BLACK WOMEN, WHITE CAMPUS: STUDENTS LIVING THROUGH INVISIBILITY.

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I dedicate my dissertation work to my family who have encouraged and supported me while I've been on this educational journey. A special tribute to my "B-Girls" – Briana, Brittany, Brandy and Brooklyn, who for most of their lifetimes endured the sacrifices I had to make to pursue an education. My husband Jamil & Mom Maxine who kept me lifted up and pressed me to finish with their love and patience. My great-grandmother Vivian Irene White Marbury who's voice I heard often, reminding me of the power of education and who instilled in me the desire to be a lifelong learner. I love them dearly!

I also dedicate this dissertation to my many friends and colleagues who have supported me along the way. I appreciate every reassuring and uplifting comment or conversation we had and their listening ears that I had along the way. I'm so thankful they allowed me to vent my frustrations, ramble about my ideas, and share my thoughts without judgment.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to the many African American women students who are enrolled in colleges nationwide and in particular the women who shared with me their vibrant stories. To those who have found their voice and those who continue to live in the shadows at higher education institutions while pursuing their degrees. In the face of balancing the multiple roles of life – you, me, we - are known as resilient. Through my own journey and those of the women in this study, I've learned that resiliency doesn't mean you don't suffer; it just means that the suffering is often done in silence.

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Khalilah A. Shabazz

BLACK WOMEN, WHITE CAMPUS: STUDENTS LIVING THROUGH INVISIBILITY

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American female students at predominantly White institutions (PWI's), with emphasis on their perception of the institutional climate and availability of support. The experiences of Black female students at PWI's have often been examined through the lens of research on Black as a homogenous group. Exploration of the unique challenges Black women face negotiating their identity, their perceptions of the campus climate as well as the institutional support that is available to them is limited. Through semi-structured interviews, eleven African American women shared their stories and experiences of being Black and female at a PWI. The details of their experiences were analyzed and produced a series of themes that describe the essence of the Black women experience at a predominantly White institution. Themes included the impact of childhood and pre-college experiences with race and gender; experiences that are overshadowed by stereotyping and invisibility; and how Black women endure the college journey with various support systems, staying encouraged, and using survival/coping strategies. Findings of this study revealed: experiencing racism and/or sexism prior to being enrolled in college impacted how they responded to incidents in college; Black females perception of the campus climate include recurring experiences with stereotyping and invisibility inside and outside the classroom; although Black women share a common standpoint, there is still heterogeneity in their experiences; despite the challenges, they persist by internal and external motivations, support systems, and imploring survival/coping strategies; and perceptions of institutional

support is that it is lacking for Black women but is greatly needed. This study also includes an update on the status of the participants as well as recommendations for institutional support and future research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The historical trend of African American women pursuing higher education has shown them entering college in massive numbers in the 19th century, initially as a primary opportunity to uplift the African American race (Evans, S., 2007; Lerner, 1979; Perkins, 1983). As Davis notes, "Black women needed to acquire knowledge – a lamp unto their people's feet and a light into the path toward freedom" (Davis, 1983, p. 105). Then and now, African American women have vastly outnumbered African American males who attend higher education institutions (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010) for various reasons.

Such a significant gender gap in higher education enrollment has produced substantial attention to the status of African American males in college (Bonner II, 2010; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Harper, 2006, 2011; Harper & Harris III, 2010) and subsequently research that explores their experiences, academic attainment levels, barriers, and strategies for recruitment and retention (Fries-Britt, 1997; Howard-Hamilton, 2002; Palmer, 2008).   This research agenda has drawn institutional attention to African American male success and the targeted support and programming necessary to help them be successful (Cuyjet 2006, Harper & Harris III, 2010).

Although this attention to the males is critical, "it must not be done at the expense of ignoring the challenges and, sometimes, silent suffering of African American women in higher education institutions as they attempt to navigate the interactive effects of racism, sexism, and gender disparities in certain fields of study" (Thomas & Jackson, 2007, p 352). Similar research is needed to address the experiences that African American females have while enrolled in colleges. Furthermore, scholarship on the experiences of African Americans at predominantly

White institutions has documented the challenges that they experience with the campus climate and how they continue to thrive despite what they encounter. From Allen & Haniff's study on Black students attending White colleges (1991), D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993), Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson's research (1999), to Harper & Hurtado's, (2007) more recent study – the findings are consistent that the chilly campus climate for Black students on White campuses impacts student success. While these studies focus on Black students regardless of gender, there have been studies conducted on the experiences of Black females in particular. The findings of those studies also reveal the challenges with the institutional climate, but also shed light on the invisibility, isolation, stereotyping and microaggressions faced by Black women on White campuses (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Moses, 1989; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Park, 2009).

Success of students goes well beyond the admission point into college; the levels at which students are retained and ultimately graduated are key goals for higher education institutions. For this reason, it is imperative to examine and understand the experiences of African American women in order to achieve these goals.

Background Information

The African American (AA) female student population has consistently represented the largest minority participation group in higher education since the late seventies (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). As of 2008, African American females represented 64% of all African American college participants and obtained over 67% of the degrees awarded to this group (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). Roughly 32% of the African American population is

pursuing higher education compared to 44% of the White population (Aud, Fox, & Kewal

Ramani, 2010), and therefore addressing the enrollment, retention and degree attainment

continues to be a priority. Additionally, only 11% of African American college attendees are

enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010),

indicating that the remaining 89% of African American students likely attend predominantly

White institutions across the country. Again, of the minority students attending institutions of

higher education, Black females represent the largest population; however their experience is

often only reflected through the research that is done on the African American population as a

homogenized group.

<p style="text-align:center">Problem Statement</p>

Dr. Rick Turner (2001) in his commentary on African American women in college simply

titled his work "don't forget the women" and speaks to the many challenges that African

American women face that are often overlooked such as alienation, competition, lack of

support, and unhealthy social relationships. Other researchers have also supported this cause

and have a vested interested in African American women in society and higher education (Berry

& Mizelle, 2006; Collins, 2009; Hooks, 1981, 1984). These specific challenges are ones that

warrant consideration on the research agenda, especially given the disproportionate number of

African American men and women attending higher education institutions.

In a review of literature on AA women in higher education, Howard-Vital (1989)

contends that "African American women in higher education have suffered from scholarly

disinterest and from perspectives that are androcentric and/or ethnocentric" (p. 189). To

<p style="text-align:center">3</p>

understand the unique experiences of AA females in higher education, contributions to this body of research are necessary that focus specifically on their experiences, successes and failures. Consideration of the distinctive characteristics and dynamics of the African American female student is important. Creating the environment that supports their identity development, academic success and satisfaction with their experiences should have a positive impact on enrollment, retention and graduation rates.

This scholarly disinterest of African American women is evident in disciplines outside of education, such as psychology (Robinson, 1983). In her analysis of theories, articles, and more on the psychology of women, Robinson reflects on the continual omission of African American women from various materials (1983). She contends that although African American women are such a resilient population with the ability to adapt, transcend, and cope – the "psychological frameworks and perspectives are applicable only to middle-class, professional, or White women" (Robinson, 1983, p 141). Furthermore she encourages development of literature that embraces and explains the unique African American women experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences that Black women have on White campuses with emphasis on how they perceived the campus climate and the availability of institutional support. The study sought to capture the essence of their collective experience while allowing the heterogeneity of their experiences to be championed. The research questions that guided this study were:

What are the experiences of African American female students at a predominantly White institution?

Additional questions of interest include:

- What are African American female students' perceptions of the campus climate at predominantly White institutions?

- What are African American females' perceptions of university support?

Through qualitative data collection and analysis strategies, the experiences that the Black female students had while attending the predominantly White institution were captured. The results of this research can aid in the understanding and awareness of challenges that Black women students face on White campuses as well as provide information on the support desired and necessary to improve their experiences. Institutions will be informed and equipped to develop programming, services and other support mechanisms for Black women students who attend predominantly White institutions.

Significance of the Study

The experience of African American females at predominantly White institutions has been captured through various studies documenting the experiences of African Americans as a whole. However because "men and women are often treated as a monolithic group, (it leads to) masking potentially significant developmental and gender-related differences" according to Howard-Hamilton (2003). The AA experience has been influenced by various variables such as level of involvement, identity development, institutional support, campus climate and others, all of which report significant differences based on gender with females

reporting lower levels of satisfaction on each variable (Brown, 2000; Fleming, 1984; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Additionally, the impact of identity as an African American woman is often not considered as influencing student's perception of the climate and support at predominantly White institutions. Therefore, this study is significant because it contributes to the limited body of research that dismantles the homogenized viewpoint of the Black student experience at predominantly White institutions.

This study is also significant because it sought to understand the African American female experience at predominantly White institutions by exploring their overall perceptions of being a Black woman in college, their views on the campus climate and institutional support. A Black woman working at a predominantly White institution conducted this study on Black women who attend a predominantly White institution. The voice of the Black woman was at the center of every stage of this research project.

Lastly, the results of this study can inform predominantly White institutions on how best to support Black women who may have similar experiences as well as offer suggestions for how the campus climate can be improved. Implementing programs and support mechanisms may aid in the retention and graduation of Black women who are enrolled as well as improve their overall satisfaction with their college experiences.

Chapter Summary and Dissertation Overview

As the numbers of Black women at White colleges continue to be increasingly higher than those of Black men, it is important to understand and help improve their experiences. It is not enough to simply provide blanket services for Black students, as this study will reveal the

experiences that Black women have are unique. This study intentionally focused on the experiences that African American women have while attending predominantly White institutions with particular attention to their perception of institutional climate and support available to them.

In chapter two, an in-depth review of the relevant literature is presented. A look at Black women in America is followed by a review of Black women in higher education. Next is an exploration of the experiences of Blacks at predominantly White institutions followed by a look at climate and support. The chapter concludes with research on how students respond to racism and/or sexism on campus, followed by the theoretical underpinnings of this study. The methodology and details of the research design are found in chapter three. Chapter four illuminates the stories of the participants and the thematic findings that were uncovered through the research process along wit the relevant literature. The last chapter (six) presents a summary of the study as well as recommendations and continued research suggestions.

"Survival for Black women is contingent on their ability to find a place to describe their experiences among persons like themselves" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 25). This study provided the place for Black women to do just that – openly describe their experiences – the good and the bad in an effort to inform and incite change for Black women students on White campuses.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature most closely related to the experiences of undergraduate African American females at predominantly White institutions. Particular attention will be paid to their perceptions of the institutional climate and support as these have been identified as key factors having significant impact on the persistence and experiences of Black students. First, a brief historical review of the experiences of Black women in America is included to provide context to the societal perceptions of them and the challenges they face with racism and sexism. Next, the state of African American women as students in college is examined to offer a historical and foundational perspective on their experiences in the U.S. higher education system. Additionally, as the majority of African American students attend predominantly White institutions (PWI's), an exploration of the breadth of literature that addresses their experiences is discussed.   In unpacking the experiences that Black students have on White campuses, several factors are addressed that have an impact on student transition, retention, satisfaction and success. Among those factors are institutional climate and support, which are two primary indicators of dissatisfaction with the PWI experience (Park, 2009; Einarson & Matier, 2005; Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1997). Discussion here also includes literature on how African Americans respond to racism on campus and particularly how African American women respond to experiences with racism and/or sexism on campus. Lastly, the theoretical underpinnings of this study are discussed to provide the basis for understanding the experiences of African American women in society and their on campus experiences.

African Americans in College

Experiences of African Americans at predominantly White institutions

Brown versus Board of Education opened the doors of predominantly White institutions to African American students. Since that 1954 ruling, Black students' attendance at historically Black colleges significantly declined as they began to enroll at PWI's instead (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Fleming, 1984; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). Fleming offers that Black students were simply "exercising their right to attend" (1984, p. 28), while Gurin & Epps offer other reasons why this shift occurred. They posited that Black students attend White colleges due to the proximity of White colleges to Black communities as well as the availability of financial resources that are limited at historically Black colleges (Gurin & Epps, 1975). Although the availability of money and the ease of location have inspired many Blacks to attend PWI's, their experiences have been riddled with many challenges. In her cross-sectional analysis of the differences between Black students on predominantly White campuses and those in historically Black colleges and universities, Fleming (1984) asserts that Blacks adjust differently, "the comparison of White and Black student profiles tells us that Black students have special problems in predominantly White college settings that White students do not share" (p. 136).

The challenges experienced by Black students on White campuses have received considerable attention and the literature is substantial.   Researchers have highlighted several factors that may attribute to this including campus climate (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999; achievement (Nettles, 1991; Davis, 1991; Steele, 2003), level of engagement, involvement and integration

(Ancis, Sedlacek & Mohr, 2000; Guiffrida, 2003;Flowers; 2004; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Johnson, 2005; Seidman, 2005); and identity development (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Stewart, 2009). These factors have been shown to impact persistence (Mow & Nettles, 1990; Taylor & Oslwang, 1997), satisfaction (Brown, 2000; Benton, 2001), retention and success (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Furr & Elling, 2002; Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004; Seidman, 2005), encounters with racism (Feagin, 1995; Sedlacek, 1999; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso; 2000) and their overall experiences in college (Allen W. , 1988, 1985, 1992; Fleming J. , 1981, 1984.

Typically, studies consider the experiences of all African American students monolithic. They are not likely to highlight any significant gender differences. The majority of research on African American students neither identifies nor addresses adequately the role of gender. However, examination of the sample populations of various studies reveals considerably higher numbers of African American women than men. For example, Walter Allen's (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991) National Study of Black College Students is one of the most cited and expansive studies on African American students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black universities (HBCUs). Data were collected from sixteen institutions, eight PWI's and eight HBCUs. More than 2500 students participated and subsequent data analysis produced various reports from the study (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). While the overall demographic data is not presented in his collective work, *College in Black and White* (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991) – many of the reports reference the overrepresentation of female participants and some of the gender differences that were discovered. Haniff acknowledges the limited information provided on Black women by stating that the study "is lacking in the highly

sensitive data needed to understand the complexities of Black women's lives at these

universities" (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991, p. 253). This sensitive data is critical to understanding

these complexities and the experiences that Black women have on predominantly White

campuses. The purpose of this study was to explore these complexities further.

African American Women in College

History

In order to understand the experiences of African American women in college, it is

important to consider the role they play in society. "As a group, Black women are in an unusual

position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational

ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other racial group" (hooks, 1984,

p. 16). Traditionally AA women have been preceded by White men, White women, and African

American men resulting in the perception of less significance and position in society (Zamani,

2003; Collins P. , 2000). The lives of Black women have been colorfully detailed through works

of many Black women to include Sojourner Truth, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, Maya

Angelou, and others. These works have included essays, speeches, poetry, and scholarly

research that illuminate the struggles of negotiating the identity of both being Black and a

woman. Alongside the struggles are accounts and recollections of survival and resistance of

Black women who have encountered the effects of racism and sexism in society. Sojourner

Truth's famous line "Ain't I a Woman" in her speech in 1851 reveals the intense difficulty of

being disregarded as a woman while being a slave, yet watching courtesies being afforded to

White woman (Truth, 1992). In 1980, Audre Lorde, a self-identified "Black lesbian feminist

socialist mother" challenged women (all women) to move beyond the oppressive natures

within by acknowledging difference and creating change (Lorde, 1995). "Ignoring the

differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the

most serious threat to the mobilization of women's joint power" (Lorde, 1995 p. 117).

Gerda Lerner, a White female historian is often cited for her seminal collection of essays

titled Black women in White America (1972). Lerner who initially began her work to document

the history of women in America, described Black women as "doubly victimized by scholarly

neglect and racist assumptions" (1972, xvii). Through her studies of records, documents,

collection of oral stories and more, Lerner presents information on a variety of subjects. She

included works on slavery, education, survival, working, race pride, social organizations and

more. Lerner acknowledges the limitation of her race in conducting and presenting the

collection and insists that the viewpoint and contributions of Black people must be considered

in the future works on Black women (1972). Crediting the works of Lerner, Darlene Clark Hine,

a Black woman historian labored to produce Hine Sight – Black women and the Re-construction

of American History (1994). She too attempted to insert the life of Black women in the history

books of America. Her collection detailed the impact of slavery on Black women with specific

emphasis on the sexual oppression and exploitation of them (Hine, 1994). Additionally, Hine's

research on Black women led her to explore the complexity of the race-class intersection that

they face (1994). She stated

> Exploration into the status of Black women over time, however, fosters the need to do
> intersectional analysis because for the most part this particular group of Americans has
> always occupied the bottom rung of any racial, sexual, and class hierarchy: as slaves

they cost less than male counterparts; as free workers they were undervalued and negatively stereotyped.

The feminist movement and civil rights movements are defining illustrations of the difficulties that AA women encounter in negotiating their existence in society. On one hand Black women may relate intimately with the movement to end racism and on the other hand relate to the movement that is addressing issues of sexism. These movements don't consider the nature of the African American woman who has obvious connections with each; the pressure to decide is unsettling.   The struggle to find balance in identifying with and supporting both movements is evident in historical narratives and studies done on AA women's role in the feminist movement (Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997; Harnois, 2005; Roth, 2004; Hunter & Sellers, 1998).   Loyalty to the race discounts the significance of gender inequalities, while completely supporting the feminist movement disregards race and doesn't capture the womanhood experiences of the AA woman, which are strikingly different than those of the White woman (Beal, 2008; Reid, 1984). Gay and Tate's (1998) research on the political positions of Black women found that while race was still more salient in their political attitudes, gender was still very important often leading to conflicting positions on issues. Black women having experienced both racism and sexism would be assumed to be equally supportive of both feminist and civil rights movements, but that is not the case (Gay & Tate, 1998). Among other researchers, Jean & Feagin (1998), Lerner (1972, 1975, 1979), bell hooks (1984), Hine (1994) have also documented the struggle to contribute to both movements without having to choose one identity over the other.   "I refuse to choose. And by that I mean I refuse to choose between being Black and being a woman…I am both equally, and I'm proud to be both" (Roth, 2004, p. 1). Both olden and contemporary researchers agree that research on Black women

must purposely consider the unique intersection of their identities in order to have accurate portrayals of Black womens lives both historically and today (Davis, 1972, 1981; Weiss, 1988; Morgan, 1999; Harris-Perry, 2011) . These struggles and society's perception of Black women has its footing in higher education as well.

The U.S. system of Higher Education existed for more than 200 years as a racist and sexist microcosm of the U.S. society (Zamani, 2003). As a result, African American women have often been ignored at the intersection of their race and gender while pursuing a college degree. In her piece Three's a Crowd: *The Dilemma of the Black Woman in Higher Education*, Carroll (1982) speaks to the struggles that the Black woman faces not only as students but also as administrators in higher education. Carroll contends, "Black women in higher education are isolated, underutilized, and often demoralized" (Carroll, 1982, p. 115). This, she says, results in "the status that mirrors her impact on the national scene" (p. 117) as there are fewer Black women leaders within the institution. Howard-Vital (1989) contends that "African American women in higher education have suffered from scholarly disinterest and from perspectives that are androcentric and/or ethnocentric" (p. 189). Despite this scholarly disenterest, Black women have still been persisting in the U.S. higher education system since the mid nineteenth century. This study places Black women at the center and aids in the scholarly research on undergraduate Black women.

Lucy Stanton became the first Black woman to earn a higher education degree, a literary degree in 1850 (Evans, 2007), prior to the abolishment of slavery that took place in 1865 (Spring, 2004). She graduated from Oberlin college, who had missioned to educate women and

Blacks (Thelin, 2004). Twelve years later, Mary Jane Patterson who also attended Oberlin, became the first African American woman to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree (Evans, 2007). Having originally been achieving degrees primarily in the southern states, the late nineteenth century saw a wave of more Black women attending colleges in the northern states of the United States (Evans, 2007). Women began entering higher education institutions in increasingly higher numbers and by the early nineteen hundreds had surpassed Black men's enrollment (Evans, 2007). Initially Black men represented the higher enrollees; however researchers have noted that this shift in college going rates among African Americans is associated with a myriad of conditions. Among the key reasons noted on why Black males are not enrolling in college are the high levels of incarceration, employment right after high school, and unfamiliarity with the college environment (Roach, 2001; Cuyjet, 2006). Additionally, Cuyjet (1997) contends that there are two basic categories that explain the disproportionate number of Black men in college. First there are factors that prevent them from getting to college such as high school dropout rates, high rates of homicide and health issues. Second, for the ones that do enroll, they are seen as underprepared for the rigor of college work and unable to connect with Black male mentors on campus for assistance (Cuyjet, 1997).

African American females have consistently represented the largest non-White college enrolled student body (approximately 64%) in higher education and currently account for over 67% of earned degrees of the African American student population (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). In the past, Black women entered higher education institutions primarily as a means to uplift their race and subsequently obtained degrees to educate the African American children and members of their community (Perkins, 1983;Hine, 1994; Benjamin, 1997; Evans, 2007).

Gaining a college degree was thought to "demonstrate the race's intelligence, morality, and ingenuity" (Perkins, 1983, p. 19), and often "college attendance was inseparable from community engagement and social responsibility" (Evans, 2007, p. 52). The experiences of Black women who attend higher education institutions have been primarily documented through the Black college student experience as a whole. This homogenous viewpoint has illustrated the challenges and conditions of their pursuit of higher education particularly at predominantly White institutions (Fleming J. , 1984; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Furr & Elling, 2002). Works specifically on the African American female student experience are in large part historical and illustrate common themes of the intent of being educated, frustrations of continued societal limitations after being educated, experiences with racism and sexism on campus, and persisting in a campus environment as an invisible person (Moses, 1989; Higginbotham, 2001; Evans S. , 2007; Perkins, 1983; Collier-Thomas, 1982).

The breadth of literature that considers the higher education experiences of Black students as a homogeneous group regardless of gender provides fertile ground for extending the works to recognize the unique experiences of Black females. Black women in college have struggled similarly with the issue of identity as they have in society and this warrants attention. This study provides a more current analysis of the issues that Black women have in college and specifically at White colleges.

Identity Development

The identity development of college students has evolved from theories that only looked at overall student characteristics, to those that included either race or gender as a key factor in development. Theories such as Cross's Nigrescence theory that acknowledges the significant racial differences in identity development (Worrell, Cross Jr., & Vandiver, 2001) and Ruthellen Josselson (1996) who explored the role of gender in women's identity development theory don't consider the intersection of race and gender. Both ethnic and gender identity models do aid in the interpretation of the experiences of African American females in higher education, however explaining developmental differences cannot exclusively be done through ethnic or gender theories. The gender identity models don't distinctly address how race influences development, and the racial identity models don't consider gender differences in racial identity development. "The use of a single lens or perspective or a 'melting pot' view of diversity, cannot help all students, particularly African American women…doing so anyway results in a loss of individualism as well as gender and cultural constraints" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 21).

Prior to entering higher education institutions, Black women struggle with identity development. Jackson (2008) found in her study of 18-26 year old Black women that incidents from their childhood such as ones in their schools, community and family had a significant impact on how they perceived their self-identity as adults. Many of the negative experiences associated with gender and/or race formed the basis for how they formed their individual identities (Jackson, 2008Hamilton). Once Black women enter college, there are still challenges

with identity formation. Research has been consistent in finding that the identity development process for Black women in college is complex, unique and requires more intentional analysis (Shorter-Gooden & Washington; 1996; Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997; Howard-Vital, 1989; Chae, 2001; Watt, 2004). Jackson (1998) examined the relationship between race and gender and self-concept of Black women at HBCU's and PWI's. She found that for Black women, self-perception is also influenced by racial and gender composition of the institution. Black women on White campuses struggle more because of limited support for them and the burden to prove themselves to others on campus (Jackson, 1998). Additionally Jackson (1998) identified struggle, problem and consciousness as core themes of what being a Black woman on these campuses meant. More recently, Sengupta & Upton (2011) found several themes in their literature review on college women's identity development. They noted for women of color – particularly at PWI's they are

> experiencing all the identity challenges of the typical college student – transitioning from high school, being in less contact with their families, dealing with their academic expectations of themselves – they are also navigating their identity development as women and women of a particular (or multiple) racial and ethnic background (p. 235).

Through their review, they identified five identity challenges faced by women in college.

There are feelings of disconnnect from others such as classmates, family and friends. Many have financial concerns that may inhibit engagement and working more hours off campus. They perceive a lack of affirmation from others including faculty, friends, family – male or female. The women also doubted their ability to learn or be teachers to others. Lastly, their research revealed the frustration that women have with authorities on campus (Sengupta & Upton, 2011).

Imbedded within the above-mentioned studies are references to the role of the institutional make-up on the Black women's identity development and subsequent experiences. Given nearly three-fourths of African Americans attend predominantly White institutions (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991); it is important to review the relevant literature on the experiences of Black students and specifically females at PWI's.

Experiences of AA female students at PWI's

Allen & Haniff's study on Black students attending White colleges examined the specific outcomes of academic performance, racial attitudes, and satisfaction by race and gender. They found that there were significant differences based on gender in several of the measured outcomes by disaggregating the data. For instance, AA females on White campuses had lower academic aspirations, reported greater academic competition, reported least favorable relationships with faculty, and less satisfaction with the overall experience (Allen & Haniff, 1991). These findings are consistent with Gurin and Epps who in 1975 conducted several studies at Black colleges and universities and indicated challenges existed in higher education for Black women (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). Although the challenges were identified, neither study explored further to understand the experiences of Black women at predominantly White institutions.

The breadth of literature on African American women in college lags behind other topics, but there are several studies that focus specifically on understanding their experiences. Fleming (1984; 1983) provided foundational research for exploring the different experiences that African females have in college. Using primarily a quantitative approach, Fleming surveyed

Black females attending PWI's and historically Black colleges to understand the effects of attending each type of institution. Although this approach doesn't thoroughly explain the experiences, it does offer insight into how Black women experience college and is often cited in research on this population. The purpose was to "explore whether the situational pressures and contextual factors that Black women face in Black versus White colleges differentially contribute to the development of qualities, such as self-assertion and an achievement orientation" (Fleming, 1983, p. 46).   Fleming contends that institutional type can help perpetuate societal images of Black women, the matriarch or the victim (1983). Additionally, she states

> For women, the supportive institutional climate of Black colleges might help to develop self-reliance and achievement concerns, but the presence of substantial numbers of Black male peers could be a cross-pressure toward passivity, at the very least directing achievement into relatively traditional unassertive channels. On the other hand, at White colleges the demands for achievement might be strong, but the poor social life (relatively few Black males) and non-supportive institutional climate might erode the development of achievement concerns (Fleming, 1983, p. 45-46).

The survey and open-ended data results did reveal significant differences in college experience and development based on gender and institution type. The HBCU environment was found to provide a supportive atmosphere, promote improvement in academic performance, and be more encouraging to Black women – boosting their confidence and motivation (Fleming, 1983). The women experienced greater academic gains than the women who attended PWI's and were more likely to describe themselves in a positive manner relative to their intelligence (Fleming, 1983). Additionally, Fleming (1983) indicated they had less fear of failure than women attending predominantly White institutions.   Difference in the encouragement of social assertiveness was the most significant finding of Fleming's study.

Fleming states "in Black colleges, there appears to be a significant loss in assertive abilities, while in White colleges consistent gains in assertiveness are strongly suggested" (1983, p. 49). Measuring assertiveness included factors such as fear of confrontation, shyness and submissiveness and in each of these, Black women at Black colleges scored highest (Fleming, 1983). Black women at PWI's however, were found to be much more assertive in an attempt to "hold their own intellectually" (p. 145) on these campuses (Fleming J. , 1984), but were emotionally suppressed. They suffered from "emotional pain, social isolation, or aroused fears about their competence" (Fleming, 1984, p. 146) in addition to limited opportunities for relationships and lack of overall support (Fleming, 1983). Fleming indicates that this pain and fear may be due to the lack of support at PWI's as well as traditional society-formed female roles such as the matriarch stereotype. Fleming notes that the balance of social assertiveness with the negative experiences involves coping and survival while attending a White college.

The results of this study have prompted a variety of other studies over the years on Black women at White colleges. More recent studies have further explored some of the very issues that Fleming identified as challenges for Black women at predominantly White colleges. Although most of the research is overlapping, for the purpose of this study, it will be organized into these broad categories: the continued struggle for identity, integration and involvement, the PWI experience, support, and persistence and coping.

The Continued Struggle for Identity

As Black women work to further their education in college, they must also continue to make meaning of who they are at the intersection of being Black and being female.

In an attempt to understand how Black women identify themselves, a creative quantitative study using vignettes was conducted at a predominantly White institution and a predominantly Black institution located in the Midwest. Developed around Cross's Racial Identity model and with consideration of women's identity, Bowman, Cureton, Mellum, Alarcon, Altareb & Valtinson (1995) developed several vignettes designed to elicit a response from women about the salience of race and or gender biases (Bowman et al., 1995). Results indicated that all the women perceived the vignettes as discriminatory, however Black women attending White colleges viewed them as more racially biased, but those attending Black colleges viewed them as both racially and sexually biased (Bowman et al., 1995). Black women at Black colleges had higher scores on Cross's encounter and immersion scales than those attending White colleges. The women on the White campuses struggled more with racial discrimination and therefore identified more as a Black person than a Black woman while on campus (Bowman et al., 1995). This study illuminates the continued challenge for Black women attending White colleges and the institutional responses needed to help these women cope with racial discrimination at PWI's.

Slightly different findings were revealed in McCowan & Alston's (1998) study on racial identity, African self-consciousness, and career decision making in African American women attending an HBCU or a PWI in the Southeastern region of the U.S. They surveyed over 200 African American women using the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981), the African Self-Consciousness Scale (Baldwin & Bell, 1985) and the Career Decision Scale (Osipow, 1980). Similar to the Bowman et al. (1995) study, HBCU women had higher scores on the internalization scale; however this was more prevalent among the senior students than

freshmen. Conversely, the Black women who attended the PWI had higher levels of

internalization during their freshman year. "The often socially isolating PWCU climate is likely

to provide a provocative event (e.g., racist writing in dorm hallways) that will cause African

American female students to examine their racial identity" (McCowan & Alston, 1998, p. 7).

This process could result in Black women having to adapt and survive an environment that may

be indicative of their future workplace. "The overall ethnic minority experience at PWCU's may

enhance the social adeptness of African American woe by strengthening their survival skills in

predominantly White environment" (McCowan & Alston, 1998, p. 7). As for Black women

attending HBCU's, McCowan & Alston refer to "Fleming's assertion that HBCU's seem to foster

social passivity and nonassertion because of a cocoon-type atmosphere" (1998, p. 7) and

therefore these students would have more challenges coping in a predominantly White

environment. In summary, McCowan and Alston (1998) challenge PWI's to acknowledge the

identity process of Black women and be prepared to support students who may not feel a sense

of belonging while trying to negotiate their identity in an environment that may not be

culturally affirming.

Additional researchers such as Jackson (2008) Stewart (2002, 2008), Watt (2004), Taub,

D. & McEwen, M. (1992), and Winkle-Wagner (2009) analyzed the identity formation process of

Black women in college. Jackson's interviews of twenty African American women at a PWI

revealed the internal questioning that takes place as Black women try to categorize themselves

based on an identity that overlaps distinct societal categories – such as gender and race (2008).

Stewart and Watt both examined and found the role that faith/spirituality plays in the identity

development of Black women. Watt contends that spirituality is not only a coping strategy for

African American women in college; it also mediates their attempt to reconcile their multiple identities (Watt, 2004). Stewart's use of interview and portraiture of Black women at a PWI revealed similar results regarding the role of spirituality in identity development (2002). Most of the women in the study identified spirituality as "a central component of their identity make-up" (2002, p. 592). More recently, Winkle-Wagner conducted a study on Black women attending a PWI and found that they experience an imposed identity. This identity, that she coins the "unchosen me" is what is constructed for Black women who encounter the predominantly White college environment and are subject identities and labels that are prescribed to them (2009a, 2009b). The "Unchosen Me is an imposition on one's identity whereby one perceives a need to accept and portray particular ways of thinking, acting, speaking, or being in order to belong within the social realm" (Winkle-Wagner, 2009, p. 23). Winkle-Wagner conducted interviews through the development of a group – Sister Circles that allowed the Black women to come together to discuss relevant issues they were encountering. Her interactions by her own admission were initially difficult as she attempted to gain trust as a White woman researching Black women (Winkle-Wagner, 2009a, 2009b). Her findings revealed the struggle that Black women encounter as they deal with the regular college stresses that are then compounded by imposed identities and the burden to respond/react to them (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). She further explored what she describes as the perpetual homelessness of Black women's college experiences – the tension between getting involved on campus and maintaining connections with family (Winkle-Wagner, 2009a, 2009b). Winkle-Wagner offers that the Sister Circles provided an avenue for the women to balance the conflicting norms of the campus and their families/communities (2009).

Integration and Involvement

How successful a student is in college is often attributed to their level of integration and/or involvement. However, as Winkle-Wagner notes, this is not as easy as predicted for students of color and particularly women of color (2009). Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure is often cited in relation to how well a student integrates into a campus after leaving high school. Integration is defined by Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) as "the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community or in subgroups of it" pg. 54). Tinto (1993) drawing on former works by Van Gennep describes three stages that students progress through to integration – separation from communities of the past, the transition between high school and college and finally the incorporation into the society of the college. Winkle-Wagner's contends that this first stage (separation from communities of the past) presents a great conflict for women of color who have great ties to their families and communities thus creating a perpetual homelessness during their college experience (2009). Tinto (1993) does make note of the incongruences that exist between the majority populations' norms and values and diverse groups such as African American students. These incongruences, he states, can negatively impact their integration thus leading to departure from the institution (Tinto, 1993). The book *Reworking the Student Departure* edited by John Braxton (2000) includes works by Rendon, Jamolo, & Nora, as well as Kuh & Love. They too supported Tinto's claim about the significance of cultural perspectives in the departure of students of color from college. Also relevant in student's successful college experience is the degree to which they are actively involved on campus. Astin is often cited for his student

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involvement theory, which suggests that the more students are involved on campus through a variety of means, the more likely they are to stay enrolled in college (1990). Both Tinto and Astin's theories are mainstream theories addressing college student departure; however neither thoroughly analyzes the impact of race on the experiences of students.

African American Student Involvement

Guiffrida (2003) provides a perspective that looks solely at African American students and their involvement using Tinto's theory of student departure. He interviewed 88 African American students (55% Black females) at a predominantly White campus to learn about how their involvement in African American student organizations. His findings suggest that there were some similarities to Astin's findings regarding the impact of involvement on retention; however, there were limitations in the application of the theory particularly for Black students who had come from predominantly White communities (Guiffrida, 2003). These students had familiarity with being in predominantly White communities and thus had experienced being the minority, understood the distant interactions with White peers, and were less sensitive to being alienated. Despite this, they still were not as integrated into the environment as Tinto's theory would suggest. Guiffrida recommends that institutions be aware of seeing African American students as a homogenous group without specific attention to the differences within the group. This was also echoed in Museus (2008) analysis of the role of ethnic student organizations on adjustment at predominantly White campuses. Museus found through interviews with Asian and Black students that the "ethnic organizations facilitated the cultural adjustment and membership of minority students by serving as sources of cultural familiarity, vehicles for

cultural expression and advocacy, and venues for cultural validation" (Museus, 2008, p. 576). Although Guiffrida's & Museus's study included majority Black female participants, there was not a specific focus on their experiences.

Schwartz & Washington (1999) conducted a quantitative study analyzing the cognitive, non-cognitive and adjustment variables associated with academic success for African American women in college. They analyzed questionnaire data from 213 Black women who attended a historically Black private institution. The results indicated that a combination of high school rank; personal emotional adjustment; availability of a strong support person; high school GPA; and social adjustment were the best predictors of academic success for African American women (Schwartz & Washington, 1999). Adjustment variables such as academic, social, personal emotional, and attachment to college were significant factors affecting commitment to the institution (Schwartz & Washington, 1999). Robertson, R., Mitra, A., & Delinder, J. (2005) found similar results when they examined the social adjustment process of African American females at a predominantly White institution.

More recently studies done by Chambers & Poock (2011) and Miles, Bertrand Jones, Moore Clemons & Golay (2011) looked specifically at the role of engagement and integration of African American women in college. Chambers & Poock evaluated data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and found that while Black women engagement levels are typically higher then their peers, this engagement doesn't necessarily mean positive outcomes (2011). They suggest further research into the specific experiences that African American women have on campus who are actively engaged. Miles, Bertrand Jones, Moore

Clemons, & Golay (2011) conducted their study on the social integration of Black females at predominantly White institutions. Six Black female participants were interviewed to gain their perspective on the impact that being involved on campus had on their persistence. Overall, the participants found getting involved (especially through minority student organizations) very beneficial to the college experience (Miles, et. al, 2011). While they faced difficulties getting connected to the overall institution, they found those connections valuable. The authors note the importance of the campus in being responsive to the needs of minority student populations and particularly Black women in their efforts to support students due to the environmental and racial identity challenges (Miles, et. al, 2011). How Black females experience college by getting involved plays a key role in their persistence. Additionally, the studies mentioned above each mentioned to some degree the influence of the campus climate in facilitating their level of comfort with the institution and desire to be engaged beyond the classroom.   Therefore a discussion of the campus climate for students of color and also women of color is relevant.

Campus Climate for Black Students

Challenges with the campus climate have been addressed in numerous studies as an important predictor of the success of African American students at predominantly White institutions (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fischer, 2007; Fleming J. , 1984; Harper & Hurtado, 2007;Lau, 2003; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). Additionally, studies indicate that the HBCU environment is more conducive to African American success impacting the student's level of satisfaction with their

overall experience (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Fleming J. , 1984) as noted earlier in this chapter.

D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) led a study on the role of campus climate on student's academic performance at a PWI. He surveyed 146 undergraduates (73 White and 73 Black). The majority (89%) of the Black students indicated having experienced some sort of negative racial experience (harassment, racial remark, feelings of mistreatment, etc.). The African American students also indicated a negative overall experience at the university. Although no direct links were found between academic performance and climate, D'Augelli and Hershberger report that the use of a more sensitive measurement could have better evaluated for those differences (1993). Gloria et al (1999) also examined the impact of climate and negative experiences in relation to performance. The study indicated that one of the greatest predictors of persistence for African Americans was comfort with the university environment. The AA students who were more likely to persist either had fewer negative experiences or found ways to cope with them to continue in their commitment to their education (Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999). Greer's (2007) study of minority related stressors and their ability to cope at PWI's indicated that minority students at PWI's have much higher levels of stress which was significantly related to negative performance. She suggests that institutions should evaluate their campus climate in order to better serve minority students and reduce such stress (Greer, 2007).

Hurtado's (1992) work on the campus racial climate, which is often cited, offers an in-depth look at students' perception of racial conflict and institutional commitment to

eradicating the tensions. The longitudinal study revealed through surveys that one in four

student's perceived issues with race on their campuses and those students were less likely to

see their campuses taking action against it. Harper & Hurtado (2007) examined key studies

conducted on campus climate since Hurtado's initial study in 1992. Through their review, they

clustered the various studies into three categories: Differential perceptions of campus climate

by race, minority student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments, and

benefits associated with campus climates that facilitate cross-racial engagement (Harper &

Hurtado, 2007). The first cluster highlights studies that indicate that African American and

White students perceive the campus climate very differently with African American's perceiving

the existence of more racism on campus than White students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The

second cluster of studies discussed the continual issues of race related incidences on campus

such as stereotyping, isolation, intellectual inferiority, and alienation (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

The third cluster reveals institutions that intentionally address racial challenges through

activities that promote interactions with students of various backgrounds benefits the entire

student population (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). This in turn promotes a better campus climate

and helps to reduce negative experiences.

The studies mentioned above consider the African American experience with climate to

be homogenous with few exploring the significance of gender differences. Hall & Sandler

(1984) specifically address the campus climate for women in their project. Their project and

subsequent report described the environment for women as chilly outside the classroom.

Examining the impact of faculty and staff treatment, opportunities available, and excluding

activities; the report draws institutional attention to how the campus climate is chilly for

women, Although the report looked at all women, they highlighted groups who may be especially affected by the chilly climate such as minority women (Hall & Sandler, 1984). This may occur due to the "double devaluation as women and as members of a minority group" (p. 11), leading to lack of support, insensitivity, sexual harassment, oversight and more (Hall & Sandler, 1984).

Campus Climate for Black Women

In Black women in Academe – Issues and Strategies, Yolanda Moses examines and reports on the campus climate for Black women students, faculty members and administrators (1989). Through informal questionnaires and anecdotes, Moses compiled a series of summaries and recommendations for higher education institutions to include PWI's and HBCU's. Regarding the campus climate for Black women, Moses shared "Black women students on predominantly White campuses are rarely integrated into the life and culture of their institutions, nor are there clear paths for them to effect change" (1989, p. 4). She contends that there is a differential treatment of Black women that further isolates them from their in and out of classroom experiences. Moses (1989) explained the effects of under-attention, over-attention, stereotyping, sexual harassment, and isolation that are experienced by Black women. In another study, Rankin & Reason (2005) conducted a quantitative analysis that was disaggregated by gender in their examination of student perceptions of campus climate. Females accounted for 68% of the respondents, with African Americans representing 8.1% (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Nearly 50% of the African American students reported that they had observed some form of harassment at predominantly White institutions, but only 32% had

personally experienced it. Evaluation of the results by race and gender revealed that on each

measure, AA females both observed and experienced harassment more than Black males,

White males, and White females (Rankin & Reason, 2005). The primary forms of harassment

reported were derogatory remarks followed by written comments made by other students and

faculty (Rankin & Reason, 2005). To further explore the results for women in higher education,

Dixon-Rayle, Kurpius and Arredondo (2006) replicated the study done by Gloria et al (1999)

surveying only freshman college women. Among the diverse group of women they found that a

measure of climate – cultural congruity, was not significantly different between the women of

color and the White women, however it was noted that this would likely change as students

persisted in college (Dixon-Rayle, Kurpuis, & Arredondo, 2006) considering the developmental

identity phases that they will encounter and negotiate. Each of these studies examine and

discuss the African American female's experience with climate and report they have greater

dissatisfaction with the campus climate than African American males, however the intersection

of their race and gender is not considered as a contributing factor to these negative

experiences. In summary, African American's varying perceptions of the university climate

impacted their experience at predominantly White institutions and thus reduced their overall

satisfaction with the university experience (Park, 2009; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). While

we understand that the climate has an impact on persistence as well as satisfaction for AA

students, it is important to further analyze some of the specific experiences that students have.

Incidences in the academy

Many of the studies on campus climate mentioned incidences of racial micro-aggressions, stereotyping and invisibility that affect the experiences of Black students on predominantly White campuses. For this reason, a brief exploration of these subjects is included to better understand the impact of these incidences and the significance role they play particularly for Black women at predominantly White institutions.

Microaggressions

Chester Pierce is credited for developing what is understood as microaggressions and defines it as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of Blacks by offenders" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977, p. 65). Applying this theory of microaggressions to television commercials, the researchers sought to illustrate how television is a powerful tool in supporting negative representations of African Americans (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977). Their analysis of television shows and commercials supported their hypothesis of misrepresentation of Blacks through various microaggressions. Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) utilized Pierce's theory of microaggressions and applied it to the experiences of African American students in college. Utilizing focus groups, the researchers interviewed 34 Black students (18 females, 16 males) who attended three different predominantly White institutions. Their purpose was to understand how the students experienced and responded to microaggressions. The students reported both in and out of classroom experiences with racism on campus. Racial microaggressions in the classroom were described as feeling invisible or isolated, negative interactions with faculty, self-doubt,

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and being stereotyped (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). Racial microaggressions experienced

outside the classroom were described as a discomforting environment, general racial tension,

the existence of double standards, and feeling unwanted or un-regarded in campus spaces

(Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso point out the effects of such

microaggressions cause African American students to

> strive to maintain good academic standing while negotiating the conflicts arising from
> disparaging perceptions of the them and their group of origin, additionally, they must
> navigate through a myriad of pejorative racial stereotypes that fuel the creation and
> perpetuation of racial microaggressions (2000, p. 69)

> They suggest that institutions should create counter-spaces to help students respond to

racial microaggressions; "these counter-spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of

color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and

maintained" (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, p. 70). These results of microaggressions were fairly

similar to those found by Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma (2003) in their study of

African Americans college students experiences with everyday racism. Their study used a daily

diary methodology where Black students (24 Black men and 27 Black women) attending a

predominantly White institution detailed experiences of racism for two weeks by responding to

a series of questions in a diary format (Swim, et. al., 2003). Results found that 65% of the

respondents recorded some incident that they considered probably or definitely prejudiced.

The themes in their diaries were incidents characterized as staring, verbal expressions, or bad

service (Swim, et. al., 2003). Both emotional and behavioral responses to the incidents were

described. The students also had high emotionally connected responses to the incidents such

as feeling angry, upset, surprised, or threatened. Additionally, behavioral responses included

directly responding in some manner by addressing the offense or indirectly responding to it (Swim, et. al., 2003). Additional key findings revealed that the women in the study experienced more incidents that they perceived as racially motivated and were more likely than men to respond directly or indirectly to the incident (Swim, et. al., 2003). In summary, Swim, et. al. suggest being aware of the impact of microaggressions on the psychological well-being of African American students because although the students are coping with the incidents, the continual stress of microaggressions on Black students will eventually take its toll (Swim, et. al., 2003).

Attempting to gain a deeper understanding of Black women's experiences with racial microaggressions, Williams & Nichols (2012) collected survey data and conducted focus groups with 20 Black women at two predominantly White colleges. They intentionally created questions to investigate the intersection of gender and race in incidences of microaggressions. Analysis of the responses revealed several categories of microinsults that the students experienced. The categories were assumed criminal status, second-class citizen, ascriptions of intelligence, pathologizing cultural values and universal Black women (Williams & Nichols, 2012). Many of the women described perceptions of being intellectually inferior by their classmates, instructors and campus personnel. However, they thought that this was more directly related to their race as African Americans in general and little to do with the fact that they were women. This was also the case for being considered a second-class citizen. On the other hand, the Black women felt that assumptions of criminality was directly related to the intersection of their gender and race as they described instances of being assumed to or accused of stealing at school or the surrounding community and being referred to as

intimidating and aggressive. Additionally, many of the women described situations where their

cultural values were perceived as abnormal and different then the dominant populations

(Williams & Nichols, 2012). This included patterns of behavior, dress, hairstyles, etc. that the

women constantly had to defend, describe and/or respond to. Lastly, the microinsult most

commonly shared by the participants was the stereotyping of the Black woman and the

resulting "universal" Black woman that the participants were compared to. "Common

stereotypes were that all Black women can cook (especially fried chicken), they can all braid

hair, and they are all exotic and sexual" (Williams & Nichols, 2012). Williams and Nichols

quoted one of the participants' responses to being seen as the universal Black woman – here

she describes her frustration with being stereotyped.

> It would be easier [to attend the University] for a Black male because…I guess their
> identity is less constricted than ours would be. I guess there are different stereotypes
> for the Black male…For us, I can't really see beyond the stereotypes for Black women
> that are like loud, obnoxious, angry, and aggressive and they are embarrassing in public.
> The stereotype is very constricting (p. 88).

Williams & Nichols suggest colleges be intentional in not only understanding the

intersectional experiences of Black women in college but in developing appropriate support for

them while they are enrolled (Williams & Nichols, 2012). Although the women are thriving in

the institution, the chronic stress of dealing with microaggressions was again seen as having a

lasting impact on the development of the women.

Stereotypes

Claude Steele is often cited for his work on the impact of stereotypes on academic

achievement (Steele, 1997; Perry, Steele, Hilliard III; 2003), identity (Steele, 1997; 1999; 2010),

and Black college students (Steele, 1997; 1999). When a negative stereotype threat exists for a group, it generally affects any member of that group regardless of the person's actual behavior (Steele, 1997). Steele defines stereotype threat as

> The social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype (Steele, 1997, p. 614).

Some of his initial research examined the effects of stereotype threat on African Americans and women. His research has found that for each of these populations, stereotypes have a significant impact on achievement, causes anxiety, and can overtime impact the identity of these students (Steele, 1997; Steele, 2010).

Fries-Britt & Turner (2001) examined the impact of stereotypes on Black students on a predominantly White campus. They conducted focus groups with 15 participants (6 males and 8 females), followed by individual interviews to gain deeper insight into their experiences. Findings revealed three primary themes – discussion of general stereotypes, the proving process and physical characteristics (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). Many of the students described instances where they were stereotyped by their White peers in class via generalized statements about Black people or the content that was presented that lacked inclusion of their beliefs. The students not only felt the pressure to prove their intellectual ability not only to their peers but also to the faculty. They felt that their ability was often being doubted and that they invested a lot of energy into defending their ability and restoring their self-confidence. Lastly, the students discussed having to respond to inquiries about the physical characteristics

and appearance such as their hair and how these assumptions and curiosities impeded on learning time in the classroom (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001).

Invisibility, Alienation & Isolation

Many of the studies referenced thus far have inadvertently or specifically discussed the invisibility and/or isolation that Black students experience on predominantly White campuses (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1985; Moses, 1989; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). As described in the studies on campus climate, Black students often feel lonely and struggle with integrating into the campus community (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Perceptions of alienation have impacted the development of Black students and contributed to their withdrawal from predominantly White institutions (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Cabrera & Nora, 1994) along with their overall dissatisfaction with their college experiences. Looking particularly to the experiences of Black women, Watt (1989) describes the campus climate for Black women and the difficulty they have integrating into White campuses. She contends

> isolation, invisibility, hostility, indifference, and lack of understanding of Black women's experiences are all too often part of the climate that Black women may face on campuses. Black women students on predominantly White campuses are rarely integrated into the life and culture of their institutions… (Watt, 1989, p. 3).

> More recently, Winkle-Wagner's' (2009) research on Black women on a White campus

resulted in similar feelings of isolation on a predominately White campus.

> The isolation that the women felt followed them all the way through their campus experience. The three women who graduated during the data collection process…still described feeling 'isolation' even as they prepared to leave campus or to attend graduate programs (p. 137).

The impact of microaggressions, stereotypes and the feelings of invisibility, isolation, and/or alienation that Black women students experience on predominantly White institutions has not prevented many of them from still persisting through to graduation. This study contributes to this growing body of research on perceptions of and reactions to microaggressions. How they persist, cope and are motivated to continue their education given their challenging experiences is important to explore.

Persistence & Coping

Motivating Factors

Several researchers have explored how Black students choose to respond to negative experiences and persist on predominantly White campuses (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Davis, 2007; Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Museus & Quaye, 2009). In 1989, Hamilton conducted a study on African American females' motivation for educational achievement, particularly as they encountered economic, racial and academic barriers. Interviews were conducted with eleven African American women who attended a community college in New York City. Her findings revealed five themes that surrounded two primary motivating factors – collective advancement of African Americans and individual motivating factors such as career attainment, economic attainment, and intellectual growth (Hamilton, 1989). Ten of the eleven women revealed their desire to help uplift the Black race. By obtaining their college degree, they felt they could help advance the Black community, serve as role models, and give back to their communities (Hamilton, 1989). The women also desired to obtain their college degree for a variety of individual reasons such as starting a career, become economically self-sufficient, and grow

intellectually (Hamilton, 1989). This study sheds light on if this motivation to attend is still

relevant for Black women at predominantly White institutions.

Coping Strategies

Besides have specific motivations to attend, Black students and women use a variety of

coping strategies to persist. Feagin & Sykes (1995) summarized that Black students on

predominantly White campuses are self-segregating as a "defense mechanism to insulate Black

students from the harsh realities of institutional racism" (p. 91). They contend that despite the

treatment that they experience; the students endure it because of the long-term benefit of

obtaining their college degree (Feagin & Sikes, 1995). Davis's (2007) study of Black student's

persistence to graduation also revealed that the students saw the credibility of the college

degree worth tolerating the experiences with racism. Other participants relied on involvement

in culturally, academically and socially validating activities or groups to gain the support they

needed to persist which was similarly discussed in Bush, Chambers & Walpope's book From

Diplomas to Doctorates – The success of Black women in higher education and its implications

for equal educational opportunities for all (2009). The students also shared being motivated by

their family members and community (Davis, 2007). Greer & Chwalisz (2007) examined the role

of minority-related stressors and coping strategies among African American college students.

The results indicated that Black students have high levels or race related stress that significantly

impacts their academic success. Their attempts to use approach or avoidance coping strategies

to address racially charged experiences did not prevent their academic performance from being

impacted (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). They concluded with the recommendation that is similar to

most others in that institutions need to do more to affirm Black students and create more race

conscious and equitable campus environments (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). More recent research

on the coping strategies employed by African American women in higher education has been

introduced. Studying the reentry of Black women into higher education, Juanita Johnson-Bailey

(2001) features the experiences of eight Black women who share their experiences in detail.

Sistahs in College, Making a way out of no way revealed that the women coped by using

silence, resistance or negotiation strategies in response to issues of racism, sexism and classism

(Johnson-Bailey, 2001)

> …Blacks and women have been conditioned not to ask questions as a way of surviving.
> Many of the women spoke of silence as a familiar strategy from their familiar
> backgrounds...Silence as a coping mechanism occurred as an internal and external
> strategy. There were times when a respondent would not think of or face an issue
> because it was too painful. In such an example, the silence was internal. In other
> examples the women would refuse to answer questions or participate in activities
> because they equated silence as the safer course of action (p. 112).

Negotiation involved consciously weighing the options of rather to respond or react or

not. Respondents indicated that the process involved thinking "about the best course to

pursue, searching for the middle ground or path of least resistance" (p. 113). This process of

negotiation was not limited to the experiences in the classroom, but also was used in balancing

family and home obligations – sometimes leading to unhealthy habits (Johnson-Bailey, 2001).

For the participants negotiation was experienced and discussed most and involved attempting

to balance race, gender and class challenges (Johnson-Bailey, 2001). Lastly, resistance was used

as a strategy to cope. Johnson-Bailey described resistance as "open defiance of rules or actions

that the women perceived as unfair" (2001, p. 115). Resistance for most women involved

speaking out by confronting people during instances of racism. For many of the women

deciding to resist involved much internal debate and processing as the women have been

"socialized by their families and by society at large to be silent or to negotiate" (Johnson-Bailey,

2001, p. 116). Although this research focused specifically on Black reentry women, Johnson-

Bailey's model detailing the many overlapping forces in the lives of Black college women against

the backdrop of gender, race and class provides a visual representation of their experiences and

how they cope with them.

Shorter-Gooden (2004) described similar coping strategies that Black women use to

manage racism and sexism. Participants responded to a questionnaire that was a part of a

larger study, the African American Women's Voices Project. The study did not focus specifically

on students, but most of the participants had at least attended college at some point in their

lives. Shorter-Gooden (2004) categorized responses as internal and external resources and

specific coping strategies. "The internal and external resources seem to function as the

woman's everyday buffer against oppression, whereas the specific coping strategies are more

situation specific, more like a set of tools that are available and drawn on as needed" (Shorter-

Gooden, 2004, p. 416). The internal resources that Black women described were grounded in

their values and defined how they would respond to an incident, "these internal resources

provide the platform or foundation from which she invokes specific responses to racial or

gender stress" (p. 416). Resting on faith, standing on shoulders and valuing oneself were the

key internal resources described by the participants. Resting on faith for the Black women

meant they turned to their relationship with God as a primary strategy to cope with their

challenges. Through prayer and belief, the felt that God would give them strength to make it

through the encounters (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). This finding was consistent with research

done by Stewart (2002) and Patton & McClure (2009) who explored the role that spirituality

played for Black women in college – each finding that spirituality was important in identity

development and navigation through the college experience. The last internal resource that

Shorter-Gooden describes is valuing oneself. This involves how the woman sees herself – how

she loves, respects, and cares for herself. Shorter-Gooden states "the strategy of valuing

oneself helps women to resist the prevailing negative perceptions of African American women

by allowing them to hold on to and bolster a positive self-image and support their ongoing

personal development and growth" (2004, p. 417). The only external resource described was

learning on shoulders (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). This involved using resources external to them

such as family members and friends to deal with racial and gender challenges. They would use

these resources to help buffer their feelings of oppression (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Specific

coping strategies were also described as the tools that the Black women implored to deal with

racism and sexism. They were role flexing, avoiding, and standing up and fighting back.

Avoiding and standing up and fighting back were very similar to the Johnson-Bailey's coping

strategies of silence and resistance (2001). Role flexing involves "altering one's speech,

behavior, dress, or presentation to fit in better with the dominant group and to diminish the

impact of bias and negative stereotypes" (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 418). The women

described specific instances such as "walking the walk, talking the talk" and having "two me's:

one who interacts with Whites and one who interacts with people of color" (Shorter-Gooden,

2004, p. 418). Shorter-Gooden notes that role flexing included the women's desire to prove

themselves and to fight stereotypes (2004). Role flexing had a significant affect on the women

as it led to a conflict with their true selves (Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

This strategy of role flexing was explored further in Jones and Shorter-Gooden's (2003)

continued work on the African American Women's Voices Project. They discussed the concept

of shifting to describe the varying identities that some Black women must present in the face of

racial and gender bias in the book *Shifting, the Double Lives of Black women in America* (Jones

and Shorter-Gooden's, 2003). "Much of the shifting that Black women do is motivated by a

wish, sometimes conscious, sometimes not, to confront, transcend, and hopefully defeat the

ugly myths and stereotypes that so many in society continue to hold about them" (Jones and

Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 68). The book highlights the longstanding prevalence of stereotypes,

the coping mechanisms similar to those mentioned above, as well as the psychological and

health impacts that shifting has on Black women. They conclude with suggestions for Black

women to counter the impact of shifting such as seeking counseling, joining support groups and

lastly for America to hear and be more responsive to the Black woman's voice (Jones and

Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The theme of being supported in college was prevalent throughout

many of the studies mentioned throughout this review; therefore a review of students'

perception of institutional and other forms of support is included.

Support in College

How African American students perceive the level of support available to them at

predominantly White institutions has been found to be critical to their persistence and

satisfaction with their collegiate experience (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; D'Augelli &

Hershberger, 1993; Brown, 2000; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). These studies indicate that

institutional support can be defined as specific programming, targeted academic advising,

mentoring, availability of a staff or faculty member, etc. *Black women in the Academe – Issues*

and Strategies focuses on the experiences of AA females at predominantly White institutions

and outlines several issues and suggestions for inclusion and support that administrators and

faculty can implement to better serve AA females (Moses, 1989). Issues such as the obstacles

encountered because of race and gender stereotypes, university culture, lack of inclusion in

the curriculum and social life challenges need to be addressed by the institution to ensure their

success (Moses, 1989). Academic and social support affects the persistence rates as well as

their perception of the campus environment thus leading to greater academic success (Fleming

J. , 1984). Additionally, by having a strong support network (both on and off-campus) AA

students (and particularly women) are able to "buffer the negative experiences at a

predominantly White university" (Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999, p. 265).

Institutional Support

The impact of institutional support on the academic performance of AA females (Gloria,

Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999), availability of a strong support person (Schwartz

& Washington, 1999), the impact of mentorship (Munford, 1996), and counseling groups for AA

females (Bradley & Sanders, 2003; Mitchell, 2000) are all institutional support strategies found

to be effective. Again, similar to most research on African American students, many of the

studies consider AA students as a homogenized group and rarely expound gender differences –

therefore the assumptions of the impacts on females is taken from indicators in the sample

population (large representation) or the data results. The types of support that Black women perceive as critical to their persistence in college have been referenced throughout this chapter and reveal the role of family, faith, and participation in ethnic student organizations. This section looks more intently at the institutions role of providing support to the women. The recommendations for institutions on how to serve Black women on White campuses issued by Moses (1989) have been echoed in the results and implications sections of various studies over the years. Moses indicated that institutions should be intentional about recruiting and retaining Black women, that Black female students be reflected in and around campus life, that faculty members make efforts to include Black women in the curriculum and to form relationships with them, that peer support groups be established, and that mentors be available to support Black female students (Moses, 1989). Additionally, research has highlighted the need for financial support of Black women (Guiffrida, 2003; Munford, 1996), addressing health issues (Rosales & Person, 2003) as well as providing academic counseling (Constantine & Greer, 2003).

Institutional Support of Black Women

Research that looked more intently at institutional efforts to support women and particularly women of color is limited; however research by Wolf-Wendel (2000) and Landry (2002) offers insight. Wolf-Wendel selected five institutions known for their high retention and graduation rates of White, Black and Hispanic women and sought to find out what they do to help these women be successful in college (2000). She conducted interviews with administrators, faculty and students to learn how the institution supports women. Results

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provided several themes for creating women-friendly campuses such as providing positive role

models, creating a caring, supportive environment, providing opportunities for leadership,

connecting students to their communities (Wolf-Wendel, 2000). Landry's' literature review on

retention of women and people of color analyzed key variables that support persistence of

these populations (2002). Discussion highlighted faculty/student mentoring programs,

multicultural centers, women's centers, curriculum that was more inclusive of women and

people of color, and gender equity in the classroom (Landry, 2002) as ways that institutions can

improve the retention of these groups.

Brown (2000) using a quantitative approach analyzed Black students satisfaction with

college (at a PWI) and perceptions of social support. Social support contained four

types/dimensions of support: home-based emotional support, university-based emotional

support, home-based instrumental support and university-based instrumental support (Brown,

2000). Emotional support involved the students' ability to have people that could comfort

them and make them feel secure and cared for. Instrumental support was defined as providing

advice or guidance to help solve problems and deal with challenges (Brown, 2000). The findings

indicated significant differences based on gender. The participants indicated that their overall

satisfaction with college was directly associated with the university-based support that they

received (both emotional and instrumental), rather than support they received from home

(Brown, 2000). For Black men satisfaction was more related to instrumental support; however

Black women were more satisfied when both instrumental and emotional support was available

at the institution (Brown, 2000). Black women also relied on home-based support and having

both (home and institutional support) increased their satisfaction. Brown suggests that

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institutions increase the availability and ease of access to campus resources for Black women in addition to making sure those resources are useful (2000).

The availability of mentoring is also seen as a valuable strategy of support for Black women in college. Munford (1996) examined the role of mentoring for reentry Black women and found that they generally perceived mentoring important to aid in their personal growth and development, educational growth and career success. Most of the women indicated having a mentor, but none indicated that their mentor was associated with their college. Munford suggest however, that institutions play a role in training students and potential mentors on effective mentoring relationships for Black women (1996). Mentoring programs as institutional support has been referenced in various studies. Winkle-Wagner's research on Black women was based around a peer mentoring/support group established at the institution. The participants found the group "sister circles" a healthy way to engage each other and find continual support while pursuing their college degree on a White campus (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). "Sister-Friends", was a counseling group started for Black female students at a predominantly White institution to help them deal with racial and gender bias – specifically isolation (Mitchell, 2000). The group was led by a professional counselor and intentionally targeted Black undergraduate female students. Through a series of focused topics, the women were engaged about their history, self-concept, relationships and more. Evaluation of the group sessions indicated that it did achieve its purpose and helped develop a support network and peer-mentoring group for the participants (Mitchell, 2000). Rosales and Persons echoed the importance of support groups and counseling for Black women as they highlighted various institutions for their support of African American women in college. Common throughout much

of the literature on support is the need to consider the unique needs of African American

women in college and to offer support that is holistic – supporting the academic, social and

personal challenges that they may experience, especially on predominantly White campuses

(Munford, 1996; Brown, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Rosales & Person, 2003; Howard-Hamilton,

2003). One of the aims of this study was to understand the Black females perception of support

while in college with emphasis placed on the availability of institutional support. This will

contribute to the growing body of research on and by Black women's experiences with support

in higher education.

Frameworks for Understanding Black Women's Experiences

Traditionally, frameworks for understanding the experiences that Black women have in

college have often approached analysis from an ethnic or gender perspective.   However,

research has been conducted that considers multiple identities and the intersection of

identities in understanding the experiences of African American women in college.

Multiple identities

Earlier studies sought to understand college students' experiences by using individual

identity models together such as a race model and a gender model.   In evaluating the

relationship between racial identity, womanist identity and self-esteem of AA women,

Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson (1997) surveyed 84 African American women from a PWI and

a historically Black institution. To measure ethnic/racial identity they used the Racial Identity

Attitude Scale (RIAS) developed by Helms and Parham which is based on Cross's Nigrescence

stages and the Women's Identity Attitude Scale (WIAS) developed by Ossana et al to measure

gender identity (Poindexter & Robinson, 1997). A similar study by Watt (2006) used the same

two measures to understand self-esteem of 111 African American women attending two HBCU

types, single-sex and co-educational. Each of these studies made an attempt at combining the

identities of being an African American and a woman in their analysis of their college

experiences. Although useful when combined, the models still don't account for the impact of

intersecting identities. "Multiple identities help us understand the whole person" (p. 67)

because identity development doesn't "occur in a vacuum" – with ethnic identity development

first and then gender identity development later or vice-versa (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, &

Cooper, 2003). As Torres notes, "few individuals define themselves with just one identity; all of

us simultaneously develop multiple identities throughout our life" (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, &

Cooper, p. 67). The concept of multiple identities was introduced to address the convergence

of various elements of identity.   These theoretical perspectives challenged us to consider

multiple identities as socially formed based on various constructs within the unified self (such

as gender, religion, sexual orientation) as well as the contextual influences on identity

development (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Jones, 1997).

Jones 1997 study of a diverse group of women led to the development of a conceptual

model of multiple dimensions of identity- MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The initial study

revealed that various dimensions overlap and identity could not be understood without

consideration of other constructs (Jones, 1997).   Jones concluded that at the center of identity

lies a core that holds personal attributes and characteristics. Surrounding this core were

overlapping and significant contextual influences (such as gender, religion, sexual orientation,

culture, class, and race) that were both "externally imposed and internally defined" (p. 382),

and also intersected with other dimensions (Jones, 1997). Their research while considering diverse women's issues did not focus specifically on African American women, as this study addresses.

Using Jones and McEwen's MMDI, Stewart (2002; 2008; 2009) has conducted several qualitative studies to examine the multiple identities of AA students at predominantly White institutions focusing specifically on spirituality as an identity dimension. Although there are studies that consider the role of multiple identities on identity development, ones that evaluate how these roles intersect has been marginally addressed in research on African American women in higher education.

Jones & McEwen in the development of their model of multiple dimensions of identity referenced the work of Reynolds and Pope who had developed the multidimensional identity model addressing multiple oppressions (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Reynolds and Pope define oppression as "a system that allows access to services, rewards, benefits, and privileges of society based on membership in a particular group" (p. 174). They contend that current models of identity development do not accurately "picture multiple layers of identity and oppression" as experienced by African Americans, women, lesbian/gay, disabled, etc. (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 175). The Multidimensional Identity Model (MIM) that they developed was based on the prior work of Root who they report had developed a similar model for biracial individuals (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). According to their interpretation, Root challenged the western culture's worldview in favor of an Afrocentric worldview that embraces the self, past/present, nature and community, which helps us, better understand the complexities of identity

(Reynolds & Pope, 1991). The MMDI and MIM were used as the theoretical framework in

Patton & Simmons (2008) exploration of the experiences of Black female lesbians who attended

a historically Black college. Themes from their research included the student's internal dealings

with their lesbian identity, how they managed their three oppressed identities (Black, woman,

lesbian), and experiences they had on campus that they attribute to their identities. Patton &

Simmons challenge historically Black colleges as well as other universities to be intentional in

supporting students with multiple oppressive identities, such as the Black female lesbian, and

help them feel more welcome. This challenge had also been undertaken with the work on

intersectionality by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality has been credited to Kimberle Crenshaw who coined the term in 1989

by placing the Black woman at the forefront to examine key anti-discrimination doctrines,

feminist theory, and antiracist politics (Crenshaw K., 1989). Intersectionality is defined as "the

examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their

combination plays out in various settings" (Delgado & Stefancic, 200, p.51). Crenshaw

challenged the structure that places Black women in one identity dimension or the other (race

or gender) but doesn't consider both. "Because the intersectional experience is greater than

the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account

cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated " (p.

140). Crenshaw contends that African American women are theoretically erased because of the

single-axis approach to characterize their experiences (Crenshaw K. , 1989). Their experiences

are often positioned either within antiracist viewpoints or feminist viewpoints, but the consideration of both simultaneously is necessary to analyze them. Her examination of three legal case studies involving African American women supported her position on the impact of intersectionality on AA women and the resulting invisibility of the double oppressed identity (Crenshaw K. , 1989).

Settles (2006) used an intersectionality framework in higher education to explore the integration of identities. Settles examined 89 Black women's identity on the basis of gender and race using intersectionality. The sample was drawn from participants in a larger study on women in science and contained both undergraduate and graduate students from both historically Black and predominantly White institutions (Settles, 2006). Both qualitative and quantitative measures revealed the emphasis on the unique identity relation of being both Black and female (Settles, 2006). Measures of identity importance, Black-woman identity interference, and psychological well-being were assessed using a survey. Results indicated that Black women perceived each individual identifying factor (race and gender) as equally important but placed greater value on the intersection of their race and gender – the Black woman identity (Settles, 2006). The Black women reported that stereotyping and discrimination along with isolation were the difficulties they experienced. Given that this study focused on African American women in science programs, it provides a rationale for furthering the use of intersectionality in understanding the overall experiences of African American female students in college.

Black Feminist Thought

Patricia Hill Collins extended the works of Crenshaw by developing Black Feminist

Thought (Collins P. , nd). This theoretical framework focuses on the marginalization of African

American women as an oppressed group and the works necessary by Black female scholars to

resist such oppression (Collins P. , 2000; Hill-Collins, 1989). As Howard-Hamilton notes (2003),

the dominant society members (through theoretical models, assumptions and research) have

articulated the experiences of African American women according to their understanding of the

experiences. "Black feminist thought, then, specializes in formulating and rearticulating the

distinctive, self-defined standpoint of African American women by African American women"

(Hill-Collins, 1989, p. 750). Through this lens, Black female researchers are able to correct,

challenge and properly state the experiences of African American women based on the realities

of their lived experiences. "Since Black feminist thought both arises within and aims to

articulate a Black women's group standpoint regarding experiences associated with intersecting

oppressions, stressing this group standpoint's heterogeneous composition is significant"

(Collins, 2000, p. 32).

Black Feminist Thought includes five key dimensions of a Black woman's standpoint.

These are 1) the core themes of a Black woman's standpoint indicating the common experience

of being a Black woman; 2) variation of responses to core themes – not all Black women will

respond the same way to the core themes; 3) the interdependence of experience and

consciousness – the uniqueness of the African American woman experience sets the group

apart which can stimulate a Black feminist consciousness – however this consciousness may not

develop among all African American women; 4) Consciousness and the struggle for a self-

defined standpoint – The expression of a Black feminist consciousness is often suppressed by

the dominant groups; and 5) the interdependence of thought and action – self-defined

standpoints can stimulate resistance to oppression, a change in thinking can lead to a change in

action (Collins P. , nd).

Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical framework or "Black feminist epistemology"

(Collins, 2000, p. 275) has several key dimensions to address. The first dimension is lived

experience as a criterion of meaning – "for most African American women those individuals

who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more

believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences"

(Collins, 2000, p. 276). The second dimension is the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge

claims – "for Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other

individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community"

(Collins, 2000, p. 279). The third dimension is the ethic of caring – "the ethic of caring suggests

that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation

process" (Collins, 2000, p. 282). The last dimension is the ethic of personal accountability –

"people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims" and "assessments of an

individual's knowledge claims simultaneously evaluate an individual's character, values, and

ethics" (Collins, 2000, p. 284). This framework provides the ability to analyze the experiences of

Black undergraduate women at a predominantly White institution by allowing their voices to be

at the forefront and guide the analysis. This was the aim of this study.

Use of Black Feminist Thought is evidenced in Jackson's (1998a, 1998b) study of African

American women's definitions of self at predominantly White institutions. She evaluated

qualitative data of twenty African American women's interview responses using Collin's third dimension of interdependence between experience and consciousness (Jackson, 1998a, 1998b). Intricately laced in their responses were themes of the daily struggle, being a part of the African American community and being an African American woman. The daily struggle referenced the constant negotiations of oppressions afforded to them by their status as a Black woman including negative stereotypes, worker harder, and proving oneself at a PWI (Jackson, 1998a, 1998b). The domination of society by White males and the subsequent fewer opportunities that exist for African American women permeates the theme of African American community membership. Additionally, Black women struggle to maintain connection with the larger community while making progress in their own lives (Jackson, 1998). Jackson encourages more works that uncover the unique experiences of African American women in higher education. It is the intent of this study to further this limited body of research by using the Black Feminist Thought framework to examine the experiences that African American women have with identity, climate and support at predominantly White institutions. Along with Black Feminist Thought, this study has at its base critical race theory (CRT).

The Role of Critical Race Theory

Understanding the intersection of multiple oppressions and Black Feminist Thought must include discussion of the Critical Race framework. Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a movement originates back to 1989 under the founders Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado all lawyers, activists and legal scholars (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). The group asserted that a pervasive subtle racism existed in America

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and previous gains for African Americans were loosing ground, so new strategies needed to be developed to address it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT contains several key features all of which are applicable in the evaluation of the higher education system in the United States. One feature posits that "racism is ordinary – difficult to cure or address" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.7). The omission of minorities constitutes a pervasive form of racism that has existed since the foundation of the American higher education system as well. A second feature addresses interest convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and offers a unique perspective when applied to the landmark Brown vs Board of Education case. Derrick Bell used a critical race lens to evaluate the context and circumstances surrounding the case and decision. His controversial view indicated the relationship of the case decision (timing and final judgement based on previous denials) to the interests of the United States at that time (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, he theorizes that the economic advantage to "appear" racially tolerant of it's own people strengthened ties with international constituents. This analysis grew widespread criticism as it challenged the initial motives of equality progress for African Americans inferring that equality may not have been the priority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

> The critical race theory framework for education…simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 63).

The use of the Critical Rate Theory lens in higher education provides an opportunity to intently analyze subtle racism patterns that are intricately laced in the construction of our systems. Evaluating the context of the development of policies, programs, structures and theoretical perspectives of identity development can lead to correcting and eliminating overt and covert practices of racism in higher education. "Too often professionals perpetuate the status quo, or one groups construction of what is 'normal', without having looked more deeply at the role of race" (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007, p.49). CRT provides the framework for analyzing racial discrimination patterns but dimly explores the historical marginilization of females as a co-precipitator of oppression particularly for African American women. "Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains" (Williams-Crenshaw, 1994, p. 93). CRT as does BFT support the use of counterstories to shed light on the experiences that people of color have. This study shares the rich stories of Black women on a predominantly White campus and calls out the constant struggles with race and gender that the students encounter and the strategies they use to push through to degree completion.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of Blacks in higher education with attention to the experiences they have at predominantly White institutions. A brief history of African American women in college was included to provide context to the impact of societal perceptions on collegiate experiences. Identity development was explored and included as an important

consideration of Black women's development in general and while in college. Next a review of the research on Black student's experiences at predominantly White institutions was included to provide historical background information. Literature on the integration and involvement of students is provided next as they are seen as significant predictors of college students success. An additional predictor of success for Black students, campus climate was also discussed to understand the role it plays in the experiences of students particularly on a White campus. Review of the campus climate detailed incidents in the academy that students of color have faced to include racial micro-aggressions, stereotyping and invisibility; therefore literature that explored this further was included. As Black women continued to persist through college despite the incidences they experienced, literature on persistence and coping was reviewed to offer some insight as to how and why they do. That literature included information about support in college, so a more detailed analysis of support was included to understand what types of support Black students and females perceive as important to their persisting toward degree completion. The chapter then introduced the frameworks for understanding Black women's experiences that guided this study. Literature on multiple identities and intersectionality were included as frameworks previously used to address the dual identity of Black and female. An overview of Black Feminist Thought, the main framework used to guide this study is included along with brief summaries of studies that have used BFT as a framework. Lastly, a brief review of Critical Race Theory is included because of its important charge of understanding the pervasiveness of racism in US that would include higher education institutions.

The literature included in this chapter does not thoroughly address the double consciousness that African American women negotiate while attending predominantly White institutions. The identity of African American women is not disjointed as many theoretical models (race or gender) assert. As African American woman have continued to balance and battle the historical effects of racism and sexism in society, the U.S. higher education system has not properly addressed their oppression, but rather mirrored the dominant perspective. Therefore the scholarly examination of the experiences that African American women have had in predominantly White institutions fails to accurately reflect how intersectionality impacts experiences. The intent of this study is to address this gap. African American female students enter college with a variety of preconceived identities.   Additionally, climate and support have been indicated as major predictors of success at predominantly White institutions, an intersectional approach such as BFT must be considered to examine their experiences from their voice. This study considers the intersectional identity of African American women to understand the experiences they have as students at a PWI with institutional climate and support.   The next chapter details the methodology used to explore this topic.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Overview

This chapter details the design and methods that were used in this study. Included here are the methodological approach, the data collection techniques, the participants' profiles, data analysis strategies, trustworthiness objectives and researcher information. The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of African American females attending an urban predominantly White institution with particular emphasis on their perception of the institutional climate and support. While quantitative studies have contributed to this body of knowledge, more qualitative studies are needed to further understand the depth of these experiences (Vaz, 1997).

The attempt to study the meanings people make out of a situation (Green-Powell, 1997) and using the Black Feminist Thought (Hill Collins, 2009) lens is best accomplished using a qualitative approach. Qualitative research intends to provide an opportunity to reach a depth of understanding of a particular phenomenon (Jones, 2002). In choosing a qualitative approach, considerable attention must be given to the methodology, method, theoretical perspective, and epistemology in order to have a carefully situated design (Jones, 2002); details of each are outlined in the remainder of this chapter. Through qualitative research, the voices of African American females can be explored and explained (Hill-Collins, 1989; Evans, 2007; Green-Powell, 1997; hooks, 2000; hooks, 1989).

As this study sought to further understand the experiences of African American females who attend predominantly White institutions, I used Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as the theoretical

lens to explore their experiences more in-depth. This theoretical lens promotes the ability to

clarify the Black women's experience, accurately interpret that experience, and represent the

experiences through intellectual works (Hill Collins, 2009). To support the use of BFT as the

theoretical lens of this study and identify the experiences as voiced by the participants; a

qualitative research approach was the most appropriate.

<div align="center">**Methods**</div>

Constructivism

The constructivism paradigm was used to guide this study. The social constructivist

seeks to understand the world in which they (the participants) live and work (Creswell, 2009).

Consistent with the purpose of Black Feminist Thought, constructivism's primary goal is to rely

on the participants' view of their experience (Creswell, 2009). "Constructivism…points out the

unique experience of each of us. It suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world

is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (Patton M. , 2002, p. 97). Considering this study

investigated the unique experiences of African American females, constructivism offered the

opportunity to "give added weight to the perspectives of those with less power and privilege in

order to 'give voice' to the disenfranchised, the underprivileged, the poor and others outside

the mainstream" (Patton, 2002, p. 98). In an effort to better serve AA females in higher

education environments, the use of a constructivist paradigm enables the researcher to

uncover (student) perceptions and social constructions and compare those with (institutional)

program goals in order to interpret the real impact or effect of such programs (Patton, 2002).

In constructivism, the interviewer is an interactive participant in the research process, which supports the BFT perspective. Guba and Lincoln explain that the inquirer's voice is that of the 'passionate participant' actively engaged in facilitating the 'multi-voice' reconstruction (1994, p. 115). Additionally, "the aim of inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold"(Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Black Feminist Thought's primary aim is to "reconstruct realities based on the persons that live that reality" (Collins, 2000, p. 39).

Phenomenology

The design undergirding my research process was a phenomenological approach. "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Patton M. , 2002, p. 104) and originated in Germany. It is defined as "a philosophical approach to the study of experience" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and was founded largely by Edmund Husserl, a German philospher (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991; Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009). Husserl desired to detour from traditional means of doing philosophy and reestablish logic as pure science. Critical in the phenomenological movement, Husserl writes *The Investigations*, a series of writings that detailed his desire to focus "directly on the analysis of things themselves – the matters at issue" (Husserl, 1970, p. xxii). Phenomenology, according to Husserl involves the careful examination of human experience. He was particularly interested in finding a means by which someone might come to accurately know their own experience of a given phenomenon, and would do so with a depth and rigour which might allow them to identify the essentail qualities of that experience. If this could be

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done, then Husserl reasoned that these essential features of an experience would transcend

the particular circumstances of their appearance, and might then illuminate a given experience

for others too (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The approach requires that the researcher gain comprehensive descriptions of

participants experiences and interpret the essence of the phenomenon (Hammond, Jowarth &

Keat, 1991). "From the philosophy of phenomenology comes a focus on the experience itself

and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25).

Here lies two key factors in phenomenological research – consciousness and intentionality.

For Husserl, phenomenological inquiry focuses on that which is experienced in the

consciousness of the individual. Husserl suggests that we focus not solely on the experience,

but our perception of that experience – taking the time to consciously reflect on what could be

considered an everyday experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). "He invokes the technical

term intentionality to describe the relationship between the process occuring in consciousness,

and the object of attention for that process. So in phenomenological terms, experience or

consciousness is always consciousness of something" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.13).

"Intentionality refers to the relationship between a person and the object or events of her/his

experience, or more simply, one's directed awareness of an object or event" (Dahlberg,

Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008, p. 49). Every experience that a person has, has meaning and it is

the objective of phenomenological research to extrapolate and understand this meaning. "In

the phenomenological frame of mind, we see the aspects, or patterns, that let us grasp the

essence of the phenomenon, i.e. what makes the object or event into that particular phenomenon (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008, p. 49).

Phenomenology is "well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 26) such as those experienced by African American women at PWI's negotiating multiple identities and/or oppressions. Using this approach allows for the exploration of how the students put together their experiences to make sense of their world and subsequent worldview (Patton, 2002). Additionally, this approach assumes that "there is an essence or essences to shared experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 106).

The essence, "may be understood as a linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon. A good description that constittutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way" (Manen, 1990, p. 39). Using a phenomenological approach to understand the experience of being a Black female at a White college according to Manen is "a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and unversal, powerful and sensitive" (1990, p. 39). As a phenomenological researcher, "we should position ourselves so the things can show themselves to us and thus 'the thing' is understood as a phenomenon" (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008) . The framework of Black Feminist Thought contends that there are shared experiences of African American women as oppressed individuals, supporting the use of phenomenology in this study.

Husserl's phenomenological approach has been viewed as primarily theoretical with limited specificity on how to conduct research using it (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2008). For this reason, one of his former understudies Martin Heidegger furthered the work on phenomenology with an emphasis on articulating the way to conduct phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2008). Husserl's approach was mostly descriptive in nature – intracately describing and reflecting (through a series of reductions) on the various elements of an expereince thus leading to the essence (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2008). Through his approach to phenomonology, experiences are "bracketed, analyzed and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25), described later in the data analysis. Heidegger (2010) on the other hand, focused on interpretation of experiences– referred to as hermeneutics and is referenced as a key contributor to hermeneutic phenomenology. "Hermeneutics is the phenomenological tool with which we understand being; the hermeneutic process, the process of understanding and interpreting, reveals to us what is hidden"(Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008). For Heidegger there is a focus not just on what is said about the experience, but on "examining something which may be latent, or disguised, as it emerges into the light" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This study sought to understand the experiences that Black women have at a predominantly White college through what they shared, but also explored the underlying essence of their experiences using the hermenuetic process of phenomenology.

Sampling

Phenomenological research calls for purposeful sampling to identify participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2008). "Participants are selected on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phebomena under study. That is, they 'represent' a perspective, rather than a population" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For this reason, phenomenological studies have small sample sizes (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom (2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Of concern in phenomenological research is the detailed individual accounts of experience…"the issue is quality, not quantity, and given the complexity of most human phenomena…IPA (interpretative phenomenological analysis) studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 51). The intent to capture the experiences of African American females was best met by using a purposeful sampling process to identify them. The selection critera included the student identifying as African American, as a female, and attending an urban predominantly White institution. Smith, Flowers , & Larkin (2009) highly suggest seeking out a purposive homogeneous sample for phenomenological research but caution against treating the participants of the sample the same. Additionally, Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom contend that "the phenomenon should direct the data gathering but in general it is important to include informants of different ages and generations…" (2008, p. 175). These participants were selected because they could "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Emploring this strategy to select African American females at a PWI allowed for the researcher to" discover, understand, and gain insight of those from whom the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). This strategy

is also supported by other qualitative researchers such as Patton (2002) who encourages

purposeful sampling for "information-rich" cases for studying in depth.

A combination of typical and network purposeful sampling was used to recruit students.

In typical purposeful sampling, the sample is "selected because it reflects the average person,

situation, or instance of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). As this study was

particularly focused on experiences at predominantly White institutions, one institution

meeting this typical criteria was selected. Additionally, females who have identified themselves

as African American were located, recruited and asked to refer other potential participants.

This strategy reflects snowball or network purposeful sampling and leads to more participants

and more information-rich cases (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009).

An initial list of over 500 female students who identified as African American was

obtained through the university information environment data site to identify potential study

participants. These students had indicated their ethnicity upon applying to the institution and

this information is kept within their university file. An initial email was sent with the subject –

"telling your story: the experiences of Black females on a White campus" to all students on the

list inviting them to participate in the study as well as make referrals. Included in the email was

the summary information sheet regarding the study as well as the consent form for

participation. Approximately 40 students responded to the email inquiry indicating an interest

in participating. Follow up emails were sent to the respondents verifying the purpose of the

study (per the consent form and information sheet) with an invitation to schedule initial

interviews. Confirmed first interviews were scheduled with 19 students; however only 11

students attended and subsequently participated in the interview process.

Interview Process

Phenomenological research requires sharp attention to the interview process and the

questions used in order to gather the necessary data for analysis.   Interviews are seen as open

dialogues between the researcher and the participant. Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom (2008)

state, "the researcher's task is to facilitate interviewees in telling their stories" (p. 184) and

should result in both parties becoming more aware of the phenomenon afterwards. The

desired richness of the data requires attention to the interviewee, their responses and physical

reactions to questions and time to fully capture their perspective on the phenomenon

(Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Given that

phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a particular phenomenon, the construction

of the interview questions was critical in the process. The interview schedule according to

Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) not only helps to prepare the participants for the subject

matter, but also helps to frame the interview and relevant topics. The questions in the

interview schedule serve only as a guide as the researcher is reminded, "the interview process

needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview

in the first place" (Manen, 1990). Therefore the interview must remain flexible and allow the

dialogue to be led by the participants' revelation of experience. "The participant is the

experiential expert on the topic in hand and therefore they should be given much leeway in

taking the interview to 'the thing itself'" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 58). The guiding

research question for this study was what are the experiences of African American female

students at a predominantly White institution? Please refer to appendix A for the full interview schedule.

An initial interview was conducted with eleven participants regarding their experience at the urban predominantly White institution, hereafter referred to as UPW. The interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours each. The first in-person interview provided a wealth of information about their personal backgrounds to include their upbringing and childhood/pre-college experiences with race and/or gender. Consistent with phenomenological research methods, initial analysis is important, therefore interviews were transcribed immediately. After transcription was complete, each participant was forwarded the transcript of their initial interview and was asked to elaborate on or modify any information provided. A second interview (in-person or via an alternative communication method) was conducted for 10 of the 11 participants; one participant left the institution and was unavailable for a second interview. This interview entailed updates on their status, more in-depth discussion of their overall experiences, and confirmation of details disclosed in the previous interview and/or email communications.

While all the participants self identified as African American women, the group could not be considered homogenous and the diversity within was important and valuable to this research study. The age range of the participants was 20 to 40 years old. Their academic levels varied as two were freshmen, two sophomores, three juniors, and four were seniors. All participants were full-time students at the time of the initial interviews. The women were pursuing various academic majors including ones in the Sciences, Liberal Arts, and Technology. Nine students were first generation students, while the remaining two had a parent or sibling

who had obtained a college degree. Lastly, six of the participants had attended college prior to

enrolling at UPW and the remaining five began their college journey at UPW. Two women were

married with children, one a single parent, and the remaining eight were single with no

children. A table providing this and more information is below.

Student Profiles – Summary Table							
Participant	Age	Marital Status	Parent # of children	First Gen	Level in school/ Cum GPA	Major	Status First-time Returner	Transfer
Ashley	22	S	N	N	Senior 3.11	Biology	First-time	N
Brittany	23	S	N	Y	Senior 2.49	Journalism	First-time	N
Burna	33	S	N	Y	Senior 3.77	Computer Information Technology	Returner (10 yrs.)	Y
Dee	40	M	Y (6)	Y	Junior 3.53	Communication Studies	Returner (6 yrs.)	Y
Jendo	28	S	N	Y	Senior 2.39	Tourism & Conv. Management	First-time	Y
Kendra	37	M	Y (5)	Y	Junior 3.01	Africana Studies	First-time	Y
Krystal	20	S	N	N	Freshman 2.10	Nursing	First-time	N
Mariah	21	S	N	Y	Freshman .60	Pre-Pharmacy	First-time	N
Shantia	21	S	N	Y	Sophomore 2.43	Biology	First-time	N
Talia	21	S	Y (1)	Y	Junior 2.08	English	First-time	N
Victoria	20	S	N	Y	Sophomore 2.46	Biology	First-time	N

Student Profiles

The following narratives provide a brief introduction to each participant along with a phrase that best summarized how they saw themselves in the current stages of their lives.

Ashley – "I STILL think I'm superwoman!" Ashley was born and raised in a predominantly Black and Hispanic city in East Chicago, Indiana. Born into a two-parent family, she is the younger of two daughters. Her oldest sister has played a pivotal role in her life by serving as an example of what to do and not to do while growing up. Ashley described her as the "ultimate role model" because although her sister initially dropped out of college and had a child by age 21, she returned to school to obtain multiple degrees and now works as a nurse practitioner. Motivated by her sisters' life and her mothers' warnings against teenage pregnancy, Ashley is proud that she has not repeated the cycle of being a mother before graduating college. Prior to enrolling at UPW, Ashley attended a different high school then many of her neighborhood peers. While she should have attended schools in her local community (predominantly Black schools), she attended predominantly Hispanic schools on the other side of town because of her mothers' place of employment in that community. By day she was the minority in her education environment and by night she was active in her community of Black friends and neighbors. Ashley recalled being the minority (1 of 5 Blacks) in her honors level high school courses. She was very active in high school and served as captain of the cheerleading squad as well as class president. She graduated as Salutatorian with intentions of enrolling in her first choice school, Hampton University, a Historically Black College. Larger scholarship offers and a prolonged response by Hampton led her to attending her second choice – instate school UPW.

Brittany - "I just feel muted".   Brittany traveled from Elkhart, Indiana. The city had once

carried the title of the second highest unemployment rate in the nation.   For over 14 years of

her life, she grew up with her parents in an apartment they called home.   Now, due to

unemployment and other economic reasons, her parents reside with her maternal

grandmother. The importance of higher education was not stressed in the home; her parents

just encouraged her to get good grades. However Brittany, a first generation student still had a

desire to move beyond high school. She vividly described the scene of foreclosed homes along

with former classmates who are on drugs, have multiple children or surviving on little or no

employment.   She says that going home is very tough and her stay is often brief. Brittany

started college near her hometown, but decided to transfer to UPW at the encouragement of a

friend. Now living away from home, she doesn't rely on her parents for financial support and

must work full-time in order to cover basic living expenses while in college. Recalling her initial

transition into UPW, she felt inadequate and less confident in her academic abilities and

described the campus as intimidating. An opportunity to study abroad improved perception of

the campus but more importantly provided her an opportunity to learn more about herself.

Now a senior with a 2.5 GPA, her academics have become more challenging. As her motivation

to complete her degree waned, she contemplated withdrawing but felt she has come so far and

is determined to finish. She has also pursued yet another goal that has distracted her from her

studies. Brittany desired to pursue a music career and had recently put a lot of energy into

producing an album, shooting a music video and releasing her first single. Brittany was doing

her best to balance going to school full-time, financially supporting herself and focusing on her

music career – all things that she considers priorities in her life.

"Burna" – She's dispelling "the myths of Mississippi". Burna's life began in Greenwood, MS

with parents who were born in 1933 (father) and 1945 (mother). She is the youngest of six

children and is thankful that her mother shared many of her life experiences with her. The

town where she grew up was a very segregated town with a distinct bridge serving as the racial

divide. On one side of the bridge there were large plantation homes on the other were

cornfields and trailer homes where her mother lived. Her mother often shared stories of racial

discrimination that included a time when she herself was spit on while crossing the bridge in

town. As a child, Burna was traumatized while out shopping as a White female clerk watched

her while she browsed through the store as if she could not be trusted. This childhood

experience has continued to affect her as an adult. She dreads shopping and the possibility of

being accused of stealing while in a store. After high school, Burna left Mississippi for

Milwaukee and attended Mount Mary, a predominantly White Catholic college. At Mount

Mary she felt more accepted than Mississippi but still dealt with discriminatory encounters.

She recalled a White roommate suddenly moving out of their shared dorm space and a college

friend's parent refused to shake her hand upon introduction. After a year at Mount Mary she

dropped out and enlisted in the military for ten years. Those years were also riddled with

incidents that she attributed to her African American identity. Particularly, she recalled being

accused of threatening a White female by urinating on her bed.   During questioning by the

master chief (a White male) was told that she looked like she would do something like that.

The investigation concluded that another White female was guilty of the act. She states that

that incident has caused her to have trust issues with White persons in leadership positions.

After completing her military service, Burna began college at UPW to study Computer and

Information Technology. At 33 years old and a first-generation college student she is finishing

her degree with a 3.73 GPA. Her years at UPW also had distinct experiences that she believes

are associated with her being an African American female but she has not let them stop her

from reaching her goals.

Dee – "I've lived a very colorful life". Dee's colorful life began on the north side of

Indianapolis. She describes her life as "regular". As a young girl, her biological family didn't

discuss being Black, however this changed when she became a teen and was placed with older

foster parents. Unlike her original home, there were images, sayings and conversations in the

home about the history of African Americans. This served as a foundation to her growing

interest in the history of people to include her own heritage, certain religious groups and

people around the world. She is an adult student returning after a six-year gap. At the age of

40 years, she sees it as an opportunity to do something for herself. Although she obtained an

online associates degree while younger, the majority of her life was spent home raising her six

children (ages 12-20) and being a wife. She spent some time in the workforce as a UPS driver

(her dream job because she liked the uniforms) and has worked in non-profit organizations.

Dee is currently in her first year (but at junior status) at UPW majoring in Communication

Studies and minoring in Africana Studies. She attends full-time and has a 3.53 cumulative GPA.

Dee is very active in her church and has helped them obtain 501C3 status as a non-profit

organization. In addition to raising her family, supporting her children who attend college and

volunteering, Dee serves as a mentor on campus.   She values her mentor role as it has helped

her to connect on campus but is careful not to allow it to consume her time or distract her from

her own goals.   Her primary goal is to have balance in her life while making her education the priority.

Jendo – "I'm not a stereotypical Black person". Born in Washington, D.C. in 1983, Jendo spent a number of years between her birth state and Gary, Indiana. Her grandparents, who had lived Gary, raised her until the age of eight. She then returned to DC to live with her mother and attended various Catholic schools that were predominantly Black. After several years, her family returned to Gary to care for her ailing grandparents and shortly thereafter her grandmother succumbed to lung cancer. Jendo found attending school in Indiana to be very different then DC.   While she still attended Catholic school, it was predominantly White with only 10 Black students in the entire school. Her high school years were more diverse as she attended a public high school in her community. As she balanced being a high school student, she was also responsible for caring for her great-grandmother who was dying of pancreatic cancer. Jendo was her grandmother's primary caregiver since her mother worked and often stayed in a neighboring state instead of commuting. The passing of her great-grandmother prompted Jendo to become what she describes as a recluse, often interacting only with her great-grandfather. Her academics declined, she withdrew from sports and other school activities. She picked up bad habits like smoking and drinking.   After realizing that missing 120 days of school would prevent her from graduating, she decided to turn things around by going enrolling in a night school program that required participating in community service along with completing coursework. Her persistence and hard work caught her up and as she celebrated graduating on time, she was faced with another tragedy – her great-grandfather died of skin cancer. Despite the challenges and losses she had endured, Jendo enrolled in a community

college to start her education with the intention of attending UPW directly after. Upon completion of general education requirements at the community college, she transferred to UPW. She is currently completing a Bachelor's Degree in Tourism and Convention Management with a focus on Event Management and is carrying a 2.39 cumulative GPA.

Kendra – She's decided to "Not fight it, just adapt to it if I'm gonna get through". Kendra's ability to adapt began early in her childhood with experiences in her own family. The complexion of her skin was much lighter then the other children of her single-parent mother and she often faced mistreatment in her household because of it. Her biological father left her mother and eventually married a White woman and Kendra believes this caused resentment from her mother and mistreatment from her siblings. Her brothers and sisters would accuse her of wanting to be and acting "White". Although she disagreed, she realized the advantage of her lighter skin tone while attending school. She and her siblings lived in a predominantly Black community and were among the first Black students bussed to a predominantly White school out of their neighborhood. While she felt more accepted by the White students in school, she witnessed the harsher treatment that her siblings and friends endured because of their darker skin. Her mother forced her to leave home at the age of sixteen years when she learned that Kendra became pregnant. In turn, she stopped attending school and began working full-time to support her daughter. She decided to end a physically abusive relationship with her daughters' father and improve her life. Kendra was able to obtain decent jobs over the years even though she had no high school diploma. She was limited in her mobility and didn't apply for higher jobs, for fear her employers would learn of her lack of education. She eventually remarried and while pregnant with her fourth son she was terminated by her employer. Instead of seeking

further employment she decided to focus on her education and at age 30 obtained her GED by

doing online coursework. She started college at a local predominantly Black college after

applying to UPW and being denied admission. While continuing her education there, she

attempted twice more to get into UPW and the third time she was successful. She then

transferred and pursued a degree in Africana Studies. She currently balances her school

obligations while working part-time, caring for husband and five children (ages 5-20). Kendra is

a first generation student who has returned to college as an adult. Her primary motivation to

complete her degree is her children. She desires to see them be more successful earlier in life

and feels that in order for that to happen, she must lead by example by finishing her degree.

Krystal – "I make it my point to be known!" Krystal was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan

before relocating to Indiana. Her mother raised her and two older brothers, but her father

(who resides in Michigan with his other children) has played an active role in her life.   Being a

first-generation student has Krystal feeling the pressure of being in college since neither

parents nor siblings attended college. Her parents have high expectations and remind her often

of them. In middle school, Krystal spent most of her time caring for her ailing grandmother

until her death in 2006, followed by her grandfather who passed in 2008. She began working at

age sixteen at McDonalds and by age seventeen had earned a certified nursing assistant license

through her vocational high school. By age eighteen, she balanced attending school, managing

a McDonalds and running track. She attended a predominantly Black middle school but her

high school was much more diverse. This diversity was overshadowed by the commonality that

many of the students were from impoverished communities and struggled financially.

Attending UPW after high school would provide her with an opportunity to do something

different, so she set out to pursue a nursing degree. Krystal tries to balance others expectations of her, with the ones she has for herself. Her goal is to be successful in life and while she knows that her race and gender play a key role in her college experience, staying focused is her main goal.

Mariah "Prove everyone that doubted you wrong". Mariah was born and raised in a small predominantly White town called Laporte in Indiana. Her parents have been married all her life and she is the eldest of three daughters. Despite being the only Black family on the block, Mariah describes her neighborhood as welcoming. The community elementary school also lacked diversity; she was the only Black student in her classes up until her sixth grade year. She progressed and did well academically throughout high school. She was very active in sports, student council and other extracurricular activities. In her graduating class, she was one of four African Americans who had successfully finished high school. She was interested in attending UPW because it provided her an opportunity to experience something different. Different in that the urban area was more diverse, provided more to do versus the small town she grew up in. Mariah plans to be a pharmacist and knows that she will need to work much harder in order to be successful at UPW. Mariah was hoping to learn to be more street smart by moving to a larger city, something she felt she wasn't learning in the small town she grew up in. Even though the city is much larger, she finds comfort knowing that the UPW population is similar in racial makeup to her own community and school experiences. Since she grew up around mostly White people, she feels comfortable being the minority in an academic setting because she feels she knows them. Despite experiencing little racial diversity in her upbringing

and having some uncomfortable racial encounters as a child, she says she would rather be Black than any other race.

Shantia – "The spotlight is on me". Shantia is the eldest in a household of 7 children, which has consumed a great deal of Shantia's life but it hasn't kept her from pursuing her goals. Most of her childhood was spent in a two-parent family in a suburb of Atlanta, GA. She recalls a very traditional upbringing with her parents walking or driving her to the predominantly Black elementary school in their neighborhood. Everything seemed normal to her until one day her mother announced divorce proceedings and relocated with the children back to Indiana. Although she had grandparents in Indianapolis, her mother and siblings moved into a shelter for the summer until her mother could get them settled into an apartment. Her life then consisted of going to a predominantly White school, going home, feeding her siblings and making sure the house was clean. She didn't want to burden her single mother with requests to participate in extracurricular activities. One of Shantia's' most memorable moments was her mother being in the car with a man and then learning that he was her biological father. Up until that day, she thought she and the other six siblings shared the same father. Shantia and her biological father began to develop a relationship and she enjoyed spending time with him and her additional older brothers and stepmother. This caused considerable strain in her relationship with her mother because of the withheld information about her father for so long. Despite this, she knew that her mother still needed help with the other children. During junior and senior year, she became much more independent and active in high school. Shantia began attending school events and going to the movies with her friends. Her choice to attend UPW was facilitated by her desire to stay close enough to her mom in order to assist with her siblings

as needed, while still being able to pursue her own academic goals. She recently changed her

major from biology to psychology, a switch that has reenergized her and made her more

comfortable with where she is academically. She is effectively balancing living away from home

while still making sure to be active in her sibling's lives. While she limits going home so that she

can stay on task academically, she is thankful for her mother's frequent campus visits.

Talia – "Raising my hand is NOT enough". Talia was raised in a single-parent family along with

her four siblings. Her mother had her first child as a teenager and although she excelled

academically, she chose to not continue her education beyond high school. Instead she

entered the workforce as a hairdresser so she could provide for her growing family. As a child,

Talia struggled with learning because she lacked motivation in the classroom. Schoolteachers

further discouraged her by telling her that she had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and that

she wouldn't make it through high school. Detached from learning, Talia began to act out

behaviorally in school and her actions led to a fight with another classmate resulting in

expulsion from school for a year. That year out of school allowed her to mature and become

more confident in her academic abilities. She also learned that she too would soon be a young

mother. She returned her junior year of high school and attended both day and night school to

catch up with her classmates and graduate on time. She began her college journey at the

community college with intentions to transfer to UPW after completing her remedial work.

Upon transferring to UPW, she began to pursue a math education degree. Talia has a vision of

developing a Montessori type of school that encourages development of Black children's

identity and learning by incorporating educational practices and physical activities such as yoga.

She is using these pedagogical approaches while homeschooling her daughter. Outside of

academic instruction, she engages her three-year-old daughter in yoga, museum trips and cultural excursions regularly. While we spoke about her college experience, her daughter listened attentively. Once in a while she attempted to join the conversation by offering her comments or asking questions of us. When she became restless, Talia stopped and wrote out double digit addition and subtraction math problems for her to solve. Her daughter's intellect often surprises people they encounter because she is articulate, communicates well and is very mature. Talia finds their reactions annoying and wonders why they have such low expectations for young children. She feels that her daughter is capable of learning anything and she plans to continue to challenge her. Talia has come to a place in her life now where she is fully absorbing her own learning experiences in college. She struggled slightly when she began college, but has since gained her footing and is branching out. Although an introvert with a love for yoga, journaling and expression through music – she believes that she possesses the strength and courage of a lion, just like her mother and the other women in her family.

Victoria "I DON'T want to become another statistic". Born on the West Coast, Victoria and her mother relocated to the Gary, IN in search of a better place to live. Along with her mother and siblings, attending church was an integral part of her upbringing in their single-parent household. Moving to the Midwest brought about a very different educational experience then the west coast education system. Her southern California community was predominantly Latino with little representation of other racial groups; the population in her school was similar. As an African American she was the minority in the school she attended. However, in the Midwest, her neighbors and classmates were predominantly Black. She performed well academically throughout school but had not contemplated attending college until the seventh

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grade when she learned about a state program that would pay for her college education. With

college being her next destination, she maintained her good academic standing and played on

the high school basketball team until graduation. Victoria is proud to be a Black woman and a

first generation student. She feels she and her mother have beaten the odds against single

parent families whose children don't go to college. As she considers an academic major change

from biology to exercise science, Victoria is still settling into a college experience that was

different than she expected. She envisioned college life similar to what is depicted in the movie

Love and Basketball. She imagined being active on campus, being an athlete and maybe even

finding love. But her reality is very different, she finds herself going to class and then going

home. Since UPW is primarily a commuter campus that offers limited yet expensive housing,

she opted to stay off campus to save money, which has limited her involvement on campus.

She's still adjusting to and learning new study habits. In high school, she could forego studying

and keep solid grades; something she realized after her first semester would have to change.

Her plan is to work harder, try to be engaged more and continue to strive for her goals.

Research Site

This study was conducted at an urban predominantly White (UPW) commuter

institution in the midwest. This institution was selected because it had key characteristics

desired for this study such as being a predominantly White institution and was also in close

proximity to the researcher. The campus is located in the downtown area of one of the largest

cities in the Midwest and offers more than 250 degree programs. UPW has recently climbed in

rankings over the last two years according to U.S. News and World Report and is one of the top

schools to watch with emphasis on first-year experiences and service learning (UPW website,

n.d.). As of the 2010 enrollment numbers, the student population nears 30,000 and is

composed primarily of undergraduate students; females represent over 57% of attendees. Of

the entire student body, 73% are White, 17% (4968 students) are minority students, 5% are

international, and 5% have ethnicities unknown. Of the minority student population,

approximately 2700 identify as African American (UPW Information Management, 2011).

African American faculty represent only 4% (54 persons) of the entire faculty body at UPW.

Additionally, 91% of the student population are residents of the state where UPW is located.

On-campus housing options can only accommodate roughly 1107 students (UPW facts, n.d.);

making UPW primarily a commuter campus.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the state where UPW is located has an overall population

of 6.5 million people with over 50% female (US Census Bureau, n.d.). African Americans

represent 9.1% of the overall population in the state, however the city has a 29.2% African

American population (US Census Bureau, n.d.). Each of these factors; institution located in a

urban city, large female population and predominantly White student body on campus makes

UPW an ideal research site in which to explore the experiences of African American females.

History of UPW

To provide the appropriate context of this study, a brief history of UPW along with a

summary of two significant occurrences on campus are included. It is important to note that

UPW was "established in a historically African American neighborhood close to the center of

the capital…thus linking the campus with a rich African-American tradition that has been a

founding value" as cited in (personal communication, 2006).   In 1880, 20% of the residents in

the community were Black and by 1920 this number had risen to over 50% (Mullins, 2003). A

variety of businesses, churches, and social clubs provided a thriving community for African

Americans throughout the late twentieth century until the area began to decline in the 1950's

(Mullins, 2003). UPW was established in the late nineteen hundreds and began to acquire and

occupy the declining neighborhood areas as a part of the cities urban renewal projects (Gray,

2003).

In 2006, UPW received a report from three Black students detailing issues at the

predominantly White institution for Black students. The issues included inequality, disrespect,

lack of African American faculty, courses, and programming as well as discriminatory student

organization funding processes (personal communication, 2006).   The document provided key

stakeholders with specific charges and demands to be addressed (personal communication,

2006). News of the document reached local community groups and local media resulting in

community forums. These town hall meetings provided an opportunity to discuss with the

community, the challenges that Black students were having at UPW. Within four days of

receiving the report, the institution responded acknowledging the challenges at UPW and

outlined key steps already taken and proposed several more to address the issues such as hiring

of new faculty, review of student funding processes and establishment of key offices to further

address issues (personal communicaton, 2006).

Subsequent actions included the establishment of a several Diversity relates offices and

the hiring of several African American faculty (personal communication, 2007), up until this

point, the institution had operated without these key areas/initiatives. UPW has continued to

address the concerns originally stated in the report and each year has released a diversity report to highlight diversity efforts.

The 2012 diversity report provides some key information relevant to this study to include the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement questions on diversity of the curriculum, co-curriculum, and campus climate (UPW, 2012). The curriculum question prompted students to consider if their class discussion or assignments included diverse perspectives (UPW, 2012). First-year student responses indicated a lack of diverse topics in their courses and faculty responses indicated a decline in including diverse topics in upper level courses (UPW, 2012). Co-curricular diverse experiences were also lower than expected as the results indicated that UPW "lags behind its peers in diversity experiences outside the classroom" (UPW, 2012). Questions regarding campus climate for diversity were asked based on specific indicators of a negative campus experience. The indicators included negative or disparaging comments, harassment, discrimination, feeling isolated or unwelcome, offensive language or humor, not being taken seriously, and discouragement in pursuing academic goals (UPW, 2012).

Overall the results indicated that "female undergraduate students reported significantly higher levels of negative experiences than men in the areas of negative or disparaging comments, not being taken seriously, and offensive language or humor" (UPW, 2012). Additionally, minority students indicated significantly higher instances of negative experiences in all areas listed above. This study sought to explore these experiences in depth for African American students on this campus.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers contend that analysis should be conducted concurrently with data collection in order to continually reflect about the data and get clarifications (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Miles and Huberman strongly suggest early and continual data analysis in order to make "analysis an ongoing, lively enterprise that contributes to the energizing process of fieldwork" (1994, p. 50) and allows for continual thinking about the interview process and subsequent data collection (1994). An initial technique used in conducting qualitative research is epoche, which involves understanding and situating our prejudices and viewpoints to be better aware of the phenomenon that we are investigating. Epoche can be achieved by describing personal experiences with the phenomenon thus making an attempt to set aside judgments and focus entirely on the participants(Creswell, 2007). Epoche however, does not mean that personal experiences must be totally excluded as heuristic inquiry in phenomenological analysis makes it possible for the researcher to include personal experience as part of the data(Merriam, 2009). Therefore, recognizing personal judgments to better understand the experiences, yet using personal experiences of the researcher in the data supports the Black Feminist Thought framework. The heuristic inquiry process involves several steps and is considered a highly personal process (Patton, 2002). It involves, 1) immersion – where the researcher in centered in the experience; 2) incubation – where the researcher through patience allows awareness and understanding to develop; 3) illumination – expansion of awareness and deepening of meaning to allow for new discoveries; and 4) explication – where through focusing, self-dialogue, and reflection, the experience fully unfolds (Patton,

2002). A researcher bio is included near the end of this chapter to help the audience

understand how the researcher was situated in this study.

Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological analysis attempts to 'ferret out the essence or basic structure of a

phenomenon (Merriam, 2009, p. 198)" through various techniques. The analysis for

hermeneutic phenomenological research is similar to other qualitative analysis strategies. "The

insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflective appropriating, or

clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (Manen,

1990, p. 77). Analysis techniques included several key steps to fully understand the essence of

what was shared in the interviews. Phenomenological analysis requires extensive focus, "that

focus directs our analytic attention towards our participants' attempts to make sense of their

experiences" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 79). The steps that Smith, Flowers, & Larkin

outline include reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching

for connections across emergent themes, and looking for patterns across cases (2009).

During the interviews, notes were taken to correspond with the students' responses

describing their facial expressions, demeanor, or other nonverbal cues. This would aid in

properly illustrating the voice of their experiences. Once verbatim transcription of the

interview data were complete, the basic inductive strategies found in qualitative research were

followed along with incorporation of the specific phenomenological data analysis strategies

(Merriam, 2009). Analysis began with reading through each transcript thoroughly, engaging in

their story and reflecting on each individual interview. After reading through each participant's

transcript, initial comments were made allowing for clarification or further exploration with the participant in the follow up interview that was conducted. Key phrases and words were then highlighted as suggested by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) throughout each individual's transcript to understand how the participants structured their thoughts; such as what figures of speech they used, how they responded emotionally, etc. while describing their experiences. Making comments and notes involved moving through stages of analysis.   Noting started with descriptive comments that simply identified important text. Next, an exploration of specific language use was conducted, thus allowing for noting what Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) describe as linguistic comments. For example, in this study the word invisible was used often by participants' descriptions of their experiences and was a powerful word that illuminated the magnitude of feeling alone on campus.   Analysis then shifted to being more conceptual with the identification of emergent themes. During this stage of analysis, copies of transcripts were literally cut up and each response or comment from a participant was loosely separated and categorized under the themes that appeared in the individual analyses. "The original whole of the interview becomes a set of parts…but these come together in another new whole at the end of the analysis in the write-up" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Identifying themes is a critical step in the phenomenological analysis process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Manen, 1990). Themes help capture what was important and evident throughout a transcript. Arriving at the themes required analysis of the participants' comments and incorporation of the researcher's interpretations (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). "Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure – grasping and formulating a thematic

understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of "seeing" meaning" (Manen, 1990, p. 79).   Manen also suggests that arriving at a theme through theme analysis is "a process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (1990, p. 78). The process of identifying themes within each participant's story and then examining the themes across the various participants is another main step in phenomenological analysis. This, as Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) state, helps the researcher see connections across emergent themes and identify patterns across the participants' stories. The initial analysis revealed a variety of themes that were evident in many of the participants' interview data. Analysis also produced several sub-themes – some which were evident in many of the participant's cases and some that were not. This was consistent with how the how phenomenological research and the Black Feminist Thought framework operate. While there may be "super-ordinate themes which are represented in each of the individuals stories, there are also "idiosyncratic" instances where the overarching theme may be shared but experienced in a unique way by different individuals. For instance, the theme of not feeling welcome may be an overarching theme; however an adult Black female returning student may not feel welcome because of her age, race and gender as opposed to just race and gender for a traditional-aged Black female student. Themes will be presented and discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Trustworthiness

Assessment of the trustworthiness of qualitative research differs from quantitative research methods, which seek to ensure validity and reliability (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Qualitative researchers focus on trustworthiness and quality of the findings and therefore use strategies to ensure that these criteria are met. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings a variety of strategies were employed in this study. Establishing trust was critical to insuring the accuracy and depth of the information collected from participants. Merriam encourages the collection of rich, thick description as a strategy to ensure trustworthiness and including very detailed accounts of the participants in order to situate the reader (2009). The multiple collection points of data and communication with the participants helped to ensure an accurate and detailed interpretation of their experiences. The participants were allowed to add/modify their accounts, as they needed in order to have the best representation of their stories. They were active participants throughout the research process. Being engaged with the data and participants until saturation requires extensive time and aids in accurate interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009). Yardley (2000) a psychologist who conducts qualitative research is often cited in phenomenological research addressing quality. She offers four principles (or characteristics) that when applied appropriately will help to ensure the quality of qualitative research. The first characteristic is sensitivity to context, which includes being aware and mindful of the "theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data; sociocultural setting; participants' perspectives; and ethical issues" (Yardley, 2000) associated with the study.

The very nature of phenomenological research and the selection of a specific population that share a particular lived experience are "centered upon the perceived need for sensitivity" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and therefore met these criteria. Additionally sensitivity was shown through the intentional relationship building with the participants through the interview process which as Smith, Flowers, & Larkin suggest demonstrates "through an appreciation of

the interactional nature of data collection within the interview situation" (2009, p. 180). This sensitivity to context was also extended into the analysis process. "Making sense of how the participant is making sense of their experience requires immersive and disciplined attention to the unfolding account of the participant and what can be gleaned from it" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 180). Yardley's second characteristic is commitment and rigor, which includes "in-depth engagement with the topic; methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis" (2000, p. 219). Each of these strategies was employed throughout the collection and analysis of the data in this study. Considerable time was spent with the data as suggested and complete immersion in the relevant research and participants stories in order to provide complete and accurate representations of the essence of their experiences. The third characteristic is transparency and coherence which Yardley says includes "clarity and power of description/argument; transparent methods and data presentation; fit between theory and method; reflexivity" (2000, p. 219). Smith, Flowers & Larkin state that "transparency refers to how clearly the stages of the research process are described in the write-up of the study" (2009, p. 182) as presented in this chapter detailing every phase of the data collection process. This chapter and the next provide very descriptive information on the participants and their experiences. The goal of coherence in research according to Yardley is for the quality of the narrative to be an integral part of its productive value; a convincing account exerts its effect partly by recreating a reality which readers recognize as meaningful to them" (2000, p. 222). Inclusion of such rich data as done in this study allows the readers to clearly connect with the participants' stories and the research. The fourth characteristic that Yardley suggests for good qualitative research is impact and

importance. The impact and importance suggests that research must be "theoretical (enriching

and understanding); socio-cultural; practical (for community, policy makers, health workers)"

(Yardley, 2000). Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) further indicate that "however well a piece of

research is conducted, a test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something

interesting, important or useful" (p. 183). The thorough examination and depiction of the

experiences of Black women on a predominantly White campus was a constant focus of this

study in an effort to illuminate their challenges and successes as well as offer these institutions

guidance on how to support them.

Additional trustworthiness strategies were used in this study such as triangulation,

which helped to ensure the quality of the data.   Triangulating the interview transcripts, student

written feedback, interviewer notes and observations during the interview process allowed for

checking the consistency of information. This served as an example of triangulation of data

sources, described by Patton as a means to compare and contrast the consistency of

information (2002). Additionally, a peer reviewer (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) was recruited

to discuss the preliminary findings and the initial interpretations of the data.

Another strategy, member checking was a key tool used in this study. Through member

checking credibility is established, as well as clarification of content by consulting with the

participants on the accuracy of the researchers interpretations (Creswell, 2009). Member

checking is considered to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility and should

occur throughout the research process (Jones, 2002). Each participant received an email

transcript of their interview and was asked to use track changes in Microsoft Word to make any

modifications to their transcript. The comment tool was also used to request clarifications of

statements made. Furthermore, the use of a two stage interviewing process enhances the

trustworthiness of the study by allowing for the opportunity to clarify information as well as

gather additional data about their experiences. This strategy is "the single most important way

of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say" (Merriam,

2009, p. 217).

Lastly, a strategy to ensure the trustworthiness of the research that is supported by the

phenomenological research process is to engage in reflexivity. Reflexivity is the "process of

reflecting critically on the self as researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In her work titled *Getting*

Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research, England (1994) encourages the

researcher to respect and include the role of the researched as far more than just an

information source. She advocates for the development of relationships between the

researcher and the researched. "Seeking reciprocal relationships based on empathy and

mutual respect" and the researcher "sharing their knowledge with those they research" is ideal

(England, 1994, p. 243). One of the ways this is accomplished is through reflexivity that England

defines as "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of

the self as researcher" (1994, p. 244). Using reflexivity in phenomenological research is seen as

one of the characteristics that Yardley (2000) promotes to ensure the quality of the research.

For this reason, I will summarize my role as researcher.

Researcher Profile

I am a 36-year-old African American woman who has worked and/or studied at a predominantly White institution for over 17 years. Raised by my maternal great-grandmother since the age of six, I grew up in the city in a predominantly White neighborhood for the majority of my elementary school years. My biological father spent most of his adult life addicted to crack cocaine and my biological mother lived a promiscuous lifestyle and preferred to entertain her men friends instead of raise the three children she had birthed by three different men. My siblings and I had not been raised together for more then a few months at a time throughout our childhood. At the start of first grade, my biological mother resided with my great-grandmother and I began to go to school from her home. She had retired from being an educator and principal and had retired in a community near a private predominantly White school. She was well known in the community for her leadership in a local elementary school along with being a founder of a national PanHellenic organization.

The community we lived in was not very diverse and in fact I can only recall three Black families within walking distance of our house. One family had children; the other two were older African Americans who were also retired. The closest neighbors to our home with children were all White families. The adjacent neighbor had two young boys close in age to myself. Although the father of the boys was very nice and receptive, the mother would not let me play with her children when the father was not present. Often times, the boys and I would get "caught" by the mother attempting to play together outside and she would make them go in the house. The boys and I both would cry and the oldest son would beg for an explanation

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from his mother as to why we could not play together, which she never provided. The father

and mother would even argue over the issue to no avail. As a child, I just assumed that she

didn't care for me but I didn't understand why, as an adult reflecting back – I'm nearly certain

she feared her sons being attracted to Black women.

I was enrolled in the neighborhood elementary school, which was a school for the

academically talented. As one of few African Americans who attended the school that was

literally right across the street from my home, I didn't get involved much in extracurricular

activities. My days consisted of serving as a lifeguard and coming home for lunch daily. I began

to come home for lunch daily because I often had no one to play with during recess and I had

been picked on by some of the White female students. They talked about my hair, made fun of

my skin color and ostracized me from the groups they had created. One of my earliest

recollections of being mistreated based on my race was in second grade. I was the only Black

female in my class and a White female lost her earrings. When she realized that they were lost

she decided to tell the teacher and pointed at me and said the Black girl did it. I had not stolen

her earrings but was questioned by the teacher and made fun of for years while attending that

school as the girl who stole the earrings in second grade. More than twenty years after this

incident, I ran across my accusers Facebook page and sent her a request. She accepted and

then messaged me saying, that she remembered me, I stole her earrings in second grade. I

immediately deleted her realizing that obviously time had not made her wiser. I dealt with

these experiences by talking to my great-grandmother and staying focused on my schoolwork. I

excelled academically and enjoyed learning both in and out of the classroom. My great-

grandmother strongly encouraged my academic endeavors, often telling me that the most

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important thing I could do is to get an education and become a teacher. Throughout my fourth

and fifth grade elementary school years, my grandfather (the father of my mother) would visit

during the summers. I thought the world of him and enjoyed spending time when he came in

town from California. I considered him a loving, caring and giving grandfather. Near the end of

my sixth grade year, I participated in a good-touch bad-touch program at school and learned a

lot about inappropriate behaviors between an adult and child. I had not related it to the many

private experiences I had had with my grandfather when he would visit. He had moved to our

city and one night invited me over to spend the night and I happily went. This night would

forever change my life as the events that evening and the occurrences over the past several

years had make me a victim of child molestation. The next few months were a whirlwind, as my

biological mother removed me from my grandmothers' home, called the police, had me

interviewed by news stations, etc. She was thoroughly excited about the possibility of winning

a lawsuit and when he was sentenced to prison and I was awarded a large sum of money she

was happy. I on the other hand was confused, didn't understand why I had been taken from

my great-grandmother and suffering from the emotional and mental harm that this situation

had caused me. Life went on and she enrolled me in a middle school that was drastically

different than anything I had ever experienced.   I began to reside with my mother in a

predominantly Black low-income apartment community. For the first time in my life, I attended

school with students who looked like me. This was a culture shock. The way I dressed, spoke,

and learned was very different then my peers in the new school. It was difficult even having

some conversations since I hadn't watched much television or listened to the radio much of my

life. Despite this, I made the most of my experience by still staying focused academically and

trying to fit in and learn more about who I was an African American female teenager among my Black peers. My biological mother spent a lot of her time away from the home with various men while my younger sister and I cared for ourselves. When she was home, her interaction with us was primarily to have us do chores and sometimes she would host neighborhood parties for the teens. I learned about growing up as young woman mostly from trial and error and people I had met in school. High school brought about different challenges as I continued to try to understand myself. I was actively involved in academic groups and desired to go to college because my counselor had talked to me about it. After learning I was pregnant near the end of my junior year, I worked even harder to stay on task academically after I refused to join the other teenage mothers in the adult education program at the high school I attended. I successfully completed my high school education and began my college journey immediately with my one-year-old daughter in tote.

UPW was my first choice school to continue my education as I would be balancing raising my daughter and working full-time. After sitting out a year following my freshman year to work two jobs, I decided to return to school. I was initially pursuing a Business degree but found myself interested in Construction Management and Engineering because of an internship I had. My first courses after returning were drafting and introduction to engineering. These courses were challenging but the unwelcoming climate in the classroom made them far more difficult. In one of the courses, I was the only Black and the only female. In another I was the only Black student. Older White males taught both courses and most of my classmates were White males with the exception of another White female in one class. Participating in group work was distressing as I often was the last selected group member for projects and mostly

worked alone on my coursework. The instructors and classmates often ignored my inquiries and even my presence in the classroom. I successfully completed both courses but because of the experience decided to change my major yet again. I decided to pursue a degree in Psychology. My involvement in programs or activities was limited since I still lived off-campus on my own. During my junior year in college, I got married and birthed twin daughters but still continued to work hard academically. I proctored tests in the Psychology lab to make extra money and decided to try to get involved. There was a Psychology Club meeting that I decided to attend only to enter the room and be met with blank stares as if I was lost. That was my first and last club meeting. From then on out I decided to just go to class and go home. Throughout the remainder of my UPW experience, I found myself alone as an African American female in many of my classes. I communicated with few students on campus (of my race or others) and knew no faculty of color on campus. My identity as a single mother and eventually a wife led me to believe that few would understand "my world" so I mostly attended class, limited my interaction and then left campus. I graduated December 2000 with a Bachelors of Science in Psychology and didn't see the value of even participate in commencement exercises, so I didn't. I found a job immediately following degree completion and went to work as a case manager for a federally funded school preparation program. After six months of not being fulfilled, I took a job on the UPW campus in the Scholarship Office with the intent of giving back to the department that had offered me scholarship money while I was enrolled. It was this role that helped to shape what my future career would be as I found my passion in helping students achieve their goals. Since then, I have spent nearly my entire career working in student affairs work at UPW because I wanted to help positively shape the experiences of students of color at

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predominantly White campuses. My roles have included developing programming for first generation students as well as retention program development and services for students of color.

Chapter Summary

Given that little is known about the experiences that African American female students have at predominantly White institutions, this study was intentionally designed to expand this body of literature. This chapter detailed the qualitative research design to include methodology, sampling strategies and data analysis methods. Using a phenomenological approach to guide this research study helped to ferret out the essence of the Black female experience on a predominantly White campus. Black female undergraduate students were purposely recruited to participate in this study and as a result, a diverse group of participants made up the sample. Detailed descriptions of each participant and a summary demographic table were included to aid in clarification and understanding of the data presented in the next chapter. Next the research site and the history of UPW were included to provide additional context for the study. UPW has a large student population but a small number of Black students attending. Of them, females are overrepresented. Fairly recent incidences and campus surveys indicated that the campus climate was uncomfortable for minority students and that these students had reported instances of discrimination and unfair treatment. Next the date analysis techniques are described in detail. Analysis was guided by methods used in phenomenological research along with general qualitative methods. One of the most important parts in the process is engagement with the data and the development of themes

from the data to get at the essence of the students experiences. The chapter concludes with the strategies used to employ trustworthiness such as those suggested in phenomenological research by Yardley (2000), member checking, peer review and reflexivity. A researcher profile is included to summarize my role as a researcher and how I am invested in studying this topic.

As stated previously, the stories of Black women have often been told generally through the lens of African Americans with limited emphasis on gender differences; however this study sought to contribute to the understanding of a more heterogeneous experience by unpacking the Black female experience at a PWI. The research design described in this chapter facilitated this unpacking. In the next chapter, the findings and themes of this study will be presented.

Chapter Four: Analysis and thematic findings of their Stories

Chapter Overview

This study sought to understand the experiences of African American women enrolled at a predominantly White institution. The women shared about their personal backgrounds, experiences in college to include their perceptions of the institutional climate, motivations, and types of support they have for their academic journeys. Their individual stories were loosely organized into a set of themes that in many ways overlapped with each other.   Each theme played a significant role in how the participants interpreted and explained their current college experience as an African American female at a PWI. The broad themes are: childhood and pre-college experiences with race/gender, experiences at a PWI, and enduring the college journey.

While the overarching themes provided the foundation of interpretation of their experiences, several subthemes emerged providing intricate details of their collegiate experience as a whole. These included transitioning into college, fighting stereotypes and dealing with invisibility as a Black woman at a White college. Dealing with these issues included relying on support systems both on and off-campus and knowing what strategies to employ to best cope with their experiences.

Exploring the intersection of Black and Woman undergraduate college students echoed many of the historical standpoints and literature on their experiences. The participants in this study revealed challenges with understanding their overall identity, dealing with the societal perceptions of Black women along with the lack of institutional support available to guide them through the college journey.

"Beautiful also, are the souls of my Black sisters" (Noble, 1978, np) – Understanding their identity.

There was no consistent way that the participants in this study responded to the questions – Who are you?   Who are you as a Black woman? Who are you as a Black woman in college? For many of the participants it appeared that they had never truly reflected on the intersection of their lives as Black and woman. Often they've viewed themselves through a singular lens or so they thought. As the narratives of their stories unfolded, a very different image manifested describing the Black women they saw – these visions were being intricately laced with the images of the past. Herein lied the challenge with self-identity. While their self-disclosed identity as a Black woman unfolded, it was a challenge to think of themselves at the intersection of Black and woman. On the outset, race appeared to be more salient, but unbeknownst to them often sex was linked to their described experiences as well.

In Jean Noble's 1957 research on Black women who were college graduates, she posed the question "what will be the probable social and psychological life roles of Negro college graduates?" (pg. 20).   In the context of this study, the blurred understanding of identity as a Black woman and the lack of targeted institutional support can significantly impact the social and psychological well-being during and post college. This struggle with identity and the effects it has had on Black women is expressed in many olden and contemporary research as described in the literature review (Chapter two).   From Sojourner Truth (1851), Lorde (1980), Hooks (1984) and Roth (2004) to Howard-Hamilton 2003), Jackson (1998), Shorter-Gooden & Washington (1996), and Sengupta & Upton, 2011) the themes are consistent – Black women

have and continue to struggle with their identity. From childhood, Black women's perception

of who they are is riddled with varied experiences.   These include learning or not learning

about their intersecting identity from a parent or guardian; having negative encounters when

they were young or prior to college, and dealing with societal imposed identities and roles.

In higher education institutions, this struggle is compounded with the additional role of

college student. Not only do they attempt to understand who they are as Black women and

balancing their multiple roles, but they're also working through the transitioning process

familiar to many college students including understanding the college environment and

managing their academic performance. All of these factors play a significant role in how they

will thrive beyond college. How they learn how to deal with their encounters, understand and

own their identity as Black women, will subsequently shape how they approach their

experiences beyond college. How institutions help Black women understand their identity and

negotiate their experiences is critical to their social and psychological development and success

beyond the institution.

College campus = "Racist and sexist microcosm of U.S. Society" (Zamani, 2003)

Zamani's statement about higher education institutions being racist and sexist

microcosms of society has carried through generations. Davis, 1972 & 1983; Lerner, 1974;

Noble, 1978; hooks, 1981; Carroll, 1982; Hine, 1994 and others have shared a consistent

message in their research throughout the years, such as the societal experiences of Black

women being marked by demoralization, their lives and works being devalued, and the overall

struggle to be seen and treated equal to other races and genders. The double oppression

experienced at the intersection of being Black and woman has been woven into the fabric of the legal system (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991); leadership opportunities in and outside of higher education; societal perceptions of Black women; and the continued failed negotiation of adequate salaries, jobs, etc. (Carroll, 1982; Jean & Feagin, 1998; Hill-Collins, 1989). Harris-Perry's 2011 work "Sister citizen: Shame, stereotypes and Black women in America" continues to reveal that not much has changed in society throughout the years and Black women today continue to experience racism and live in a society that keeps them oppressed. More recently, the Black Women's Roundtable associated with the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation released "Black Women in the United States, 2014. The intention of the report was to "assess the overall conditions of Black women in the United States" (Black Women's Roundtable, 2014). The key findings of the report are as follows. Black women still have considerable health issues such as maternal mortality and death from breast cancer due to delayed care. While Black women continue to excel in school, they posit that education is still separate and still unequal. Being hard and consistent workers, Black women still suffer from lower pay than anyone else as well as working in lower paying positions. This economic disadvantage subsequently affects the lives of Black women over 65 as they are at a higher risk of poverty. Black women also are still subject to increased levels of being a victim of violence – such as rape and physical abuse as well as being victims of mistreatment within the criminal justice system. Lastly, Black females are far less likely to study in the STEM fields due to being exposed to uncomfortable environments, isolation and assumptions of incompetence (Black Women's Roundtable, 2014). While much of the report still revealed many of the same struggles from the past, it did highlight some advancements for Black women particularly in the

area of developing and running various businesses, and high representation of voters during elections. These same complex struggles are still embedded in the minds and experiences of Black women in college. In particular, the women in this study revealed the challenges with being taken seriously, being constantly subjected to stereotypes, and the internal and external fight to push through racist and sexist barriers.

The insight from the eleven participants produced a series of themes that further captured the essence of their experiences.

Overview of Themes

For Black female students attending a predominantly White institution, this study reveals that:

- Experiencing racism and/or sexism prior to being a college student led to conscious choices on how to react to experiences of racism and/or sexism while in college.

- Black females' perception of the campus climate involves varied experiences with stereotyping and invisibility that most of them experienced inside and outside of the classroom.

- Although many of the participants shared a common standpoint of being stereotyped or feeling invisible, there was heterogeneity in their experiences that cannot be ignored.

- Despite challenging experiences at a PWI, the participants persisted anyhow. Often this involved focusing on specific motivations, relying on support systems, and imploring a variety of survival strategies to cope with their experiences.

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- Participants perceived a lack of institutional support particularly for Black women (and

    the diversity within the group); however they desired specific support not only for

    themselves but also for the Black women who would attend the institution in the future.

These findings will be discussed in depth below.

Childhood & Pre-college Experiences

"A piece of the price we paid for learning survival was our childhood. We were never allowed to be children. It is the right of children to be able to play at living for a little while, but for a Black child, every act can have deadly serious consequences, and for a Black girl child, even more so" (Lorde, 1984).

Childhood experiences seemed to form a significant baseline to which the participants

learned of and began to understand their identity as African American females and thus played

a role in the interpretation of and response to experiences with the intersecting identities of

being both Black and female. Experiences in childhood that were perceived to be based on race

and or gender set the tone for future interactions. Participants discussed experiences within

their families, schools, and communities that significantly shaped their identity and how they

process their college experience now. These experiences seem to have helped them

understand their identity as Black women and contributed to the further evolution of that

identity.

Black female children learn about their oppressed societal position through a variety of

encounters at a young age. Some of these lessons originate in their family unit and via their

mothers. Black mothers of Black daughters must teach their children to navigate the

intersecting oppressions of racism and sexism in order to survive (Collins, 2000). This

navigation is uncharacteristic of other female children who are not raised to survive, to work

and to battle both racism and sexism (Lerner, 1972; Lord, 1984; bell hooks, 1993; Collins, 2000)

> Black daughters learn to expect to work, to strive for an education so they can support themselves, and to anticipate carrying heavy responsibilities in their families and communities because these skills are essential to their own survival and for those for whom they will eventually be responsible (Collins, 2000).

This was evident in several of the childhood/pre-college experiences of the participants.

Living life, as a Black person was not always specifically taught, however the lived experiences

of their parents served as a guide. Parents living in poverty, sharing stories of discrimination

with the children, mothers being viewed as superwomen and observing how to "be" in the

presence of Whites taught many of the participants how to live as Black women. The way they

were raised helped to shape how they view their own identity as Black women as well as how

they understood and responded to incidents with racism and sexism as adults in college.

Ashley and Jendo were told at an early age by their mothers that they would have to work

harder just because they were Black and more so because they were Black women. That lesson

has contributed to their strong work ethic throughout high school and in college. For others

like Shantia, Krystal and Jendo, their childhoods were consumed with carrying for ailing family

members, working outside the home, serving as head of households and rearing their siblings.

Balancing multiple roles such as these is common in Black female rearing and is again

connected to their socialization for survival and historical Black female roles (Lerner 1974;

Collins, 2000). That caregiver mentality that was required at a young age has led many of them

into academic programs that help others such as nursing and psychology.

Similar to Jackson's (2008) findings, the participants discussed experiences within their families, schools, and communities that significantly shaped their identity. Many of the participants openly discussed critical points in their lives that presented the dilemma of negotiating their race and/or gender. Race was most salient in their recollection of childhood, family and community experiences; however gender for some participants was mentioned as being important. This was consistent with previous research by Jackson (2008) and Shorter-Gooden & Washington (1996) who found gender was an important part of identity but not as salient as race.

Family experiences

The role of family and upbringing was significant in shaping their own identities as well as their perceptions of Black women in their families and communities. Family structure varied greatly among the participants. Some women grew up in two-parent households, others in single-parent homes, and some being cared for by relatives such as grandparents or by foster families. Regardless of the family structure, the women perceived and referenced their family dynamics as normal. Ashley recounted what she characterizes as a normal childhood growing up with both parents in East Chicago who had worked hard to overcome the poverty that had stricken many of their family and community members:

> I didn't have a hard life, my parents provided for me, they did what they needed to do, they made sure I had good grades, they made sure that I had fun as a child, they made sure I was spoiled rotten, whatever I wanted as long as I did my job which was to go to school, I could have whatever I wanted which I did. I understood like people had hard times and stuff but I never experienced that first hand which I'm thankful for it's a blessing, always had a roof over our head, always had a car, always had food, clothes,

toys, extra stuff so it was great. I had a very good childhood there is nothing to complain about, if I was to complain I would be stupid, ungrateful.

It is necessary to provide a brief background on the area that Ashley and similarly many of the other participants grew up in. Thornbrough (2000) conducted extensive research on Blacks in Indiana and the prevalent issues of racism, increased segregation, the rise of the KKK, poverty-stricken Indiana communities, the advances of Blacks in certain cities, and the continued search for a Black identity as of the late 70's.   East Chicago where Ashley was raised would be best be described as an overall impoverished city in Indiana along with other northwest Indiana cities such as Gary and Calumet. This region was home to many southern Black families who during the great migration were in search for employment in the Chicago area (Thornbrough, 2000).

East Chicago was a city initially thriving as a steel mill, railroad and industrial city of the Northwest region of Indiana. In the early 1900's, the population was mostly foreign immigrants who flocked to the area for work opportunities. The population changed drastically by the 1950's with an insurgence of African American and Latino families. Today the population is over 50% Latino/Hispanic, 40% Black, and 7.2% White and the once thriving industrial city has fallen significantly, resulting in high crime, unemployment and poverty. Known as the "twin cities" because of similar makeup on distinct sides of town, the communities are mostly home to specific racial/ethnic groups with few neutral areas. This segregation by race fuels high gang affiliation and violence that is often a part of the daily lives of the residents.

So, although Ashley discussed normalcy of her childhood, she also experienced the separation of her extended family due to the circumstances of the community and her parent's

sacrifice to make things better for their children. These weakening kinship and community ties

had an impact on how Ashley perceived her parents and family and community members.

Referring to her aunts and uncles, Ashley stated,

> the other people in my family, they don't do anything – they are jealous of my parents
> because my parents, it's really strange – my mom has three brothers and a sister and
> my dad has three sisters and a brother…and they are the only two out of their siblings
> that actually came up and out of the situation that they grew up in which was poverty,
> low income, they actually did something to do better for their families so neither one of
> the side families are like good, they are just haters.

Ashley's parents had worked hard to position themselves as middle-class wage earners.

Her mother had attended college for two years and although she didn't complete a degree, she

landed a steady job as a teacher's aide/housemother for a local home for young girls. Her

father had completed high school and worked as a mechanic. Their steady employment

afforded them the opportunity to relocate to one of few communities that was more affluent,

diverse and gang neutral in East Chicago known as Prairie Park. Here she experienced better

schooling options and had interactions with a diverse community of people outside her

household. She attributes these interactions to her understanding of herself as a young Black

woman.

> My parents never really taught me there's Black, there's White, there's Hispanic and
> Asian, never taught me be aware you are African American and you need to be this and
> the other – it's more like yes that's your race and that's their race keep it moving. I just
> always have been in a world where there is a diverse group of people so I never really
> paid attention to it but I know I'm Black.

Dee grew up in Indianapolis, in a more affluent area of the city. She too alluded to a

normal childhood by describing it as "diverse…regular mother, father, influential adults…just

being a regular kind…nothing major." Her normalcy however, also included being temporarily

removed from her two-parent home and placed with foster parents. Dee had been removed

from the home after being sexually abused by her stepfather. Over the next few years of her

life she stayed in the local children's shelter, with a grandparent and then her biological father

whom she had not have a relationship with prior. She lived with him for years and became

pregnant by a neighborhood boy that she was infatuated with.

> At the same time – in that month, my father uncharacteristically came into my room
> and got in bed one night. He had on no clothes and laid against me. I was utterly
> confused, as my father had never approached me this way in all the years I had lived
> with him. Not until years later did I find out that my father was at that time doing
> intense drugs, which explained his altered behavior.

After this incident, Dee temporarily moved back with her mother but was unable to live

there because of the court order preventing the stepfather and her from living in the same

house. Her foster parents were family friends that she didn't know, but her mother made

arrangements for Dee to reside with them. It is there that she began to have a greater

awareness of herself as an African American. In her biological family, race wasn't discussed,

"you were just Black, we didn't have to talk about it – you were just Black." However, her

foster parents displayed and discussed African American culture through their values and way

of life. She was exposed to artwork, movies, historical Black icons, and dialogues about whom

"Black people were." This has instilled in her the desire to want to know her heritage and

wants others (regardless of race) to be knowledgeable of theirs as well.

Shantia joyfully described growing up as a young girl in a Black community in Atlanta as

happy. Her mother, then a single parent of three, was originally from Indianapolis but later

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remarried, had more children and relocated to Atlanta while Shantia was very young. Her

parents (mother and step-father) were very active and they spent a lot of time together as a

family.

> When I was growing up…it was happy and my step-dad too, my mom worked in the
> afternoons and my dad he was there with us when we got home from school…we
> always had a parent there. We had everything we wanted, like we didn't really need
> anything. We didn't drive, they had cars but we would just walk home, a short distance
> from our apartment.

It wasn't until after her mother announced that they were relocating back to

Indianapolis that she began to understand that marital problems were prompting the change in

their family structure and could explain separate sleeping areas for the parents and limited

communication between them when they were together. This happy depiction of childhood

was rocked when "they started filing for divorce and we moved to Indiana, so we knew it was

real." Relocating back to Indianapolis was not an easy transition, although Shantia's description

of it was pleasant.

Her pregnant mother and 5 siblings relocated back to Indianapolis and temporarily lived

in a shelter for the summer until her mother was able to secure a job and housing for the

family. Although the quarters were small, Shantia and her siblings viewed it as a summer

vacation and she was thankful for the experience. "It was like a summer vacation and we're

camping basically, I didn't feel bad living there. It wasn't horrible." Her mother chose a shelter

as opposed to living with her parents (who lived in Indianapolis) because she didn't want to be

a burden to her family. Once they were settled in their new apartment, she reflected on how

different life was, "I went to school, came home and our school was far away from our house so

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we caught the bus, our parents didn't walk us anymore – it was kind of different but you kind of roll with it. " Shantia found herself handling many responsibilities including caring for the household and her siblings – life consisted of "go to school, learn whatever, come home, be with my brothers and sisters and then wait for mom to come home and make sure the house stays clean and everybody has ate."   She limited her extracurricular activities and interactions with friends,

> I didn't think I had time for that, didn't want to bother my mom because she's working and she's a single parent and she couldn't – there was things I was interested in but it's like then asking …I didn't want the pressure, so I didn't do anything.

> Things slowly shifted and Shantia's opportunities broadened as she matured and was exposed to life outside of their home. After getting a job and beginning to contribute to the household financially as well as seeing how her best friend was active, she desired to get out more. In the later part of high school she became more involved and started spending more time with her friends. "I started doing more things outside the home, more independent…I wanted to do more and I started telling my mom about it and I want to do things and I started asking her…she's like okay you can do that but you can't be gone all the time. She took advantage of those opportunities and saw her herself transitioning from a quiet and shy person to a young lady coming into her own.

Similarly, Brittney and Mariah grew up in two parent families and were fairly stationary most of their childhood lives in Indiana cities.   Unlike Ashley, Dee and Shantia, both grew up in communities that were predominantly White. Brittney grew up in Elkhart, Indiana a small northeastern Indiana town known for recreational vehicle and musical instrument production.

It has approximately 52,000 residents (71.5% White of German decent, 14.7% Black) and one of

the highest unemployment rates in the United States reaching upwards of 19 %).   As Brittney

reflected on her childhood there, she believes that God helped her to get out along with the

motivation to want more for herself.

> I'm just shook up every time that I go home. I never stay long. I never stay long. A lot
> of the homes are foreclosed. I never knew what it was like to live in a house. We lived
> in an apartment. We stayed in the same apartment for about fourteen years. My father
> has been unemployed for probably over three years now; they couldn't afford to take
> care of themselves so they moved in with my grandmother. So, they're still there…I
> don't rely on them for anything.

> Although Brittney's parents never stressed the importance of a college education (as

neither of them pursued anything beyond high school) and she considers her performance in

high school as just ok, she knew that college was her next step. Returning home now brings

sadness as she sees many former classmates who didn't pursue anything better and several are

either on drugs or have multiple children. Although it's tough, she is thankful for choosing to go

away to college.

Both Tarren & Krystal discussed the strengths and weaknesses of growing up in a single

parent family with their mothers and siblings. Tarren, who now cares for her daughter alone,

said that her mother "is an example of what I would like to be as a young single parent" as she

expressed how strong and self-sufficient her mother was and still is.   Although her mother

excelled academically at a private high school in Indianapolis, she ultimately had to change her

plans after becoming pregnant. Working as a beautician to support her growing family, she

worked long hours yet still made it a priority to support and push her children in their

academics. After many years, her mother has now returned to the local community college to

continue her education. Tarren, like her mother, initially thought it would be important to learn a trade in order to support her daughter right after high school; she changed that plan and is now working on a four-year degree.

Krystal spent most of her years away from her birth city of Detroit, Michigan where her father and other siblings live. Her mother relocated to Michigan City, IN and there raised Krystal as a single-parent mother. Krystal spent much of her middle school years caring for her ailing grandmother until she passed. She then cared for her grandfather who passed shortly thereafter as well. This led her to interest in health care and obtainment of a certified nursing assistant license at the age of seventeen.

Jendo had her own life challenges as family circumstances changed during her childhood.   She spent a lot of time with her great-grandparents growing up and juggled academic responsibilities with being the caregiver to her ailing grandparents. Jendo was born in Washington, D.C. but spent a considerable amount of time being raised by her great-grandparents in Michigan City, IN while her mother remained in D.C. While there with her mother, she attended a Catholic school that she recalls had a maximum of ten African American students in the entire school. Due to this she stated, "My family always instilled that because I was Black I had to do everything I can to show that I'm just as capable of my White counterpart." Additionally, she shared "I had been told that as a Black person, I would automatically be looked upon as inferior to others, and this would be even more so because I was a woman." Once she relocated to Indiana for good upon the death of her grandmother, she attended a very similar Catholic school where she was again one of very few Blacks in the

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school. Besides the Black girl in her class, Jendo remembers all her friends being White and she was allowed to spend time outside of school with them. However, after middle school she was ready for a change and decided to ask her mother to send her to a public high school and as a result found herself getting back in contact with people she knew in her childhood…her people. In high school, her great-grandparents both began to battle various illnesses. Her great-grandmother was first battling cancer while her mother commuted to Illinois for work and a long-term relationship, Jendo was left home with her great-grandparents and felt she had to just deal with their illnesses on her own.

> It was kind of one of those things where everybody was trying to figure out how to deal with her sickness in their own way. So at times, she chose to stay in Chicago. So she was kind of away from it so I kind of dealt with it on my own, just me and my great-grandfather.

Her great-grandmother eventually lost the battle to cancer and passed away her sophomore year of high school. This had a significant impact on her life.

> I kind of became a recluse you could say…I think I was really upset at the fact that she got sick so you know I started smoking, drinking, you know that type of thing. I started skipping school…they finally informed me that I had missed like almost a hundred and twenty days of school.

However, instead of staying in that space, she realized that she had to refocus and finish high school, which she did through day and night school along with community service and was successful in graduating with her class. Unfortunately, soon thereafter her great-grandfather was stricken with a rare form of skin cancer presumably caused by working in the steel mills. His health deteriorated and he passed within 8 months of being formally diagnosed. Starting

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college was a welcomed new adventure and distraction from all of the family illnesses and deaths.

Perhaps the most emotional recount of childhood experiences was Kendra who described her relationship with her mother growing up:

> My mom and I, we never really got along – deep down I think going back, my father had married a White woman and so I think my mom kind of held that against me so being lighter, growing up in Warren Township and then being accepted out there – my mom and my siblings used to ridicule me, saying I always wanted to be White, I was always the White girl...you know I was always the outcast, but I always was different.

> This experience with her family still affects her tremendously as she shed tears during our interview while reflecting.   After becoming pregnant at age 16, her mother put her out and as a result she stopped going to school. However she returned to finish high school once she had her daughter and got emancipated from her mother. While family experiences seemed to have an impact, their childhood experiences in their community played a role in shaping who they are as well.

Community Experiences

As described above Ashley's community in Northern Indiana was very unique. Known as the Twin cities in East Chicago, the city's layout was fairly identical but the population was much divided.

> Like the harbor side is where the majority of Black people stay, the East Chicago side is where the Hispanics stay…I technically lived in harbor but my mom worked…on the East Chicago side, so I was there pretty much all the time.

Mariah also grew up in an area where she was the minority – "my neighborhood – all White people, we were the only Black people on my block." Burna's Mississippi community was predominantly Black and supportive but outside of her neighborhood she vividly recounted an experience that she says still affects her today:

> In Mississippi, I think something interesting happened when I was younger and it kind of traumatized me now. I remember and it still affects me in my adulthood. It may not have anything related, but remember I went to the grocery store with my aunt and it was a store like a little shop you know probably similar to a little Dots. She was in the grocery store. I went over there and I was just looking around. I was just looking at the stuff and the lady was kind of like you know thought I was trying to steal or something you know and then it affected me so bad when I was younger it affected me now into my adulthood that it's like I still when I'm out in stores it feel as if you know I'm always thinking ok they think that I'm going to steal something going into my purse.

> She finds it difficult to this day to shop – "even if I'm enticed to go and I had the money – I wouldn't go – I would rather go with my sister because she dresses real nice." Unfortunately for Burna, this experience in her home community has impacted the way she interprets experiences now in her workplace, shopping centers, etc. An additional event that Burna described as a critical in her life as a Black female took place while she served in the Marines.

> I was stationed on the USS Theodore Roosevelt from 2001-2004. There were times when things were really rough for me there. There was this incident where I was accused of threatening a White female, urinating on her rack/sleeping bunk, and drenching her clothes. It all started when one day instead of me going to eat lunch, I went to the female berthing to take a nap. This female came in and started making a lot of noise. So, I told her could she keep it down a little bit. She knows she's supposed to keep the noise at minimum anyway. Well, this turned into an argument and she stormed out. A few days later, I was called into our master chief office. He asked me had I threatened her, urinated on her rack and drenched her clothing. I told him no. He said, I don't believe you; you look like you would do something like that. So I got really angry and disrespected him. I ended up getting kicked out of the berthing and moved to a different berthing. I was so hurt and I cried. My Black female chief found out about it

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and she got me back into the berthing. She said he had no right to kick me out. I have a hard time trusting any White leadership because of this incident. What happened to the investigation? What happened to innocent until proven guilty? In my mind, these laws don't pertain to me. The funny thing behind the whole story is someone did drench her clothes, but it was a White lady in the berthing who did it because she didn't like her. She was not reprimanded for her behavior.

Besides both family and community experiences, these women recalled the experiences that they had attending school within a variety of settings, encounters, and people.

School Experiences

School experiences during their childhood seemed to revolve around the adjustment of shifting from being with the majority population to being the minority race in their schools. Jendo and Shantia described childhood school years similarly. They both started attending predominantly Black schools – Jendo in Washington, D.C. and Shantia in Atlanta, GA and then moved to schools where they were the minority. Jendo recalls enrolling at a school where there were a total of "eight Black students and two of those other students, I was actually related to. So that tells you." However, she felt accepted by her new peers – "I had most of my friends were all White except the other Black girl in my class, we were best friends." She lightly brushed over an incident with a young White boy who was picking on her on the playground saying she got over it. "I didn't feel like out of place or anything like that." Shantia also moved from a school where most of her peers and teachers were Black. In Atlanta, she recalled "We loved all of our teachers and my teacher's loved me…and my mom knew all my teachers." Moving and going to a different school with different people helped Shantia begin to open up more as she interacted with others.

I was still fairly quiet and shy and then I really didn't start coming into myself until actually we moved to Indiana that was the first time I really saw like a whole bunch of White people. Like I didn't really see many of them and it was so funny because I ended up being best friends with this one girl and she was White and I was surprised and it was so awkward. I was like why is this White girl trying to be all nice to me – it was really awkward. I met a whole bunch of different people and learned about them and I had more White teachers and I wasn't as close to them as I was in Atlanta, I don't know why but I just wasn't.

Kendra also recalled moving from a predominantly Black school to predominantly White and how it made her feel.

We were one of the first set of kids that were bused out to Warren Township and so when we got out there we went to school with a lot of kids who hadn't seen Black kids before. So immediately we knew we were different (kind of like can we touch your hair). The environment was completely different then the environment we were used to.

Growing up in a community that was predominantly Black and then being thrust into an educational environment that was White was difficult for her to navigate. Particularly because of the different treatment that she was afforded over her siblings that she attributes to her skin color. Kendra's complexion was fairer then her darker skinned siblings and therefore she felt she was more accepted by the White students than they were. Her siblings were aware of this and it created tension among them as they picked on her and distanced themselves while also adjusting to the new environment themselves.

Victoria and Krystal both attended the same high school in Northern Indiana and had to adjust to a different population of students then they were originally used to. Krystal being from Detroit had mostly been around Black students her whole life. "I've never been in a diverse situation at all coming from Detroit so it was just different all together." Although she

noticed the very different racial population, there was a commonality that brought them together – living in a lower economic area. "Even besides the whole different color thing, like it really didn't matter. It was just hood…even the White people were hood." Victoria being born and raised for a significant portion of her childhood in Southern California had attended school with mostly Latino students. So attending school in Michigan City was very different as the population was split – White and Black. "It was almost equal the amounts of Blacks and Whites at our school…but to me it it's like Black people everywhere."

As Mariah recalled her school years, she simply stated, "we stuck together, the few of us that there were, we stuck together. We hung out with other kids but not really – we stuck to our own kind." Her community in LA Porte, IN had very few Black families and therefore very few in the school system. She felt she rarely had any problems and only remembered a White boy on her school bus throwing around racial slurs after she had taunted him first.

As many of these women began to enter college, their responsibilities included balancing life as a full or part-time college student, being a wife, mother, and caregiver while maintaining employment. Shantia spoke of her important role of caring for her younger siblings as she finished high school and choosing to stay close to home for college so she could be there for her mother if needed. Krystal and Brittany both knew at the start of college that they would have to work full-time in order to meet their basic needs. Kendra, Tarren and Dee each had the shared the challenge of being a mother while balancing school obligations. For Dee the internal conflict of making the decision to focus on her education was challenging. Being a mother of six children as well as a wife challenged her to face the perceived role she should have.

I think we lost some of our sense of knowing of being content with our place and not that women have to have a certain place in the home or place in the workplace…but as far as us in our own identity, so sometimes we rise up and we have to be in charge of family, we have to be the head of household, we have to take care of certain things just because we have to, we have no choice, we have to survive. I think at times especially when you don't have to be in that position, you are a wife and then you know okay now I'm a mom, okay now I may be something else…we have a really hard time balancing that…and I think it's a really big deal for us.

Her something else is now being a returning adult college student and learning to

balance that and family but she approaches by acknowledging that this is where she is

supposed to be.

Personally I like this part of my life just being for me. Like you know I'm in school and this is just something that I'm going to do …it doesn't have anything to do with my husband, my kids, anybody else in life…it's just yeah…this is for me and I'm so really enjoying the ride.

Along with seeking an education as an adult student, Kendra too discussed the

challenges of balancing family and pursuing a college degree.

I'm a nontraditional [student] so I have challenges in regards to my family and my time with my family…like I really have other people that depend on me so I can't just drop everything. Being African American…we've always had challenges and so one good thing is I've been able to persevere over my challenges and that's not just through school, through life period. Being a female we again just being able to overcome the challenges of being able to balance work, family and then school. So I think we can micromanage our time a lot better than them.

Tarren, being closer to a traditional age college student still finds it challenging to

balance being a young single parent and manage her life. "It is very time consuming, as a

mother I've learned that yourself has to come first." She actively incorporates time for herself in her day while homeschooling her daughter and managing her academic course load.

It was important to provide some contextual background from participants' childhood because these experiences helped them understand and navigate the experiences that they had while in college as Black women.

Not only do childhood or pre-college experiences with race or gender impact identity, it also impacts how the student's respond to the incidents they have in college. The findings of this study revealed that for participants that had significant encounters with race or gender prior to enrolling in college, there was a heightened consciousness to racial encounters in college as well as the use of coping strategies. Research on how pre-college experiences with race or gender influence students' responses was not uncovered in previous research. Ashley, Burna, Dee, & Krystal all had pre-college experiences with race and/or gender and when describing how they persist anyhow talked specifically about surviving, playing the game, and choosing how to respond. Their previous encounters had equipped them with tools to cope that they were selective in using depending on the circumstances. In some instances, they would speak up; as Krystal says but other times they would be quiet – using the invisibility to their own advantage, as Ashley described.

For the participants that did not have significant experiences with race and/or gender prior to college, their reactions were different. Shantia, Mariah, Veronica all talked about brushing off or ignoring negative encounters. They described incidents but were quick to dismiss the significance of them and appeared to be less conscious of how they responded to them. While

previous research such as Jackson's (2008) study highlights the impact of childhood experiences

on the identity of Black college women, how those experiences actually shape future

interactions with race and gender was not uncovered in the literature.   This study indicates

that pre-college experiences with race and/or gender can influence how students respond to

and cope with racism and/or sexism while enrolled in college.

College Experiences

The women were asked to describe how they felt as a Black woman in college. They

were also encouraged to share any particular experiences that have impacted how they see

themselves or have been significant in the college journey especially as it related to the campus

environment and support. We began our conversation by exploring college choice decisions,

transitioning and overall experiences at UPW – an urban predominantly White institution.

The wealth of literature on campus climate for Black students attending predominantly

White institutions has consistently revealed the negative encounters that Black students

experience. Much of the prior research has focused on the homogeneous experience of Black

students at PWI's with limited in-depth analysis of gender differences. Harper & Hurtado

analyzed studies that had been conducted on Black students' experiences with race and racism

on predominantly White campuses. Issues of "isolation, alienation, and stereotyping, which

these students are forced to contend on campuses where they are not the majority" (2007, p.

12) have continued to be evident in the findings of olden and contemporary research. This

study revealed similar results for Black women at PWI's. The participants' descriptions of the

campus climate included the prevalence of stereotypes and the struggles with being invisible

inside and outside of the classroom. The participants in this study describe the campus climate as intimidating, unsupportive of and oblivious to needs of Black women on White campuses.

The Transition

Ashley and Mariah shared somewhat similar experiences of being comfortable with their transitions to UPW. Both had previously attended high schools where they were the minority in attendance. For Ashley who initially contemplated attending a historically Black college, said that perceived interactions with a diverse student body swayed her decision.

> Choosing between HBCU and UPW because I knew HBCU are African Americans pretty much. I mean you might see a trickle here and there, but for the most part it's going to be all African Americans, but here it's going to be mostly Caucasians and other races and I figured if I wanted to you know prepare myself for the real world per se, my world is not going to be all African Americans. So, with my mind thinking, by those who are predominantly White institutions or an institution that it's not just one race per se. I'll get that experience of culture diversity knowing you know how to approach things and knowing that there are good people out there and everything is not just about race or color.

Mariah described the similarities between her predominantly White home community and UPW.

> I feel comfortable around both places, races, like I'm happy that I went through what I had to go through in high school being predominantly White because I'm comfortable around both races but I like being around my people, I would prefer to be around people my color.

Tarren also talked about being comfortable with her choice, primarily due to familiarity because she has been in the city for years and knows the area. For her it was all about knowing about the school and comfort with the location. Shantia lived locally but decided to live on campus so that she could begin her college experience independently. This was somewhat a

challenge, as she had to get used to life without her siblings and mom. She had for years been

the primary caregiver to her siblings while her mother worked, but when she decided to go to

college, she knew that she had to pull back from that heavy responsibility.

> I had a roommate, so I wasn't by myself. I got to know her but it was kind of awkward, she was somebody I didn't know and it was just a new experience being away from all my brothers and sisters. I just told myself you can't call them all the time and you just gotta be by yourself, mom wanted to call me all the time…I feel bad sometimes.

Kendra had a notably different transition experience that she attributes to her age, race

and time since being in school.

> What did I get myself into – instantly I knew it was a completely different environment [from the predominantly Black local college she transferred from]? I knew I felt that right away from – like I just jumped from elementary to the high school. At [former school] our classes were a lot smaller, a lot more individual time with the professor, you had people that look like me and we were on the same level. Here it's kind of like you're in an independent environment and everyone is independent of themselves, you got people who are the age of your kids and they are talking…they are recently graduated so automatically – I automatically felt like oh I am out of place – I'm dumb.

Dee, another adult returning student reacted to thinking of her first semester of classes

– "I was perfectly panicked like every week. Like I was literally on edge the whole entire

semester, it was crazy." After finding the proper balance between school and home, she

described her experience as positive. In referencing the diversity of the campus she

commented,

> It's a couple of drops there, but that seems to be changing to and I'm sure as it grows you know because it's fairly new to UPW. Like it doesn't matter to me. I have an agenda. Like I came to school to get this degree so I can do this and then I can go…but I do know a lot of young Black women who are having social issues. Just because maybe they went to an all-White school and now they're here and now they're like wait a

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minute you know. How do I fit in here? What do I do? I don't look like them, but I don't act like them…so they're kind of in a bind, but not for me.

She did conclude by saying that it was important to note that she had just begun her academic journey. Jendo sees UPW's location as instrumental in diversity efforts. "I would describe it as open. I mean I believe that because UPW is situated in the downtown area of a major city that you know it's expected, you know diversity is pretty much expected." Although she seems to believe there are many Black students on campus, she made an interesting assumption about who they represent – "I mean me off the top of my head, I would say you know that more than half of them are probably athletes."

As the participants began to share more deeply about their experiences as Black women on a predominantly White campus, there emerged two dominant themes from their stories. Participants discussed often the challenge of stereotypes that have been placed on African American people in general as well as African American women. Participants also shared experiences that spoke to being invisible as a person of color and woman on a predominantly White campus. These primary themes were also accompanied by other experiences that they have had while integrating into campus life. These themes will now be explored in more depth.

Fighting the Stereotypes

Stereotyping is not new to Black students attending predominantly White institutions and Steele (1997; 1999; 2010) explores the impact that they can have on students. In his 1997 study, he reveals that stereotypes and or the threat of stereotypes "in the short run can depress their intellectual performance and, over the long run, undermine the identity itself" (p. 627). Fries-Britt & Turner (2001) looked at Black students on a White campus and found that

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stereotyping "takes up space in a students' thinking process and eventually chips away at their performance and ability " (p. 425). They found that students are constantly battling general stereotypes and engaging in a proving process. Fries-Britt & Turner support Steele's notion that stereotyping may not be captured by a specific incident but the threat is there – it is in the air.

For the Black women in this study, it is clear – the threat is everywhere. While most dealt with specific incidents in college as described in the previous chapter; others were aware of the threat, the threat that Black women are loud, not intelligent, and incapable of handling a college experience. The threat of being stereotyped had to be negotiated on campus, off campus and in some instances within their own families and communities. This continual negotiation process is draining and can cause anxiety, emotional distress and psychological harm (Steele, 1997; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, & Green, 2004). The emotion, facial expressions and responses of these participants indicated just how much the weight of generalized stereotypes of Black women was having on their self-identity and experiences in college. Despite the weight of this "cross", the women persisted. In many ways as Fries-Britt & Turner (2001) noted, they had to prove "them" wrong. In this study, "them" were family members, professors, non-Black classmates, and even Black men.

The experiences with stereotyping for many of the women interfered with the collegiate experience as a whole as they often had to negotiate their personal identities with their imposed identities

The labels don't fit me!

Jendo shares,

I'm not a stereotypical Black person and I think that's a challenge that I will always have in life…that we all will have, just because you know our society is just so…we base a lot on stereotypes you know.

She then elaborates on the stereotypes that she feels Black women in college have to

reject,

It goes back to stereotypes and what society has portrayed the average Black female to be. You know when I think about it, you know, I think my perception is that most White people believe that a Black woman is someone that's really opinionated, that's loud, that you know may dress scantly at times, that you know has kids, that's struggling, you know on some type of federal assistance. True or not, they are in college and they're trying to do something to better their lives, but yet they may feel that they're still taking advantage of society as a whole you know. But that's not the case and I know for a fact, I mean I know that there are so many women out there that aren't like that. You know Black women that do not fit any of those. I mean myself, I don't have any kids, the only federal assistance I'm on right now is unemployment because I lost my job…I don't drink, I don't dress scantly. You know I'm not loud. I like to actually talk to people and I feel that I am definitely professional when it comes to meeting somebody or just getting business done. I definitely sometimes kind of feel like you know somebody will have a surprise reaction when I'm not fitting that kind of stereotype. They're like oh okay and it shouldn't be like that.

Burna too reveals the difficulty of being characterized and categorized because of her race.

You know I have to make sure that I'm doing what I should do. I don't want nobody…even if you have some that's acting ignorant, I don't want to be placed in that category. When somebody see me…okay, there might be some hope for them. There are some that might be educated and some are serious about their life. They are serious about their education. So, I mean I feel good because I'm doing my best. Trying to do well in school and be respectful, not to feel those stereotypes that society tries to portray African Americans as.

She further shared…

Society has portrayed African Americans in a negative light because of a few bad seeds. One Black person do something wrong and it automatically is stigmatized to all Blacks. When I go into the classrooms, one of my purposes is to disprove all stereotypes about

Blacks. If I go into the classroom, participate by asking and answering questions, doing well on quizzes and exams...that maybe in their minds, they will begin to see us in a different light and what they will see will be shared with others.

Tarren shared the reactions she gets from people as a single parent attending college after some high school struggles.

Most people are shocked that I'm in college with a child, most people are shocked that she can speak for herself so from hearing those things, I'm thinking that they think I should be wasting my life doing nothing, not striving to educate myself or my daughter or have any idea as far as expressing how I feel or what I think. I'm African American and most have this perception that a lot of people don't read, you don't want to know and learn. So those perceptions, not wanting to be educated are so untrue.

Kendra, who again is an adult returning to school after several years of being out discussed reactions from people that she knows upon deciding to return to school.

I had somebody ask me...well sometimes I have people ask me the dumbest questions, but I had somebody ask me yesterday, how long are you gonna be in school? And I was like as long as it takes because I'm going for everything that I can get, but why didn't you ask me how long are you gonna be uneducated?

She believes that this is partly due to how people perceive Black women as college students. "Sometimes I think it's viewed of Black women, we're just in college to get student loans and grant money and not really much of anything."

As Ashley reflected on what it's like being a Black woman in college, she too spoke of many of the stereotypes mentioned above. She also talked about the challenges faced among African Americans in college and specifically those between some males and females.

Sometimes I think that African American males could be somewhat negative. Like just looking at what the African American females are doing and not your average per se hood rat or something, like somebody actually doing something and not allowing for the to be called certain things or to be put down. Just because you're not doing anything,

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you came to college just to party or do whatever. I feel like sometimes that is a barrier between males and females sometimes on the African American campus, well in the community of African Americans in general. It's like they (AA males) don't expect us…I'm not saying all, but some you know don't expect you to be the top student or to be studying. They expect you to be going to a party, it's like know that's not what life is about. That's not what college is just about. I came here to do more than go to a party. I came here to study and get my degree and be out.

Krystal's labeling by African American persons has impacted how she fights not only that stereotype but also ones that she feels are typically placed on Black persons.

Some White people already have an opinion of Black people that we are basically failures. Throughout my life I have been called an Oreo and it took me a while to understand what that really meant. I was seen as a White girl in a Black girl's body because I talked proper. Another thing I would hear was that I talked White as if it was shocking or better yet impossible for a Black person to speak properly. Some White people are intimidated by a well-educated Black person or a Black person doing better than them. Being a Black female on a predominantly White campus you have to carry yourself in a certain manner. Being stereotyped is not a big deal to me because I can show you better than I can tell you that I am opposite than what you believed. Let your actions speak louder than your words and leave people speechless in the end.

As Victoria nears the end of her college journey, she is so proud of having come as far as she has and defying the many labels that have been placed on Black women.

The statistics that they had against us, and the statistics of me being raised by a single mom and I'm not even supposed to be right here now in college. I just feel like it's one step closer to graduation, like more statistics being broken – how we're supposed to have been dropped out of college and I'm going into my junior year now…just one step closer to proving everybody wrong about Black women, what we can and can't do.

As the interviews progressed, many of the ladies discussed the difficulties of fighting

feelings of inadequacy or low expectations of their college successes and how that is a struggle

for them.

"It's a lot of pressure behind it", Krystal began in speaking about being a Black women in

school at UPW.

> Like you have to live up to and you want to succeed as an African American period, you
> know in general and a female on top of that, so it's a struggle sometimes because a lot
> of people don't, most people especially if you're on a predominantly White campus,
> most people don't…they don't think you can handle it. They don't think you are gonna
> make it.

> Sharing similar reactions, Tarren and Burna expresses the challenge of being on a

predominantly White campus in a field that is dominated by other genders and races. Tarren

shares,

> Even though its 2011, it's still shocking when you tell someone that you're in college,
> well when I tell someone that I'm in college and I'm a math major it's almost like really, I
> can't believe it and I'm thinking why can't you believe it. I have goals just like everyone
> else, it's still shocking, so pursuing this college experience and a math major as a female,
> and then as an African American female it's tough. Like professors or some of the
> classmates, I went to class and there are only two African Americans and I'm the only
> female and you will get overlooked if you do not raise your voice.

> Burna's account as a Black woman in the computer technology field is similar.

> I think they feel as if I'm incompetent. Whenever I'm working on something they always
> got to come over my shoulder…sometimes I have to tell them I got to figure this out
> myself.

Having had a previous college experience and returning after a stint in the military, Burna noticed the difference in being at UPW versus her former predominantly White Catholic institution.

> The environment was so different. It was like they were more accepting. I can't explain it…they didn't care what color you are…they were open. But then I get here and I get this feeling sometimes like what you doing here? I mean maybe it's me, because of what I experienced when I was young. I get the feeling that they don't expect me to know nothing. You know, I pay attention; I talk a lot in class. They don't expect that and a lot of time they just get quiet and they just look. You know and I get that feeling that being from Mississippi there's a myth that we all are you know dumb, don't know nothing, cotton field, overalls. Oh you from Mississippi? I thought you wore overalls and walked barefoot.

Even though she described the environment as different, she still was subjected to racial incidents such as the one described here.

> I did tell you one girl her name is Hayley, I used to cater certain events- well this one girl one day I was catering to people and this girl Hayley she tried to introduce me to her parents, but she did say to me that her daddy wouldn't want to shake my hand. He was a tall White man and had his beard curled up on the ends, so she did say that her daddy didn't like Black people. She told me, she was cool…sometimes parents might be one way, but their kids may be different.

> At UPW, Burna has also experienced being personally labeled because of her African American race. She describes an encounter she had with a White male in a school hallway.

> People automatically assume that I like rap or they come to me and say, what up dog? Okay, I don't talk to you like that, so you can speak to me and say, hello, how are you doing? Don't try to change yourself to match what society may portray. You know I'm not that type of person.

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Brittany who had been active in both high school and her former college also talked about the transition to UPW and how different the experience felt.

> I don't know what happened in my transition from high school to college. Actually I don't what changed in me. I was intimidated when I came here for whatever reason and I just, I just don't know. I didn't feel smart. I didn't feel…I felt inadequate honestly. I can't really put my finger on why, but I had a lot more confidence.

"Fighting" in the Classroom

These stereotypes and assumptions about Black women in society and Black women in college have impacted the way the students engage in their learning process both inside and outside the classroom. Mariah and Ashley express the difficulty in engaging in class because of perceptions of inadequacy.

> I'm not afraid to ask my teacher a question, but I don't know. But the class left. If I felt like I could figure it out myself, I wasn't going to ask, even if I never did figure it out. I think it's a pride thing with me to ask somebody else questions.

Ashley asserts

> Being in the lecturers that I have been in – it's very intimidating. One they are all science courses, two the lectures are like 200 people. That's a lot of people to deal with and you never really want to be one, the only colored person in a room, then two, ask a stupid question. They say there's no such thing as stupid questions, but people in those classes, they will look at you and in their head think that was a stupid question, why would she ask that. I don't want to – if they already think something of a certain stereotype about colored people…I don't want to be that person who takes their idea of what we are or what we stand for – so I'm not gonna make a fool out of myself. Now if I know I'm right, I'm gonna stand up and say x, y, and z, so that you know Black people are smart but if I'm unsure about something I'm not – I'm not gonna do that in front of a crowd of White people. These students have grown up in those towns where Black folks what – they don't know nothing. So I'm not going to give them the satisfaction of that.

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The ladies also shared in classroom experiences that they attribute to their identity as a

Black person and/or women in college. Shantia expressed her frustration over the limited

learning opportunities that are available of positive examples of Blacks in history or in society.

What she has learned about her culture in classrooms has been primarily negative.

> We talked about Africa and stuff in my Anthropology class last semester. We just talk about how they're in poverty. So it's nothing new. You know the same thing over and over and over. Bout them being in poverty and people trying to help and the struggle that they're going through on a daily basis, not being able to live.

Kendra and Brittany have taken African American studies courses and have not only

experienced positive dialogue about their culture but have been exposed to faculty of color,

unlike most of the other participants. For Kendra, she has chosen to use that knowledge gained

from those courses to insert learning about her culture in other classes that she takes. She was

enrolled in a communications course and reflected on the experience:

> For the most part and I say this now just because I have been in a lot of classes with individuals that you can tell that they come from the majority and so they have that majority belief and majority reality and there was one class in particular where we were just talking about what we recognize in the world and what we want to change. For me it was the visualization of African American's in the media, you know how we are always displayed in the negative light and this girl that was from South Africa, but she was White, she got so offended and so mad, like I had no right to even want to work toward anything for my people. Like who are you to say that's not what happens, and I'm like, I don't have to defend my position to you.

For Mariah and Victoria they found themselves in an awkward position often in the

classroom with a White professor of their philosophy of ethics class. Mariah shared

> I don't think he believes in being politically correct when he talks or he doesn't know how, but he expects us, when he opens up discussions, he expects me and Victoria to

just speak upon the whole Black perspective and we should know everything about rap music and the hood.

Victoria shared a specific session where her and Mariah were put on the spot by the professor and again asked to speak for their race.

He was discussing democrats and republicans and how certain, basically stereotypes are, but he was being stereotypical when he talked about it because he asked do we think that most Blacks are democrats. No one in the class answered, so he looks over to us and asked us do you guys have anything to say about it and we just looked at him and then we didn't respond to him at all. We just looked at him and he just turned around and went back to the class, but like he does that with everything that has to do with Blacks. He'll ask us do we have anything to say about it because no one else in the class will comment on it.

Burna recalled an embarrassing interaction while in class with her White male instructor and students. She like some of the other young ladies has been assumed to know everything about their race, culture and in this case public assistance. This was her experience.

One day in class somebody was talking about some food stamps or something like this. This White guy he had a food stamp card…he's from Russia. He's like you know what I hate? He said I hate that some Chinese, but not like in a negative way. He was saying when they go into a store where they have the food stamp card and they act like they don't know how to use it. You know what I'm saying. The guy saw him just look at me and the guy that was talking looked at me. What you want me to say? I mean I don't get food stamps. I mean I don't know how to respond. I guess he expected me to react to it. And then he was just telling me about it and he said, Hey…you know what I hate when I'm on Lafayette, the Wal-Mart on Lafayette, where I get behind some people who buying their groceries buying their stuff with food stamps. And I'm like, okay. But me being who, knowing how his mind already thinking…so me trying to figure out where Lafayette is, I…you know what he tried to kind a like inadvertently say, yeah.

Burna had already dealt with a situation about Lafayette Road, which is a side of town in the City that is predominantly populated by African American and Latino populations. It was frustrating for her because she is neither from the area nor the city but has been assumed to be associated or familiar with that area of town on more than one occasion.

> Or like this one guy just…he just kind of like pisses me off sometime because certain things he automatically assumes or "oh yeah, let's go eat on like Lafayette." I'm not too familiar with the area and I say how do you get to Lafayette? I don't know how to get to Lafayette. Where that at? Or he says you don't ever go out here? I find out that Lafayette is where a lot of the Black folks hang out at, that area…their territory. I went there once and he's like yeah this is my spot right here. You know the hood and all this stuff like this and he's like you know. No, I don't come out here.

> As she continued, she paused and stated "You know I mean I may be wrong, but I'm not stupid, but I try to be aware of my environment and how people talk to me and say things."

She then continued to describe another occurrence she had while in class.

> We were talking about something one day …I said something about Lady Gaga. I said I don't like Lady Gaga. I said I don't like that heavy metal stuff. He said, well I don't like rap. I don't like Nicki Minaj. I said I don't listen to her either. You know what I'm saying you know what I be I don't say that I hate her or something, but I was like I don't know much about… but I'm not a fan of her either. I'm not saying she's a bad artist. It doesn't mean that all Black people like every hip-hop artist or everything that's out there. And then he was asking me, "Why do those guys always where their pants baggy?" I was like I guess you know… I didn't know how to respond to that, but I tried to just be quiet. I don't ever say anything, but then I'm at this point tempted to say some things, but I would want to do it with tact. You know… I have to make sure I keep my mind… trying… he wants you to be a part of this stereotype in his mind that he already has about you and I had to maintain self-control because sometimes you do want to say something, so I just look and play like I don't know what you're talking about. You know… but he keeps trying.

> Although some have experienced particular incidents in class, Shantia hasn't but she certainly stays on guard anyway – she describes that by stating.

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I haven't had that situation where I feel disrespected or anything that's why I make sure I perk up and if I felt the need that I was being disrespected, I would raise my hand and I would just be like I feel this way and I would just let them know. Luckily I haven't come across that moment when I feel that way. I hope not but every time some subjects pops up I'm just like perking up ready preparing myself.

Kendra also indicated that she has not had any personal negative encounters that she attributes to her race or gender. Outside of the challenge of being an adult returning student, she shared "I've overheard things and I've seen things, but they weren't necessarily directed towards me."

"Fighting" outside the Classroom

Experiences that the women had with race and or gender was not confined to the classroom, in fact many of them described instances that took place in their work places, dorms, or other campus settings. As Ashley reflected on her living experience in the women in science campus housing unit, she talked about the connection that they shared in their attempt to get through their degree program as part of few women in their field. Although, race was not explicitly discussed often, she found herself "bringing them down" in essence, to reality.

> We definitely had some conversations about race with my cohort and they are very naïve about race and I have no problem talking about race, so they open up to me, they ask questions and I easily answer them because you need to know the truth honey.

> She gave the following example of one of the questions that she has been asked.

> They will ask about my hair – that was always a continuing conversation as I remember. The first time that I washed my hair and it went from straight to this and my roommate at the time she was just like what just happened. I was like what do you mean what just happened, I washed my hair and of course she had to touch it. Well…what does it feel like – it feel likes hair but its kinky – yes it is, its nappy…don't put your fingers in there because it's gonna hurt and she sat there the entire process of me doing my hair. From

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me washing it to blow-drying it to oiling it to straightening it and she sat and watched in pure amazement as was just like it went from this poufy thing and just straightened it and made it so straight. She then went next door and said have you guys ever see this – no, well next time she does her hair, you gotta go see this.

Ashley further stated that the young lady was "very innocent" in her curiosity so she had no problem sharing the process with her. She described it as a learning process for them.

Ashley went on to describe a conversation she had regarding scholarship available to students of color:

> There was a Caucasian person talking and they pretty much said that minorities had an advantage of scholarships over our Caucasian counter-parts because we are minority; people feel bad for us or feel they need to help us to go to college or something like that. I kind of took offense to that because one, we're just as smart, just as capable and able to go to college. Why not help us? Like there's plenty of minorities and not just African Americans, Asians and Spanish, you know just minorities in general who come from not such a good place where they're not financially apt to go to college. So having those scholarships available are just definitely good for us and Caucasians have had hundreds of years to go to college with no problem and now you're upset that you think you're not eligible.

Dee attributes most of her encounters to the immaturity of the White students she encounters. As an adult returning student, she tries to not let what people say or do get to her.

> I can get along with about anybody and you know I've had people say some really off-the-wall stuff to me and then I go yeah, that's right, they're really young and there's no telling where that came from. I can't assume everybody understands culturally what is acceptable and what's not acceptable to say. So I just kind of look at them and go okay, yeah that's not something you would say to me. This is how you would address that to me and just educate people. Like okay, you probably don't want to talk to me like that cause ain't no point in me walking around being offended for a long time. Let me just tell you, now if you keep doing it after I tell you that's something else, but I'll just help you understand.

Although Dee dismisses these type of fairly innocent exchanges, a fellow White male

student who made an inappropriate sexist comment to her outside of class offended her.

> Some creeper…it was a cold day and he was like it's really cold today isn't it? I was
> walking by and I was like yeah and I just kept walking. I just happened to look down [at
> her chest]. I was like that's why he said that. Creep…yea, I was like okay you are nasty
> and now he gets the evil eye from me all the time.

> Victoria played intramural basketball on campus and reflected on her season of playing

on the only all Black team.

> We didn't have anybody White on our team.   All the other teams were all White and
> the refs were all White and we're playing with the White people on the teams, so like
> they didn't care too much to call anything for us. Like you would get mauled and I
> would be on the ground and they would just run right past. Like techs were called on us
> for no reason, they said no cussing, we're not cussing once, and we say a cuss word it's a
> tech, but the other team sitting here cussing everybody out but no techs. It was not just
> because I'm Black it was all because I'm Black.

> Brittney who worked off campus at a local shoe store while attending school discussed

how her supervisors treated her "my bosses, they just didn't expect me to be involved in

anything, to even be in college and it just showed in how they treated me, like I was dumb, by

the way I was talked to." They further showed their doubt in her ability when she went to work

on an off day to present a school project.

> I came in one day with my binder…my NABJ binder. I had to speak with the general
> manager about something and my supervisor who was a White man, he saw that I was
> dressed in business attire and he was just like oh, what are you doing? He acted like he
> was really surprised and I was like I'm here to pitch this to Mark, whatever and he saw
> that I had a binder. He asked about my organization and I gave him the history of it and
> just like his jaw hit the floor. Like he didn't expect me to be a part of anything. To be
> articulate, to be able to do anything outside of work in retail and I don't know. He didn't
> expect anything better from me, I felt like I was always trying to constantly prove myself

because all he knew, all he was exposed to were Black females that weren't doing anything, I assume. Just being that person to change his mind, it kind of made me glad, but at the same time, I was really sad and disappointed that it took that.

The women had varying experiences with organizations or other types of involvement on campus. While Mariah and Victoria both lived on campus, they limited their involvement. Victoria had participated in intramural basketball but otherwise described college life as "going to class and going home". Mariah, who knew Victoria prior to school, had no involvement on campus. When prompted for a reason, she replied, "I don't know, never really reached out and tried to get involved in anything. I don't know why considering I was so into stuff in high school. "She did however share that she spent a lot of time attending parties that were thrown by college students, but "extracurricular activities, well it was the last thing underneath school work." Some found ways to connect with others of the same race and/or gender through specifically targeted student groups. Shantia discussed intentionally joining Student African American Sisterhood (SAAS) as a means to connect with other Black women on campus. SAAS is a student organization particularly for women of color in college designed to help them navigate their personal, academic and social experiences in college.

> I get a lot of support through SAAS so far as if I need help with anything or just needing somebody to talk to about certain things, I feel like it's a lot of support within that one network I am in.

Brittany shared a few organizations that she was connected with that helped her to have positive campus experiences outside of the classroom. "I've been involved in SAAS, NSBE, NABJ, even the Greek organizations, their events that they've had have been very informative and it just shows that they're here for me." NSBE stands for National Society of Black Engineers a student organization on campus that is open to students from all degree majors. NABJ, the

National Association of Black Journalists is also a student organization on campus and is directly

connected to her degree choice. She has been very active with this organization and has even

served on the leadership team. She feels these organizations have had a positive impact

because she has been exposed to others like her and have met great people.

Others just sought opportunities to be connected to the learning environment outside

of the classroom regardless of affiliation. Kendra and Dee, adult returners and parents had

both desired to be engaged in college outside of the classroom. Dee has been actively involved

as much as possible as a mentor, in various activities, etc.

> I'm looking to experience as much as I can while I'm on campus, so that includes
> internships and any of the social events that we have on campus that my time will
> spare. Anything that I can experience on campus, that's definitely my goal, to network
> and make connections and know people who do different things. I'm definitely looking
> to get the most while I'm here, that's definitely a goal.

> Dee has been able to adjust to working and being in class with a much younger student

population by becoming a mentor in a scholarship program. Kendra, who also desired to be

involved, found it more challenging to try to connect in with her much younger college peers.

She describes an incident that took place after joining a law school student organization.

> I went to one of the events and then we met off campus to go do an event-type thing
> and it was me and my husband. It was off campus and we ended up at this restaurant
> with all these kids at the table that was ordering beers, getting drunk. My husband was
> looking at me like we got to get out of here because these are young kids and you guys
> are the adults. So I was really ticked that I had put myself in that environment to where
> I was with some younger kids. It could have been perceived as I could have been in
> trouble as being the adult at the table, so I realized at that point that really
> organizations on campus may not be for me.

Dealing with the impact of stereotyping played a significant role in how the participants perceived their college experience and the campus environment as African American women. It affected how they interacted with the peers, instructors and the campus community. Whether they had had personal experiences or were just aware of the preconceptions regarding their race and gender, the participants knew that inevitably stereotypes were going to a part of their experiences. As nearly every participant addressed the power of stereotyping, they also dealt with some of the effects of it. The second largest theme that arose from the interviews is the invisibility they felt as African American women on a predominantly White campus.

Invisibility: Unknown…unheard…unseen

In addition to battling stereotypes, the Black women suffered from being and feeling invisible on campus. The invisibility came in multiple forms. The participants described feeling invisible when both classmates and instructors ignored them in the classroom. At other times, the women were called upon to speak to issues of their race and/or gender. These instances of only being called upon as a representative of their race magnified stereotypical assumptions and further alienated them from being visible as their true selves. This heightened the feelings of invisibility and isolation as peers and instructors were selective on when to give them include them in the discussion. Additionally, the curriculum often lacked a relatable Black woman's perspective unless they were enrolled in courses specifically about African Americans. Outside of the classroom, the invisibility was still pervasive. Few Black women were visible in publications, marketing materials, artwork, etc. Consistent with the research by Watt (1989)

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and Winkle-Wagner (2009) the invisibility was everywhere further alienating the Black woman from the campus community.

The experiences of microaggressions as described by many of the participants along with the overall feelings of invisibility and being stereotyped contributed to the "chilly" climate that has been found by previous researchers (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hall & Sandler, 1984). While some could visibly describe mistreatment, harsh verbal comments and instances of alienation in the classroom, for others such as Brittany the environment was just different, it changed her. The effect it had on her personality was strong as she shifted from a confidant person to one who was intimidated but couldn't understand why. The continual negotiation of microaggressions, stereotyping and invisibility with persistence was taxing for the participants but they found ways to endure.

Invisibility of the Black woman on campus and how they react to it was important. Not being noticed, not seeing themselves, others not understanding who they are have all played a role in how they perceived their college experience.

They Don't See Me!

Mariah simply said "we're always outnumbered" as she referred to being a Black woman on a White campus. Victoria, whom stays primarily to herself, acknowledged feelings of invisibility yet nonchalantly shared "I don't really know White people here or talk to them." Tarren reflected on her initial reaction to beginning on the campus.

> I do feel a cinch of being invisible.   When I first started college as far as Ivy Tech goes, I was still invisible, but here it became more noticeable when you're at a mostly White

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school. You're ignored that much more but it doesn't settle up with me when I say something and I know I'm ignored.

Kendra shared similar sentiments about the difference in environment after transferring from a predominantly Black college in Indiana. "It's definitely a challenge. We're in an environment that does not support our thoughts and our ideas and our needs and so it's different. "Referencing her former school and how she felt as a Black women there with mostly Black professors and administrators she stated "there was a comfort level there…just in regards to making a statement. "There was a comfort level that I didn't find here. You know you get those snide looks and if you say something that might not be the status quo or how someone else had said it. So I did find a challenge being comfortable just to open up and talk in this environment." She found a way to deal with the invisibility by using it to push her through her college experiences.

> When I first came here, I had a class last semester where I was the only Black person in my class. It feels awkward at first, but it's like once you get in your head that I'm only here for one reason, you know, I'm not focusing on the race thing, I'm not focusing on the gender thing, it's me. It's all or nothing. That's all you focus on.

Shantia too tries not to focus on being invisible or the only one, and finds that there are times when it comes to the forefront of her experience but generally she tries to minimize feeling or reacting to being the only one and not noticed.

> I don't really feel much of a difference unless I'm put into those positions. Like If I'm around a whole bunch of Black people or if I'm in a class full of White people or majority White, when I'm put into that position to where I'm kind of singled out even. It's like the spotlight is put on us, it's really like everybody is staring at us –looking at us through glass windows. I don't feel like I'm the only Black, only when we have actual discussions about race and social issues related to race and culture and things of that nature, that's the only time I feel like ok I'm Black so this is kind of related to me. When the spotlights

on me I have to say something and I really have to listen because I want to know what's being said.

For Ashley, being invisible has provided her the opportunity to keep pushing through as she described what it mean to be a Black woman on a predominantly White campus.

> Pretty much just being there and doing what I have to do without standing out too much unless it's in a good sense but you never want to stand out bad. So just flying under the radar so that – my work isn't mediocre, I do excellent work, but as far being that outspoken student now, I did in high school but in college I don't do that. I keep to myself.

Brittany too would be described as being affected by the invisibility of herself. As we discussed how she felt as a Black woman on campus, she emotionally talked about a communication concept called muted group theory.

> The English language is a man's language. I feel like people don't understand me and whenever I speak they're constantly taking what I've said…it's as if they don't understand what I'm saying. They're constantly…not necessarily…they're like editing what I say. Yeah, I feel like it's a filter. Often times I just feel muted. I just do. I'm not sure if you've ever. Have you ever taught any classes or have you ever sat in on any cases and just you know the instructor will ask a question and then the entire room is silent…like that's how it is. I often feel like I can't speak. I don't know why. I just feel muted. I'm not mute. I have a lot to say, but for some reason, I say nothing.

Tarren, who also shared this perspective of being invisible and silenced reacts by exercising her voice. She tries to assert her opinion and thoughts even when not encouraged to do so.

> Some professors, it is a good thing, because they want to hear your perspective, because it is a predominantly White class but then others think because you are African-American you really don't have a say, so you can speak but you're not counted for.

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She went on to describe how using her voice has helped her in the classroom

environment.

> I was working in a classroom – working in groups. Initially just off appearance, they [classmates] would look and go to the next person, that person's always White. But once I started contributing ideas and the group was stuck, they second-guessed their decision.

> She continued to share how she deals when being treated as if she were invisible.

> At first I was thinking this is ridiculous, but now I'm used to it, I almost find it interesting and I want to engage them in words, like what's the deal. It doesn't bother me but at first, I was thinking wow, this is wild but you just go on with life. You have to speak up more for your voice to be heard. I remember being in all my math classes, I always had White professors as my math professors. I would ask some questions and after a while they would tell me to stop in a nice way and I'm thinking this is my learning experience; you get paid to answer all my questions. I found ways around that and that's how I'm engaged and I'm learning, to speak up and if you're told not to speak – how do you engage – that's my experience so far.

I Don't See Me!

As many of the women shared feelings of invisibility, it was important to understand if

they thought they were represented in their curriculum, faculty, and generally around campus.

Few had taken courses with African American female faculty members and those that had were

quick to mention that those classes were in the Afro Studies department and that outside of

there, interactions were limited. Ashley, Burna, Tarren, Jendo, Shantia, and Victoria all shared

sentiments that White males and females dominated their degree programs and had very little

Black representation. This seemed to be very frustrating for them, as they had no one to aspire

to in their professions. Any learning they do about persons of color in their field comes from

self-exploration. For Ashley, a biology major, she was very adamant about the lack of inclusion

of Black person's contributions to her field.

> I'm a biology major and a science major that is a predominantly – first of all male field,
> then it's a predominantly male – Caucasian males. So the books we study from or the
> material that we learn from is all in research bindings and this is what they discovered.
> No scientific contributions of African Americans are presented in class very often. I
> honestly can't remember one, but that's not their fault either. The material that we
> study of course, only White males were going to be published in, you know.

> For Jendo, a student in the tourism, events management program she too expressed

little representation and attributed it to UPW's lack of interest in preparing her for a career as a

person of color.

> It's a school just like I think most of them are, that they teach you the basics of what
> they're supposed to teach you in whatever field you're in, but as far as preparing you for
> the real world, as to what challenges you are most likely to face, I don't think that they
> do. I think that since there isn't a balance of race among the faculty, that it may not be
> possible for me to be represented in that way. If I would have attended a historical
> Black college, then this would not be that case. However, I didn't want to do that
> because it is still, somewhat unrealistic. The real world isn't just filled with Black people
> or White people. To be effective and progressive, we have to able to work with anyone,
> no matter their race, religion, background, etc. I don't think that UPW has that idea that
> that's something that needs to be taught. I think that is important…that you focus on
> teaching students what they can expect for their demographics. It's important because
> you know they may have some kind of assumption in their mind of how it's going to be
> based on what they observed in their White counterparts or their White students. But
> in all actuality it may not be like that and you know I can definitely say that I don't think
> it's like that.

> Tarren similarly agreed, when I asked about her representation in the curriculum she

had a passionate response.

> Almost cursed…I feel like you have to just take African American courses if you want to
> know or be acquainted with people that you can identify with as African American,

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other than that no. If I take a philosophy class, you don't learn about Black philosophers, they don't recognize Black engineers, it's all White and most of the time, and they didn't even invent that.

Burna felt she wasn't represented in the curriculum as a woman in the technology industry. She learns about people such as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, but no women and especially no women of color. This however, has not deterred her from seeking to find herself in her field. "I've been doing some research trying to find some like me!"

Victoria too shared her thought about being represented in the curriculum.

Under the radar I do. I don't think it's out in the open like that, but like I don't think that they put us in the curriculum so you have to learn about different races. They're not going to come out and say were not gonna teach about Black things…were not gonna teach your stuff. I don't think they do that, but under the radar, they're not putting us in the books. That's just how it is.

A couple of the women spoke to their limited relationships with their professors because of the lack of visibility in the classroom and the challenge of getting to know their professors. Victoria shared…

I don't think we have much involvement like one-on-one involvement with our professors because we have like most of our classes are lectures. So you don't have much one-on-one time for them to even acknowledge you or anything in any way. So you go listen to the lecture and you leave. There's not much involvement with professors. I don't even know all of my teacher's names.

As Jendo talked similarly about not being connected with her instructors, she further talked about the hesitancy that she assumes Black faculty have with forming relationships with Black students.

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I think there should be some type of organization or department that's…not that it's specific to trying to get students of all different races prepared for the real world meaning that…okay you want to be a scientist. Okay, so I'm going to teach you or I'm at least gonna make you aware of what type of things you can expect as being a Black scientist or a Black female scientist. Kind of get them in touch with somebody that is doing that because most of the time in majors no matter what it is you know, even though they are professionals – the people in that field, most of them are White you know. Then when you do come across African American professors, I feel that…I kind of think that and I think I've observed this, that you know we as Black students we don't want to say become attached to that professor, but we expect there to be a higher level of relationship then there would be with other students. Yet they can't really allow that because they don't want to show favoritism. They don't want to break protocol and make anybody feel special or feel un-special. But if there was a department that focused on that, then I think that student would be more prepared to find that job or be able to perform at the height of their ability once they do get out of school and they do find that position.

The lack of visibility was not confined to the experience inside the classroom; outside of class the experience was similar. Most of the ladies spoke to rarely seeing themselves or seeing the same Black female over and over again in advertisements and other marketing pieces. Ashley described seeing herself around campus by sharing the following.

Let's start with UPW and with their advertisements. I feel that they always pick just one particular person and that's the poster child. Like a student who used to go here a while ago, she was the poster child. I swear. I swear she was one of UPW's diversity per se and then you know it's always at least just one person of this race and one person of that race and oh let's put a whole thing together you know, a whole collage and that's diversity. No…but if you think so UPW! You know and then as far as like student organizations that I'm involved with, I tend to involve myself with the African American cultures, so of course I think we're represented there. As far as like other student organizations, probably not because their centered on their community.

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Speaking to student organizations on campus, Burna discussed her participation in a women's technology student organization and the challenges of it being focused on one racial group even though one of the founders is African American.

> It's a good group, but it's like mostly Asian. I feel as if it's being portrayed on our website, it's mostly like a post about the Indians and the Asians, but not a lot of stuff about African Americans. You got the Whites posting stuff about the Indians and Burmese, but nothing never about the African Americans. I was in a meeting and there were a lot of Indiana women there. Probably about four, but in their meeting, it was trying to draw them more so than anyone else...I don't see nobody really kind of trying to sell to the African American because there's actually just two of us in that group. And one of them, she's one of the founders, she's a graduate student, she founded Women in Technology.

Tarren provided her rationale for the lack of representation both in the curriculum and around campus. "being accounted for your opinions, suggestions, ideas or even my physical look I think in any predominantly White institution - the presence of any other can be intimidating."

They Don't Understand Me!

As Kendra thought about her representation as a non-traditional Black women around campus here is what she had to say.

> No, not necessarily. When we see...for the most part you see the UPW ad on the side of buses and stuff, you see White women or White kids, male. I don't think I've seen anything, I don't think I've seen anybody that's nontraditional, you now.

She further discussed how difficult it is being a much younger student then her fellow classmates.

You know for the most part just going back to the majority of the people here, they're younger, they're White, and so the professors have probably geared their message toward them and their expectations have been geared toward them. Sometimes you want to put in that…oh like I got a professor now…he's kind of young, like my classmates, and his teaching style is kind of geared toward them. You got these kids and they just come out of high school, so this is two, three years out of their past. I haven't seen this stuff for twenty years and then I can't go…if I go to him, I kind of feel like, to me, he seems like if you're not getting it, it's cause you're not studying and that's not the case all the time. Everyone's not a slacker; so don't put everybody in that slacker pool. So, I think those challenges just in regards to you know, being mindful that all your students aren't three years out of high school.

This was frustrating for her – feeling like her instructors didn't understand or acknowledge how her experience was different than others in her classroom.

I just think we need professors that have a worldview. I understand you all educated and all that, but sometimes you got to get a world's view perspective and you got to understand people come from different backgrounds and they come from different challenges and you can't lump everybody in the same group and expect everyone to perform in the same manner.

This invisibility has affected how she sees herself as a Black woman in college.

You know, to me it's kind of like there's no outlet for me to get help when I need help. So it kind of contributes but doesn't contribute to low self-esteem, but it kind of contributes to me just feeling like I'm not able to compete, I guess.

Jendo has had significant financial challenges while pursuing her college degree and she shared how she feels that this is partly attributed to her race and gender. She compared her situation to that of a White female attending college. Referencing White privilege, she feels this has played a large role in how difficult it has been for her to get her degree.

I do feel that it's easier for White females to accomplish the things they need to accomplish because they have more resources. It's kind of like the benefit they have just because they're White…they off the top have advantages because of that verses

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anyone else. I think that you know, most families, most Caucasian families do have the financial resources to actually help their kids go to school and complete on time and that type of thing. Whereas my family was never able to contribute anything, so I'm about to finish my degree now and I am sixty plus thousand dollars in debt. I would say that that would be the biggest thing, just trying to really figure out why it's been so difficult. If you were to ask me do I think if I was a White female, would I've still had the same challenges that I face now or that I have faced going to UPW, I would say no.

This has become apparent because of her degree in events management requires a lot of networking. Her finances have been limited so she has been without a vehicle and adequate attire, yet she is still expected to attend networking events and participate in different activities.

I'm not trying to blame UPW, but it's something that you have to look at. It's something that you know I feel has to be acknowledged. I wish you knew my circumstances were different because if they were, then I feel like I would probably be able to say that I've gotten more out of UPW than a degree and right now I'm just struggling to get that degree.

Enduring the College Journey

Although some of the experiences these women had were challenging and uncomfortable, they pressed through anyhow. Family members and the institutional people or programs that they participated in helped to make it possible to continue. Support was not just from others however as many relied on intrinsic motivation as a means to persist. Staying the course requires being motivated, having a support system, and using strategies and coping mechanisms. To continue on in the wake of both racism and/or sexism required much effort on behalf of the participants. For some they were unconsciously responding to encounters that they had, but for others there were thought out and even selective responses to incidents in the academy.

Support of Family and Friends

Several of the women indicated the role that family members played in supporting their college experiences. Mothers came up often as huge supporters. Burna's mother still lives in Mississippi and she described her as a "very strong woman" who is certainly still supportive of her finishing her degree. Victoria discussed how her mother is growing to be more supportive. Since she was the first to begin college, her mother didn't know how to support her initially. A college recruiter began working with her mother regarding her younger sister and now her mother has a better understanding of the college process. Victoria now has "no choice" rather to stay in college or not because her mother is pushing her to finish. For Tarren, she sees her mom as her primary support person too. In addition, to mom, Shantia called out her friends, family and dad who really keep her uplifted while she's in college.

For Dee & Kendra, both married non-traditional students their husbands are their primary support persons. Kendra shared...

> I wouldn't be able to do 99 percent of the things I'm doing if it wasn't for his support. Because not having to worry about what's going on at home is a big ease of mind, so that helps a lot for me.

Dee described her involved her husband tries to be in her college experience to show his support. She recalled one evening when she was preparing to study and discussing her reading load.

> My husband is like do you want me to read your assignments for you and I'm like yea sure, go ahead. Do whatever you have to do – help a sistah out. I said you can do the work if you want to. He said okay baby I can't do that for you.

She smiled as she reflected on his support and shared…

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Yea, he would be like baby I can read it to you, you want me to help you, and anything I can do. So he would make sure the kids were taken care of and everybody ate every day because I told him, I said, okay, this is going to be on you and them, I'm not going to be able to do all of that. I'm not going to be here, so he definitely picked up that slack and just did it all.

Dee also relied on a few friends that were either currently in college or had recently graduated. One friend (an adult returner like herself) that she encouraged to start after she began became a large support person. She thought they would interact much more in person while on campus, but because of their busy lives, they talk on the phone often to encourage each other.

I would call and be like oh my God, do you know what happened to me and I would tease her because she is such an over achiever, because she is always crying and whining about how horrible she is doing in the class and I'm like I don't believe anything your saying to me because you're gonna come out with all A's, I know you! So you know we would go back and forth. So I would call my friends and be like pray for me.

Support on Campus

Besides the support systems that the women had off campus, many of them described support they received while on campus. Some of this support was by institutional departments, programs, groups, people and other college students.

Mariah rattled off offices that she has visited over the course of her first semester that she sees as being supportive of her. "The Math and Chemistry Center, Learning Center, the clubs that you can go to and get to know other people with majors like yourself." Shantia, Victoria and Krystal described the importance of having a support network through groups and organizations they have joined. Krystal shared

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I have noticed being on a predominantly White campus that as you're growing up, being an African-American, whatever gender it is, you're always against each other, which is really crazy. But once you come to a predominantly White situation it's like you draw a cluster to each other. It's like you rely on each other, which is crazy that it takes that to happen for you to become closer.

She went on to say "if you keep yourself around a positive network then that's all you need is support and keep positive company at all times." Shantia and Victoria spoke of organizations that they have joined. Victoria shared...

I have been here since last year, I've just been a part of SAAS (Student African American Sisterhood) and I feel like I get a lot of support through SAAS. So far if I need help with anything or just needing somebody to talk to about certain things, I feel like it's a lot of support within that one network that I'm in.

Shantia also described the benefit of participating in SAAS. SAAS is a student organization on campus for undergraduate women of color. "I'm happy that I have African-American females around me that actually want to make something of their lives." Dee found her connection with certain people on campus to be important to her success. She connected with a graduate student who is employed on campus that she has known prior to her starting college.

I would go to her all the time and be like okay Patricia what do I need to do about this and this, she was really good. She is my pastor's daughter, so I have known Patricia since she was born...she was always somebody to go which was definitely good because she would tell me the right things.

In addition, one of the ways Dee chose to get involved on campus was by becoming a mentor. After participating for a while she decided that it would be best for her to seek mentorship herself. "I figured since I was a mentor, I probably should be a mentee so I can figure out and make sure I'm doing things right." She attending a campus program called

Advancing Women – a program designed to pair existing students with faculty and staff on campus. "They were very very inclusive and they were helpful with really just pairing a woman with women and there were all types of mentors. "

Tarren, Jendo and Ashley all commented about the financial support that they receive through the institution. Tarren shared "coming from a single parent that did not have a lot of financial flexibility to send all of her children to college; grants, a scholarship program, those help a great deal…and the free tutoring services." Jendo credits finding her off-campus job through the student employment list-serv that she had access to…"but other than that I mean besides that and my work-study job and financial aid, I can't say that UPW has really done anything to help me through college besides provide the curriculum." For Ashley, who graduated Valedictorian of her high school class, she responded "money, money, money" as the way the institution supports her. "I'll take the monies. Yea, money, they have definitely provided me with a plethora of scholarships. My refund checks are beautiful. Love it, love it, love it."

The Significance of Intentional Support

There is a need and desire for intentional support of Black women in college. This study revealed similar findings of the importance of institutional support in the success of Black women in college as discussed in chapter two. Support on campus centered around three key types – academic, financial and social. The academic support was available to them through tutoring and learning assistance that the institution provided. Only three of the eleven participants discussed using academic support services as a way to address academic

challenges. As Guiffrida (2003) and Munford (1996) discussed in their research, financial

support was seen as an important form of assistance. Tarren & Jendo referenced general forms

of financial aid, however Ashley shared the impact of scholarship money specifically for African

Americans. Many of the participants balanced juggling their academic load with their home life

and working on or off campus. Dee working on campus as a mentor not only allowed her to

nurture other students but benefit financially since she was not working off-campus.   The

availability of scholarships or aid for them specifically would have helped alleviate the financial

burden of caring for themselves, their children and families.

Through their stories it was found that the availability of a support network for Black

women was critical. Only three of the young ladies knew of and referenced participating in a

support group that was for Black women. The group, Student African American Sisterhood had

provided a support network of other Black college women that the participants could connect

with, talk about their challenges, and generally be in a positive environment. As Winkle-

Wagner (2009) and Mitchell (2000) found, Black women consider support groups beneficial to

their persistence in college, specifically at White colleges. In this study, those findings held

true. Black women desire to connect with other Black women students, women that they could

relate with and talk about their experiences and also seek encouragement from. In some cases,

this was participation with a group of women, but for others it was connecting with another

student who could relate to the journey of a Black female on a White campus. Mentorship

provided not only relationships, but also provided direction for navigating through the college

experience successfully. This type of mentorship experience was also found in previous

research by Munford, 1996; Brown, 2000; Rosales & Person, 2003; and Howard-Hamilton, 2003.

Wolf-Wendel (2000) & Landry (2002) both offer a series of strategies to use to increase Black female success. Although they didn't focus specifically on predominantly White institutions, this study found that Black women desire very similar things. Wolf-Wendel (2000) found that Black women desire to have positive role models and a supportive environment. The participants in this study said multiple times that they would have loved to have a mentor – someone who could simply tell them that they could do it. Managing the dual impacts of racism and sexism requires a support system or person who can provide continual encouragement. These mentors could be faculty or staff, but preferably Black women who could teach them about being Black women; help them learn how to carry themselves, prepare them for their career fields, show and teach them what they can expect to encounter in the workforce, etc.   Likely providing them leadership and mentorship that as mostly first generation Black women they had not been exposed to at home. The students also desired deeper faculty relationships, a support strategy that has been found in prior research (Wolf-Wendel, 2000; Landry, 2002; Moses, 1989). For some, it didn't matter what race they were, they just wanted to feel more connected with the faculty; however, for others they desired that one-on-one time with faculty of color.

It was clear in the findings of this study that Black women students still desire to be connected with their faculty, want to have Black women mentors to support and guide them through their college experience and want support programs available on campus to address their unique needs. While there are many institutions that have successfully addressed the needs of Black women on campus, there remains still a gap in this support – particularly at predominantly White institutions.

During their academic journey the participants described specific institutional support

that they thought would improve the campus for African American females? Their ideas

centered around three areas: faculty relationships, mentors/role models and support groups or

programs. This support from the institution was seen as being important to their success.

Brittany conveyed this by saying…

> first of all we have to be told that we can do this. We need to be told. I need to be
> encouraged and if you don't have that, if you don't believe in yourself, it's gonna be
> really hard. It's gonna be really hard because I often don't. I still don't believe in myself
> some days and I just really need that support.

> Jendo similarly stated the importance of on campus support

> As far as African-American women go, I think there needs to be some type of emotional
> support because once you, when you leave, when you graduate high school and then
> you leave home and you go to a new place to go to school, you know it's…it's kind of like
> a cultural shock.

Deeper faculty relationships

The participants desired to have stronger connections with the faculty that they were in

class with. Many expressed concerns of not even knowing the names of their professors and

even feeling guilty for the desire to connect further with them. This guilt aroused from fear of

the perception of favoritism by their White classmates. For Victoria just having that connection

was important – regardless of what race they were.

> I don't think we have much involvement, like on-on-one involvement with our
> professors. No one-on-one time with your professor for them to even acknowledge
> your or anything in any way. So you go listen to the lecture and you leave. There's not
> much involvement with professors. I don't even know all of my teachers' names.

For Jendo, not only does she want to connect with her instructors, but she feels it is necessary to have relationships with faculty of color.

> Some of my professors you know are great people, but they're not really that available to the student body as a whole, because not only are they teaching, they're also in the profession and their also working on their careers and trying to you further their position as well as take care of home. So I would say, I don't have the relationship that I would like to have with some of my past professors.

Availability of Mentors and Role Models

Having women and particularly women of color available to serve as mentors and/or role models was important to the women. These women could be staff or faculty members that offer support and guidance specifically to African-American women. Jendo stated "it's important that young girls have an older female or somebody that's at least older than them by a few years to be a part of their life when they're going through college because it can be definitely difficult." Reflecting back on her earlier years in college, she recalled "I just realized that you know it would have definitely been helpful for me if I would have had somebody when I was eighteen just going to college you know." The availability of a mentor for her was also important because it would help prepare her for her future career. She described this mentor as being a woman that would give her advice like

> okay, so I'm going to teach you or I'm at least gonna make you aware of what type of things you can expect as being a Black scientist or a Black female scientist, you know. And kind of get them in touch with somebody that is doing that.

> Burna also has similar sentiments regarding the importance of having Black women role models and mentors.

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The other Black women need to see other positive Black women. I need to see other positive Black women. You know what I'm saying. To continue to encourage me…it's going to be all right or somebody that might be lacking in some areas of study. This person might be stronger in this area.

She continued by saying

Women need to see in the forefront women that carry themselves well and because you know then other women would want to strive to imitate. I think that for African-American women...they would teach them with speech, how to carry themselves, how to dress. We just need something. Like they used to get together back in the days…everybody was like one in the community.

In addition to having adult faculty and staff women of color serving as role models and mentors, many of the women shared the importance of having support groups and programs available to assist them throughout their college experience.

Support Groups and Programs

Support groups and programs were described as vital for creating a community of women of color who were on this college journey together. Tarren described this as "a collective effort among females, then African-American females, they'll want their voice to be heard and then all you do is execute whatever you feel is necessary."

Burna described her desire for a support group

I think as far as something like us women, Black women, we get together, just something. You know once a month where we can get support. Not just personal, but any issues; school wise, educational wise, but a support group to get together. I believe just some comradery together, you know. There's not that many of us, but we could be more. It would probably be better for us if we had something of our own.

Jendo acknowledged that role of sororities on campus but felt that it excluded her because she chose not to join one. "You know what about helping Black females that are not sorority members or whatever you know. So something that isn't necessarily structured like that, that's like members only."

Ashley's participation in SAAS convinced her of the importance of having a support group; she thought it should be institutionalized more to help women of color.

> I think maybe, which is probably very farfetched, but having like we have SAAS, but something on a mandatory level type of thing. Just so that you know that you are not alone. Like later on down the line if you choose not to affiliate that's up to you, but at least for freshman to know, hey there are women here on this campus. There are women who know what you've been through, are in your major, know what you're talking about. You know just some kind of seminar maybe type of thing, I think would be definitely beneficial. Then maybe like through the Women's Studies program or something like having focus groups on different cultures of women and how they progressed and made contributions to society and UPW.

Kendra also stressed the importance of having a support group, but wanted to make sure they catered to the adult returning population that she and Dee were proud to be a part of. "I'm not really good on social groups, but I do believe we need more organizations that are geared toward the African-American student and then geared toward the nontraditional African-American student." Considering her non-traditional status she asked

> Like they have those Greek societies and I'm like can I join one? I mean can I join that society? So I mean, I think we need king of things…if you gonna open up your campus to a variety of ages, you need to have programs that reflect the variety of ages.

Brittany who has a passion for music shared a similar request that was specific to her interest. She'd love to see an arts program. "If I had the will, I would have started a glee club or something that can incorporate dance and song and just all of that." This was important to her because she participated in something similar while in high school. "That's the reason I stayed in high school…that could be more of a way to stay motivated and a reason to come to class."

Staying Encouraged

The motivations to continue in spite of negative encounters and lack of institutional support were consistent to previous research findings by Hamilton (1989), Feagin & Sykes (1995), Davis (2007), and Bush, Chambers & Walpope (2009). Persisting required continual focus on specific motivations. What kept them going provided a source of strength and encouragement. Motivations included the desire to dispel stereotypes, to uplift their race, and the benefit of obtaining a college degree as a means to personal advancement. There was a fine line between the motivations being simply motivating and those same things eliciting too much pressure to succeed. The historical images of Black women supporting the Black race are still engrained in the minds of many of the Black women in this study. As Perkins (1983), Hine (1994) and Evans (2007) discussed in their research, Black women saw education as a valuable tool for the race's advancement and their social responsibility. There is a commitment that in many ways feels like a burden to change the image of Black people in society. There is a desire to pay homage to those who fought through these images before them and an innate

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expectation that they must do the same.   Staying focused on personal goals was often in the shadow of others expectations of success.

Tarren shared how she stays focused "you have to be determined to finish or you won't finish and you have to be confident that what you're doing is right because you will get sidetracked."   Krystal discussed the influence of her siblings and their lack of college attendance and the subsequent pressure it put on her; however, she realized her own goals had to supersede their expectations.

> Between my parents and two older brothers, neither of them have graduated from college. Out of the kids, I am the first to actually attend college. So I feel that is a lot of pressure on me. My father once told me he was paying for failure when I told him I had to take a class over. At times I feel like school isn't for me because I am not satisfied with my grades or out of fear of disappointing my parents. But a few things I remind myself of to keep me motivated for myself and not because of my parents...the decision about attending college to begin with was my ideas. It was something I wanted to do and not because of my parents. So school is something personal. I myself have expectations for myself.

Dispelling the stereotypes

In addition to personal motivations, Krystal was adamant about her desire to overrule stereotypes that have been placed on African American college students and particularly women.

> This is my first and only option for a school and as an African-American female a lot of people don't expect you to succeed. So therefore it's like a mission or something that you have to do because you notice most people, most African-Americans, their living situation or their situation growing up it wasn't the best. People see where you've come from...so they think you won't make it. So it's like you just have to keep working towards it and you just have to basically believe in yourself...if you don't believe in yourself, you can't expect anybody else to believe in you.

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Mariah shared a simple yet profound comment about what keeps her motivated, "prove everyone that doubted you wrong." Victoria too talked about the odds that are stacked against her and those that don't believe in her. She followed Mariah by saying "or at least statistics wrong because all of them are against us and that's my main thing, I don't want to be another statistic." This was a shared sentiment by Burna who also is motivated by the desire to change negative stereotyping of Black people.

> Society has portrayed African-Americans in a negative light because of a few bad seeds. One Black person do something wrong and it automatically…in my opinion…is stigmatized to all Blacks. When I go into the classrooms, one of my purposes is to disprove all stereotypes about Blacks. If I go into the classroom, participate by asking and answering questions, doing well on quizzes and exams…then maybe in their minds, they will begin to see us in a different light – and what they will see will be shared with others.

> This notion of disproving stereotypes and ultimately contributing to the positive

perceptions of African-Americans fused with another theme that arose from their

conversations.

Doing it For the People…Our People

Many of the women indicated how motivated they are to continue because of this

desire to uplift their race and pay homage to their ancestors and to the Black persons who

paved the way for them to be educated on a college campus. In the face of their various

experiences, they hold in their minds and hearts why they must continue to persist. As Kendra

reflected on what keeps her going, she shared

> To me I feel like for years Black people have been excluded economically, educationally, politically and I mean when I say excluded, I mean were not offered the best. We were

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not always offered the best of an education, now that we have that opportunity to get to that point, the White people hold us to that standard like, well now you can get it – come get it. But if you are erasing 350 years of disbelief and not hope – you know what I mean, that feeling of I can't do anything or it doesn't get better than this, so when I say remnants – we're dealing with ideologies, we're dealing with despair, we're dealing with the lack of confidence in the system. I really just been in it too long and you say I've come this far, I can't stop. If I quit now, my kids – I think they are waiting on me to walk across the stage.

Both Jendo and Burna discussed the burdens that Black women have historically carried and still carry to support the Black race and how these produce unique challenges for Black women in college. These burdens consist of dispelling stereotypes, changing images, caring for children. Burna shared

I think as women, as we African-American women, we've been through a lot. We got a lot of burdens and a lot of this stress we carry today is not just ours but from those who have gone before us.

Jendo commented

I think that Black woman have the burden of and I mean in our society I think it's more it has become so important for a person to be able to rely on themselves and be able to take care of any situation in the future whether you have kids, whether you don't, whether you plan on having kids. If you plan on buying a home, if you plan on having any type of future or any type of family security in the future you know it's important that you go to college and get that degree.

Mariah responded

I think a lot of people look up to us as well because I know for example, one day me and Victoria were walking out of the apartments…a lady stopped her car and rolled down her window and just told us that she was so proud to see African-Americans in college. It's just were so looked up to and admired…that expectation, that bar is set that much higher for us to succeed.

Burna shares a similar feeling of responsibility for uplifting her race.

> If I go into these classrooms that if I think…to represent not just only myself, but when I go into a classroom, I'm representing not only myself, but all Black people…so I just try to make sure that I'm paying attention and doing my work.

Paying Homage is a Must.

Although many of the young ladies are motivated to uplift the African-American race, several were also committed to paying homage to those who have paved the way. Brittany's awareness and importance hit her as a junior taking her first African-American studies class. She shared

> Now that I'm taking this African-American studies class and I see how we weren't valued at all and how we didn't have the right to do anything; to even hand anything down to our children as slaves, we owned absolutely nothing. I see it as I better be out here getting my education. I better get everything that I have the right to do. I better go out there and get it.

Dee, a lover of history has for years been passionate about paying homage to her ancestors. "I'm very big on African-American history, I really enjoy learning and studying and understanding the lives our ancestors lived and what they did and you know how they did things and thought about things." She further shared how this passion was instilled in her while young through adults in her life but particularly by her foster parents who stressed the importance of Black pride. As she reflected on how they would do this, she shared

> When you were younger and you kind of see this traditional we are Black people being empowered by your Blackness, know who you are, get an education, people before you had to fight for this freedom and things of that nature. So you're ingrained in that.

These are reminders to her as she continues to push herself through college.

> So often you know when I research or read things and watch documentaries and things like that. I'm like ok these people went through all of the adversities and they've overcome while I look at all of the different opportunities we have and sometimes we don't overcome or we don't put those things to use or we don't strive.

Burna too reflects on the historical plight of African-Americans as a motivator to keep her going.

> I like to always thing about those people that have always gone before us and you know a lot of times some people act ignorant and then I was like man these people have fought so hard to give us this freedom and education, they probably turning over in their grave.

Both Mariah and Ashley are thankful for their ancestors who allow them to reap the benefits of attending college. Ashley believes "we didn't get to go to college for years and years and years and years. Our ancestors helped us to get to this point…" Mariah stated "there's a pride with being Black because of what our ancestors have been through and everything that we represent…being in college, it's just a pride thing."

Strategies for Survival

Motivations alone didn't provide the fuel necessary to persist. The women had to use a variety of coping strategies and mechanisms to keep going. Previous research discussed in Chapter two supports this finding. Research by Greer & Chwalisz (1997), Johnson-Bailey (2001), and Shorter-Gooden (2004) discuss strategies such as working harder, ignoring negative encounters, and using invisibility as a shield. The participants here discussed these strategies as a way to survive – survive their college experiences.

The choice to use one of their survival tools was different for participants who had previous encounters with race and/or gender. For instance Krystal, depending on the circumstance would choose the way she wanted to respond – either speak up or be quiet. This was done similarly in situations that Ashley experienced – there was a conscious decision about which action they would take. Johnson-Bailey (2001) stated that this negotiation process required much thinking, however I found that for some participants who hadn't had pre-college experiences with their race and/or gender (like Shantia) it was an unconscious response to a situation. Shantia described negative encounters but didn't really process how she was responding, she just felt like she responded to them automatically.

According to Collins (2000), there are many historically images of the strong Black woman that have impacted the personal development of women along with their psychological well-being. Feeling obligated to live up to this image of a strong woman has impacted how they see themselves, how they accept themselves and how they free themselves from their struggles. Dee & Burna both talked about wearing a mask to cover up what they were feeling about what they had gone through as individuals. This included masking things for decades, as was the case for Burna. This study helped her to express how impactful the negative encounter she had while a child in the store had on her current life. The masking helped to cover it up but the hold that it had on her life was crippling. It has led to a lack of trust of White leadership and a routine feeling of being accused, incompetence, and lower self-adequacy. There was power in voicing what had happened and coming to terms with the impact that it was still having.

Additionally, Shorter-Gooden (2004) discussed the process of shifting or role flexing as a means to cope with racism and sexism. This was similarly found in this study as a few of the women described adapting and shifting as necessary to get though difficult encounters. Ashley, Burna and Kendra all suggested that they have the "two me's" (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 418) that they use to survive in a predominantly White environment. Although aware of the shifting, it's a way for them to prove themselves as Shorter-Gooden (204) suggests in her research. According to Stewart (2002) & Patton & McClure (2009) spirituality plays a big role in helping Black women navigate their college experience. As Dee in this study shared, she relies on God to open her eyes to certain things not only about herself, but her environment. Others in this study also shared the importance of faith and how it helped them persist through their college experiences.

Previous research on surviving was very relevant to the experiences of these Black women on a White campus. Ashley shares

> I realized yes, I'm Black in a White world unfortunately and I have to work a little harder to get things and I don't know when exactly I realized that but sometimes being a minority you gotta do a little extra work.

> Both Dee & Jendo also spoke to the notion of survival when they think about how they

have to get through their college experiences. Dee stated "I think that mechanism of survival that's in women, we're gonna survive, we don't care what, like we will conquer the world just to survive." For Jendo, she thought "I'll be able to do what I need to do you know, to finish and you know then soon I'll be done and I'll be moving on with my life."

Burna revealed her thought process about being in college and coping with negative experiences.

> Well I think you gotta know how to play the game…you gonna have to make a change in yourself – you know what I mean so you know, it's about playing the game and that's what I try to do. Some people might consider it a sellout but I'm really not a sellout, I just know what I gotta get and I know where to go to get what I need to get if I'm gonna work with them. But truth be told I don't care enough about them, but I gotta make my money.

Ways to survive during their college experiences included various strategies. Rather they used their voice or chose to operate in the invisibility that existed for them. Rather they brushed off negative experiences or masked how they felt about them. For some they've learned how to appropriately shift themselves according to their settings and interactions.

Shake it off or make myself seen and heard?

Shantia and Ashley have both chosen to shrug off some of the negative encounters they've had. Shantia shared "it's those few like those two or one in your class that you might see and you might meet that rub you the wrong way, but then you just brush it off." Ashley's response to the "occasionally strong-willed" persons was "nothing a little shrug of the shoulder can't fix."

Although she chooses to shrug it off sometimes, Ashley is also not afraid to speak up when necessary, just like a few of the other participants.

> I've had conversations with White people and they just been well, they have this other superiority and they haven't been brought down to reality and the conversations that I have had with people, I brought some people down to reality. Look you are not above

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anybody and just because you haven't experienced this and that doesn't mean that you can't empathize or understand or learn.

Dee also isn't afraid to speak up.

You know I've had people say some really off-the-wall stuff to me and then I go yea, that's right they're really young and there's no telling where that came from. Like I just have to keep that in mind. I can't assume everybody understands culturally what is acceptable and what's not acceptable to say. You know? So, I just kind of look and go okay, yeah that's not something you would say to me. This is how you would address that to me and I just like educate people. Like okay, you probably don't want to talk to me like that cause, ain't no point in me walking around being offended for a long time. Let me just tell you, now if you keep doing it after I tell you, that's something else, but I'll just help you understand.

Tarren discussed her journey to being more vocal.

I'm coming to this stage where I like to express now…at first in my life, I didn't and expressing feels so good, to be almost different but yet the same with people that you are around, your ideas count to something bigger.

She continued

Initially, I did not feel welcomed but once you speak and make yourself heard, one doesn't really have any choice, because if you can't defend yourself and be confident with yourself – you speak for yourself. I'm always dominated in any setting, so it's like probably just speaking up and re-speaking and redoing something to be heard. Raising my hand is not enough, you need to be persistent and be almost aggressive to be heard and I'm totally the opposite, so it's like taking me out of my comfort zone, but it has to be done.

Krystal's approach in the classroom is simple as she deals with being one of few African-American women in many of her classes "I make it my point to be known and you know that I'm here. I'm here for a purpose and I'm not gonna just be excluded from what's going on because

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that's what you want." Although vocal outside of the classroom, Ashley described being mostly

quiet inside the learning environment.

> Being there doing what I have to do without standing out too much unless it's in a good
> sense, but you never want to stand out bad, so just flying under the radar. My work
> isn't mediocre, I do excellent work, but as far as being that outspoken student just like I
> did in high school, but in college I don't do that – I keep to myself.

Using the Invisibility as an Advantage

Burna also has found a way of dealing with the invisibility that is imposed upon her as an

African-American woman in college. She attributes it to her mother's stories of racial incidents

in Mississippi. "I try to be in tune with all of my surroundings – I pay attention even when they

think I'm not paying attention. I always try to be aware of everything." She went on to say

> you know this may sound crazy, I just keep my ears open because everybody around you
> ain't really for you and I try to keep my ears open, my eyes, you gotta be careful –
> people are backstabbers, you gotta know when. I just like to know my surroundings.

> For a few of the girls, masking how they see themselves as Black women makes it easier

to cope with some of their experiences. Although Shantia has had some isolated negative

experiences associated with race while in college, she still tries to see herself as equal to others.

> I don't feel that I'm different. I think I am given the same opportunities, so I don't feel
> that I should feel different being here. I mean everybody says don't put colors on
> everything. So, yes, I am African-American…but if I just think of myself as the almighty
> African-American female that I'll think I'm better than everybody. I don't want to put
> that idea into my head. Yes, it is good that I'm here, but there are other Whites and
> other Hispanics and Asians who are on campus too. So I don't want to feel total
> different. I feel it's a great opportunity just being able to come to college.

Even Krystal, who was very vocal about challenging stereotypes, against Black women said she tries not to pay attention to it (her race) sometimes; "that's not something that I just focus on because my only focus is to succeed in life, to better myself."

Wearing the Mask

Dee & Burna talked about the difficulty of masking how they feel living as Black women as they both struggled with accepting the realities of their struggles. Burna, who dealt with being accused by a White woman of stealing as a young child learned to stop masking the effect it had on her.

> Honestly, I try to have a relationship with God and be open to my emotions – open up your eyes to certain things, basically that you can't get free from something until you realize what it is - you can't recognize, you can't conquer what you cannot face.

Dee believes that women, especially Black women should know who they are. She believes Black women often beat themselves up for not excelling at everything.

> I think that they should be okay with themselves because there is a point where we have to look into you. Know what, this isn't working, what I'm doing, it's not working and that's ok. Like let the heavens open because you realize that what you doing is not working, that's okay and a lot of times we just don't want to mess up. We don't want to make any mistakes. It always has to look this way, it always has to be in this beautiful little package and if it's not, the whole entire world will know that's it's not okay. Most of us probably already know it's not okay, we just hadn't said anything. We had this false sense of security that we generally express to everything out here and we don't even realize they can see past all of that anyway, at least some people can and then we're still not fulfilled. Like we're still not happy.

She further shared this behavior is partly ingrained in her personality because of the desire to survive while some of it is learned. Referring to the boundaries that she sets for others in her life, she shared

Hey gotta survive, you don't let everybody in there, you can't. You put the clamp – you can only go this far okay. I like you a little bit more and you can go this far. Okay I trust you a little more – you can go this far, but everybody is still at least right here.

This behavior Dee says is "definitely a Black woman thing"

Adapt and Shift as Necessary

Kendra shared a similar thought process, however she sees it as adapting – a necessary strategy to survive in her environment.

You know sometimes when you adapt, you are not being honest, and fake you know. So for the most part, when I feel like I'm adapting, I don't necessarily feel like I'm being fake – I feel like I'm just putting my best foot forward to get through the situation…I don't feel that we should have to but unfortunately we don't have much of a choice.

She further shared

I started very young and adapting to me is recognizing my environment and knowing what's appropriate and what's not appropriate. Although we have our cultural ways of doing things that are comfortable for us, they are not always accepted in every environment unfortunately. So adapting to me is not conforming to the environment but at least getting through it.

Referencing her identity as a non-traditional Black female, she commented

…I tell people all the time, this is their school and you have to adapt to their ways, and when I say their; not just White, but the younger environment. I mean, I'm a nontraditional student, so this is way out of my league. So there are things that I just have to adapt to. You know, not fight it, just adapt to it if I'm gonna get through.

Krystal also has learned how to shift her behavior according to her environment so as to not feed into any stereotypes.

Being a Black female on a predominantly White campus, you have to carry yourself in a certain manner. I am a very silly person, but in class you probably will never see that side. I do not want people getting the wrong idea that it's all fun and games to me. Being stereotyped is not a big deal to me because I can show you better than I can tell you. I am opposite than what you believed. Let your actions speak louder than your words and leave people speechless in the end.

Individualism within the Common Standpoint

The experiences of Black Women in college have many similarities but they are not the same. The collective Black woman's standpoint of not being seen and not being heard did not mean that the experience was exactly the same for each participant. One of the most prevalent findings that arose within this standpoint was the unique experience of the returning adult Black female student. Three participants in this study were adult returners, two who were married and parents and one who was not. Burna's adult returning experience mostly resembled other transfer student experiences in this study. Although she returned to school after a 10-year gap, she didn't perceive her age as having an effect on her college experience. However both Kendra & Dee who were both wives and mothers shared similar experiences that they also attributed to their age. Kendra's return to school in her late thirties as a first-time full time freshman was overwhelming at times as she had to learn to deal with a much younger group of peers in addition to balancing her role as a wife and mother. Dee's continuance of her education after six years challenged her to understand the generation of students who shared ages with her own children. For each of these women, the campus environment didn't make it easier. Faculty didn't consider their unique identity as adult returning college women and often geared their instruction, teaching styles and activities to the traditional-aged college

students. This challenged them to work harder, sacrifice more family time to stay engaged with their peers (whose lifestyles were very different) and attempt to fit in the best they could within the class. In some cases, this resulted in being deemed the wise, mother figure in the classroom, often referred to in the research as the "mammy" (Collins, 2000) which was embraced more by Dee than Kendra. Dee found it necessary to work harder to fit in with the group because she saw it as "their" world. Her first year on campus she overextended herself by getting involved in a variety of ways but has since pulled back to maintain some balance in her life. Her role as a mentor on campus has allowed her to build relationships with her peers, earn some extra income and feel connected. While Kendra is involved, she has found ways to connect with various faculty and staff rather than serve in peer mentoring roles. For these women they had to employ various strategies to persist and become a part of the UPW community.

The added layer of identity as an adult returner was significant as they also negotiated being Black and being female on a predominantly White campus. As Johnson-Bailey (2011) found, returning adult women returners have a myriad of overlapping forces in their lives that require them to constantly negotiate their interactions both on and off campus. On campus they have to decide when and how to respond and react and off campus they have to manage obligations related to work and home life – either of which can affect their mental and/or physical health (Johnson-Bailey, 2011). Rather than the institution (faculty, staff and peers) being mindful of their existence on campus, the participants in the in this study reveal that the onus was on them to figure out how best to exist in a community that caters to traditional students.

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An additional observation that was uncovered in this study was the impact that the negative experiences were having on the student's academic performance. This was consistent with other research that found that students were more likely to persist if they knew how to cope with negative experiences or had fewer of them while enrolled at a PWI (Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton & Willson, 1999; Fleming 1984; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Brown, 2000). In this study the participants who were performing at higher academic levels and still enrolled either had early encounters with their race/gender prior to college and/or knew coping strategies to use to help them persist. Only four of the eleven Black women (Ashley, Burna, Dee, & KW) at the beginning of this study had GPA's over 3.00 (two have since graduated) and each of these women discussed learning about the influence of race/gender or having a negative encounter prior to being enrolled in college. They also knew of and described specific strategies to cope with instances that they had while enrolled at UPW. Of the entire sample, three have graduated, four are still enrolled, and four are no longer attending UPW. A more thorough update of the participants is provided near the end of this chapter. How these students persisted (up to departure for some) is now discussed.

Chapter Summary

Through the voices of the participants in this study, the experiences of Black women at a predominantly White institution were explored. This exploration provider greater understanding of their perceptions of the campus climate, their experiences with the intersection of their race and gender as Black women and how they continue to push forward in their quest for higher education. The themes as discussed illustrated the importance of

childhood and pre-college experiences with race and gender and the subsequent

interpretations they had of their college experiences. Rather those experiences were within

their own family environment, in the community or at their childhood schools, the women

recalled them as instrumental in their development of their Black woman identity. The women

shared a variety of experiences that they have had while enrolled at a PWI. Although some

were positive there were two broad themes of fighting stereotypes of Black women and the

invisibility of the Black women that were central to the experiences they had on campus. The

stereotyping they experienced was not just confined to the classroom; they shared ones they

had while in the campus community. Although often dealing with stereotyping and invisibility,

the women shared how they persist. The support they had from others was important. Family

and friends were necessary backbones and some were able to take advantage of support

programs and persons on campus. However, for many their wish list for on-campus support

outweighed what they received currently. Many women also shared their personal motivations

that kept them encouraged including disproving stereotypes, race uplift and paying homage to

their ancestors. Despite the support and personal motivations, the women had to employ a

variety of strategies to keep going. Strategies such as shaking off negative experiences,

masking how they felt about them, refusing to be unheard or unseen, using the invisibility to

their advantage and knowing when to adapt or shift who they were based on their

environment. Lastly, while this study sought to explore the unique experiences of Black women

in college, it was incredibly important not to yet provide another homogenous viewpoint as

there is still great variability in who the Black women is and how she experiences her college

journey.   In the following chapter, some implications and recommendations are discussed

relative to supporting Black women in college.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, & Considerations

Discussion

As this study has revealed, there are Black women on White campuses who continue to struggle with invisibility, alienation, and stereotyping yet they persist anyhow.   The burden of pushing through these experiences can be lessened by the institution being responsive to the needs of the Black women on their campuses. The trend of Black women in college is unlikely to change; there will continue to be a disproportionate number enrolled in higher education institutions across the country. Therefore as a means to successfully recruit and retain Black women students, institutions must be intentional in understanding the varying needs and experiences of Black women on their campuses. The experiences of Black students as a whole are not entirely indicative of those that Black women have, particularly on White campuses. Even then, the one-size fits all approach is an ineffective way to adequately serve them.

As this study indicates, Black woman's experience in college is not the same and certainly cannot be ignored (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Jackson, 1998). There is a continual pull to address stereotypical assumptions and marginalizing while negotiating a balance between personal and academic life. At the intersection of all their identities lies a uniqueness that further diversifies the college population. Failure to recognize and address their experiences will result in higher education institutions disrupting the academic, psychological, and social growth processes of Black women. While many will remain resilient through their college journey, it may be done at the cost of not fully understanding their own identity and value or a decreased appreciation for the college experience as a whole. Others may in fact, leave the institution prematurely due to the lack of support. It is indeed the obligation of the institution

to serve all students enrolled, particularly if they have been historically subject to systems of oppression and/or marginalization. Zamani (2003) stated that institutions of higher education exist as a "racist and sexist microcosm of U.S. society" where Black woman are demoralized, devalued and struggle to be considered equal to other races and genders.

Institutions of higher education rarely acknowledge these structural disadvantages that have made their way from general society to college campuses and continue to impact the experiences of Black women. From the lack of educational opportunities in the classroom about Black women to the limited and often poorly supported availability of institutional support. The few Black women faculty and staff often try to support younger Black women in their college journey while stretching themselves thin trying to assist. They too are negotiating their challenging experiences of being a Black Women in strained environments and managing their other roles outside of the institution (Landry, 2002). Faculty are potentially risking their tenure status, since service (in this case mentoring young Black females) is not as valued of a component in the tenure process as research. So while they may be committed to serving as mentors to young Black women, their fight to gain and maintain status, manage being one of few in the institution or their department, and fight the overall societal perceptions of being a Black woman may take precedence over being a mentor.

Learning about the history and contemporary issues of Black women is often limited to singular lens perspectives either within gender studies or ethnic studies or the rare occasion that a special topics course is offered on Black women. Again, forcing Black women to choose what is more salient in their lives versus providing them with the opportunity to embrace their

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intersecting identities adds to the challenging college experience, particularly at predominantly

White institutions. It is not enough for institutions to just have a poster Black woman displayed

around campus and on marketing materials or the few Black women who may be a part of the

welcoming or orientation team as student leaders. These often-tokenized Black women rarely

depict their true college experience that may be masked. Nor does it highlight the many

intersecting identities beyond Black and woman. It dismisses the Black woman who also may

be a mother, wife, single-mother, lesbian, veteran, returning adult, of varying religions, to name

a few! Embracing the Black woman on a White campus requires that the institution embrace

her at her intersections. Provide support in those varying intersections and intentionally

dismantle the structural disadvantages that disregard the Black woman's experience.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for institutions of higher education, supporters and

scholars to weigh in efforts to better serve Black women:

- Analyze existing structures, procedures, programs and services to see if Black women

    are excluded or alienated. This includes admission policies where entering criteria

    continues to rise closing off opportunities for many Black students to gain admission

    into four-year institutions. Additionally, programs and services are often constructed in

    a manner that doesn't consider the unique needs of Black women. Timing, marketing,

    content and even descriptions of programs should be reviewed to make sure they are

    inclusive.   Support programs or groups should be developed that solicit the input of

    Black women and speak to their needs directly.   Cultural or Women's offices are

encouraged to evaluate their effectiveness in serving a diverse Black women student

body. Predominantly White institutions need to be intentional in developing

programming and support structures that address the unique needs of Black women on

their campuses. It is not enough just to have programming that addresses Black

students and other programming that addresses women. Support for Black women has

to be intentionally designed as their challenges and needs are unique as revealed in this

study.

- Cultural competency of administrative staff and faculty should be an integral

  component of the hiring process. Societal perceptions of Black women play a role in

  how staff and faculty perceive and support students. Lack of competency perpetuates

  the stereotypical assumptions and invisibility that is often experienced by Black women.

  Yes, Black women flood college campuses but that does not mean that they are all

  strong and able to adequately handle instances of racism and sexism alone.

- The disproportionate number of Black women on college campus should help drive

  institutional priorities relative to Black student recruitment and retention while still

  acknowledging the lack of Black male college students. As Black women continue to

  flood institutions of higher education in greater numbers than any other gender and/or

  race, efforts should be made to focus institutional support measures in the recruitment,

  admission, matriculation, retention and graduation of Black women students. These

  efforts should include targeted marketing, representational staff, and carefully designed

  programming that meets Black women at the intersection of their identities.

- Battling the historical image of the mammy or jezebel may impact Black women seeking out help or support. As Black women still negotiate their identities and fall victim to historical images of being the strong Black woman in society along with other damaging images projected upon them, it will be important for institutions to help dispel these mythical personalities by being deliberate in offering support and assistance along their educational journey. Staff must be mindful that students' not seeking out support doesn't mean that they don't need it or it should not be offered, but that self-efficacy and the threat of stereotypes have impacted their ability to seek support.

- While Black women may appear to be traditional college students, as this study revealed many have intersecting lives and are managing multiple roles that they must maintain while pursuing their college degree. These additional identities may include being a caregiver, parent, a veteran, lesbian, spouse, working full-time, etc. It is important for institutions to recognize these multiple roles and offer programming and support that speaks to their various intersections. One sized programming and support will not serve all, therefore purposeful measures must be taken to include opportunities that speak to and welcome all Black women.

- An additional institutional priority of increasing the numbers of Black women faculty and staff on campus would help to fill the wide racial & gender gap that exists. The availability of Black women faculty and staff should be representative and more equivalent to the number of Black female students on campus. Intentionally recruiting and investing in Black women in a variety of academic disciplines and particularly STEM

areas would increase the availability of role models and mentors for Black women students.

- Providing Black women faculty and staff with the opportunity to provide service to Black women students without risking their tenure process or jobs would aid in retaining Black women students on campus. Black women faculty and staff should not be penalized for utilizing their time to help retain Black female students; in fact their service should be incentivized given the impact it can have on retention and graduation rates.

- Inclusion of other identities that intersect with Black woman must also be considered if institutions are to adequately serve Black women in college. Although this study gave voice to the Black women's experience at a PWI, there were many more voices within the group that were worthy of addressing. Voices such as that of the adult learner who is interacting with a predominantly White campus that caters to the traditional-aged student. Or the voice of a single-mother who is a traditional-aged college student but must continually balance being a young Black mother with being a "normal" college student.

- The stories and experiences of Black women in college must continue to be a priority for researchers. As we work to undue narratives that inaccurately represent their experiences, advancing the research agenda on Black women is essential to building supportive institutional climates for them to not only survive, but to thrive. The research agenda is also filling a void in the literature that has existed for years, however contributions to this area will not only serve institutions but more importantly lead to better experiences for Black women in college.

Considerations

The findings of this study offer more insight into the experiences of Black female's students on White campuses in an effort to provide institutions with awareness of and strategies for serving women of color students. However, please consider the following:

- This study was conducted at only one predominantly White institution in the Midwest;

- During this study, only the participant's perception of university support was included. The researcher did not attempt to thoroughly investigate the programs and services on the campus that may be available or designed for women of color.

- The sample size of this study is small relative to the number of African American women who attend predominantly White institutions.

Where are they now?

At the conclusion of this study, three participants had graduated, four were currently enrolled, and the remaining four were no longer enrolled. Ashley & Burna have both graduated and had begun pursuing graduate degrees at UPW but have since withdrawn. Burna is working in her field and Ashley was planning to enroll in a graduate medical program. Jendo graduated as well and relocated to the West coast to look for employment. Dee & Kendra are both still enrolled and active on campus along with Shantia & Talia and have remained in contact with me throughout this study. Mariah left after one semester of enrollment due to being academically dismissed and has been unresponsive to communication. Krystal left the institution the term following our initial interviews and returned to Detroit to work full-time

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and attend community college there, she too has not responded to recent check-ins. Victoria

remained enrolled for a year following this study and then withdrew from the institution, I have

not heard from her either. Lastly, Brittany who was so close to finishing has withdrawn. The

burden of managing working full-time, the financial obligation of school and finding her

purpose has interrupted her enrollment. She plans to reenroll after she takes some time to

save some money and think through her motivation for attending college. In a recent email

communication, she shared "After 6 years of college I have nothing to show for it but wasted

time, wasted money, failure and debt. It is a strong dose of reality that is hard to swallow.

Those who lack discipline and have an unruly spirit often lose their desire to work hard,

especially for things they never wanted wholeheartedly" (Kimbrough, email communication,

2014). It is my hope to continue to encourage her to finish her degree and assist her as I can.

Conclusion

The intent of this study was to explore the experiences that Black women have while

attending predominantly White institutions and understand how these women perceive the

institutional climate and what forms of institutional support they utilize. Most prior research

on Black students at predominantly White institutions did not fully consider gender specific

challenges; a gap addressed in this study. The eleven Black women who participated in this

study not only revealed the unique standpoint of Black women on White campuses, but also

illuminated the diversity within the Black women's standpoint. Their voiced experiences

illuminated the essence of their experience – for most, they suffer but they succeed.

The enrollment numbers of Black women at predominantly White institutions represent an overwhelmingly higher ratio to the Black men enrolled. For this reason, predominantly White institutions such as UPW should consider the great benefit of improving the experiences of Black women as a means to increased personal development and success of these students as well as higher retention and graduation rates for the institution. Through the lives of these women and the stories they shared, it is hoped that predominantly White institutions will be more conscious of the needs of Black women and work to secure a more welcoming and supportive environment. As bell hooks (1994) notes, it is time for Black women to move from the margins to the center.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Script (verbal, in person)

My name is Khalilah A Shabazz a graduate student from the Department of Education at IUPUI. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to understand the experiences of African American females who attend predominantly White institutions. You are being invited to participate because you attend this institution and may identify as an African American female.

As a participant, you will be asked to commit to a three-phase interview process, which includes a pre and post individual interview along with a group interview with other African American females. Interviews will be audio taped and possibly videotaped. It is expected that the entire three-phase interview process would not take more than 4 hours of your time.

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential; however we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. All audio and/or video recordings will be kept and all responses are confidential and will not be linked to any identifying information.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of participation in this important study and should you agree to participate you can follow up with me (Khalilah Shabazz) at shabazzk@iupui.edu or call 317-278-1795.

Do you have any questions now?   If you have questions later, please contact me at 317-278-1795 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Robin Hughes, at 317-274-6817.

Appendix B: Recruitment Script (email)

To: Potential study participant

From: Khalilah A Shabazz

Greetings,

My name is Khalilah A Shabazz and I am a graduate student from the Department of Education at IUPUI. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to understand the experiences of African American females who attend predominantly White institutions. You are being invited to participate because you attend this institution and may identify as an African American female.

As a participant, you will be asked to commit to a three-phase interview process, which includes a pre and post individual interview along with a group interview with other African American females. Interviews will be audio taped and possibly videotaped. It is expected that the entire three-phase interview process would not take more than 4 hours of your time. Your participation is completely voluntary, confidential and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential; however we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. All audio and/or video recordings will be kept and all responses are confidential and will not be linked to any identifying information.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of participation in this important study and should you agree to participate, please respond to this message or e-mail shabazzk@iupui.edu or call 317-278-1795.

If you have any questions please contact me at 317-278-1795 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Robin Hughes, at 317-274-6817.

IRB STUDY #1104005155

INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR

Experiences of African American females at PWI's

You are invited to participate in a research study of the experiences of African American females who attend predominantly White institutions. You were selected as a possible subject because attend the institution where the study is being conducted and you may identify as an African American female*.* We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is being conducted by Dr. Robin L Hughes, Principle Investigator, Education and Khalilah A Shabazz, Co-investigator, doctoral candidate in the School of Education. It is an unfunded study.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purposes of this study are to (1) explore the experiences that African American females have while attending predominantly White institutions, (2) investigate the participants' perception of campus climate and institutional support and how these impact the overall college experience, (3) create research-based interventions to improve the educational experiences for this population based on these assessments and on our own investigations of African American females, (4) disseminate the results of this study nationally to refute the prevailing homogenized experience of African American students at PWI's by telling the stories of African American female experiences solely.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

Participate in a 3-phase interview process that will be audio and/or video recorded (focus group). Phase 1 will be an individual pre-interview lasting no longer than 45-60 minutes to begin to explore individual experiences. Phase 2 will be a focus group including all participants to discuss shared experiences and should be 60-90 minutes long. Phase 3 will be a follow-up individual interview to expand, reflect on initial individual or focus group information, this interview should take no longer than 45-60 minutes. In total, no more than 4 hours of your time will be requested. All interviews and the focus group session will occur in a private office with limited distraction and/or conference room.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. All audio and/or video recordings will be kept confidential and access is limited to the researchers involved in this study. Information will be stored in a secured/locked file cabinet or travel case at all times. All responses are confidential and will not be linked to any identifying information.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [for FDA-regulated research and research involving positron-emission scanning], the National Cancer Institute (NCI) [for research funded or supported by NCI], the National Institutes of Health (NIH) [for research funded or supported by NIH], etc., who may need to access your medical and/or research records.

PAYMENT

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

For questions about the study, contact the researcher Dr. Robin Hughes at **317-274-6817 (roblhugh@indiana.edu).**

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at (317) 278-3458 or [for Indianapolis] or (812) 856-4242 [for Bloomington] or (800) 696-2949.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

Appendix D: Individual & group Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION: Good day and I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me. My name is Khalilah Shabazz and I am interested in learning about your college experience as an African American female.

Today we will be discussing your perceptions, thoughts, experiences, and opinions about you as an African American female attending a predominantly White institution. There are no right or wrong answers, just your own story that you are telling.

Before we begin, let me make a few requests. Please speak up as I am tape recording the session in order to not miss any of your comments. We will be on a first name basis today and in the later reports, no names will be attached to comments. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Our time together should last no longer than one hour. Let's begin.

Introductory & Demographic questions:

Tell me your name, year in college, and major. Please share a little about your background to include what race and gender you identify as, your age, and where you grew up. Additionally, please share what brought you to this institution?

Being an African American female in college

1. What are your thoughts about being an African American female in college?
2. What are your thoughts about being an AA female at a predominantly White college?
3. In thinking of you high school, would you describe as predominantly White or otherwise?
4. Did you consider the diversity of this institution prior to enrolling?
5. Can you tell me about a positive or negative college experience that you attribute to you being a female?
6. Can you tell me about a positive or negative college experience that you attribute to being an African American?
7. Can you tell me about a positive or negative college experience that you attribute to being BOTH a female and an African American?
8. What is your overall perception of your college experience as an African American female?
9. Do you feel you are represented in the college curriculum? Why or why not?
10. Do you feel you are represented in the university activities, programs, advertisements, etc.? Why or why not?

Experiences with the campus climate

1. How would you describe the campus climate (defined as your ability to be included and respected on campus)?
2. Have you had a negative experience with the campus climate (where you were not included or respected) that you attribute to you being an AA female?
3. What if anything would improve the campus climate for AA females at predominantly White institutions?
4. Do you think African American women have different experiences with the campus climate than other genders or races? Why or why not?

Experiences with institutional support

1. Do you think AA females face unique challenges and therefore need unique support? Describe some of the unique challenges faced (if any).
2. In what ways does the institution support you through your college experience?
3. What is your perception of the institutional support that is available to you as an African American female at a predominantly White institution?
4. What types of institutional support would you like to see for African American females?

For Focus Group – interview questions will focus on the questions asked in individual interviews but allow for the group to expand upon and/or share additional experiences.

For individual post-interviews – participants will be given the opportunity to disclose any additional information regarding their experiences after reflecting on their initial interview and the focus group session.

Khalilah Annette Shabazz
Curriculum Vita

EDUCATION

2015	**Ph.D**. – Higher Education and Student Affairs (April, 2015)
	Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana (3.96 GPA)
	Dissertation: Black women, White campus: Students Living through invisibility. *(Dissertation Defense Date: April 8, 2014)*
	Committee: Drs. Robin L. Hughes, Lori Patton-Davis, Valerie Grim, Mary Howard-Hamilton, and Sherree Wilson.
2006	**M.S.,** Higher Education and Student Affairs, *Summa cum laude* - Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
2000	**B.S.**, Psychology, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

EXPERIENCE

1/2014 – Present	**Director, IUPUI Multicultural Center**

- Responsible for the management, planning and continued development of the Multicultural Center.
- Serve as an advocate for for all underrepresented ethnic minorities, students of color, women, and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered students by offering educational and social programming.
- Research and implement best practices in diversity initiatives.
- Develop unique programs and communication strategies to increase the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations and to contribute to the development of an inclusive campus culture.
- Cultivate and maintain partnerships with the campus and community in an effort to increase multicultural awareness and education.
- Assess current programs and populations regarding diversity issues and use the results for ongoing improvement and the development of new initiatives.

10/07 –12//2013   **Director, Diversity Enrichment & Achievement Program**

University College, IUPUI

- Develop and implement program concepts and objectives that promote retention and success of underrepresented students at IUPUI.
- Program development to include strategic retention focused workshops, intrusive advising, mentorship opportunities, leadership development opportunities, and service opprtunitites.
- Engage entering underrepresented students and their families to aide in successful transition into IUPUI by offering direction to resources, clarification of documents and other assistance.
- Advocate for underrepresented students on campus to ensure inclusion efforts are sustained.
- Collaborate with faculty and staff across campus to provide supportive services to underrepresented students.
- Oversee the Student African American Brotherhood (Brother to Brother) and Student African American Sisterhood (Sister to Sister) student organizations. SAAS developed as a non-profit organization providing a retention model for minority women that has been incorporated into the strategic plans of retention based programs on other campuses across the USA.
- Amass campus-wide academic support efforts currently available for uderrepresented students that promote academic progress, retention, and graduation rates for referral and collaborative purposes.
- Research ideologies and best practices that provide for strengthening academic support and retention efforts for students considered at risk.
- Communicate retention strategies and program concepts to faculty and staff on campus.

09/01 – 10/07   **Assistant Director for Student Retention and Scholarship**

Office for Student Scholarships, IUPUI

- Designed and implemented the First Generation Scholarship Program designed to engage students who are the first in their family to attend college through intentional programming such as workshops, one-on-one meetings, family gatherings, etc.
- Hired, trained & supervised full-time staff as well and student workers. Served as Director in the absence of Director of Scholarship Office.

- Redeveloped procedures for all campus departmental, mentor, and fellowship awards (over $500,000 managed annually). Successfully responded to two audits.

- Administrated of over 25 institutional scholarship programs, which include the application, review and selection process (over $300,000 managed annually).
- Managed and administrated all NCAA athletic scholarship awards for IUPUI Athletics. Consisted of NCAA compliance procedures, revocations, and athlete financial aid management.
- Assisted in the financial coordination of a variety of campus programs such as the Nina Mason Pulliam Scholarship Program, University College Mentor Programs, Twenty-First Century Mentor Scholarship Program, Bank One Academy Scholarship Program and others.

HONORS/AWARDS

01/2013	IU Neal-Marshall Distinguished Alumni Award (Indianapolis chapter)
04/2012 mentoring	Alvin S. Bynum Mentor Award –recognition of outstanding academic
02/2012 nominee	Center for Leadership Development Minority Achiever in Education
05/2011	IUPUI Black Faculty & Staff Council recognition for creating the inaugural Celebration of Black Graduates.
04/2011	Campus Influence Award – Sigma Phi Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity
10/2005	Glenn W. Irwin Jr., M.D. Experience Excellence Recognition Award for service to IUPUI beyond the call of duty.
05/2005	University College Leadership Award

NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Organized IUPUI Scholarship Office visits to Indianapolis Public Schools, collaborated with Admissions Office to begin and maintain visits to these local schools.
- Revamped campus based fellowship processes and procedures with minimal impact to graduate, post-graduate students. Required intentional collaborations and trainings with graduate and professional schools across campus.
- Acquired and amended IUPUI Athletic aid processing to include NCAA compliance training and management, interaction with student athletes

and coaches, campus/NCAA reporting. Led to Glenn Irwin award nomination and receipt.

▪ Managed final year of Lumina Foundation SAAB grant, which included redesign of program and development of retention model that led to SAAS development and permanent role in University College.

▪ Development of Student African American Sisterhood National (SAAS), a research driven program for women of color in the academic environment. First chapter at IUPUI. Program incorporated into the strategic retention plans at California State San Bernardino, Minneapolis Community & Technical College, College of Lake County, and Northern Illinois University. Other chapters at Indiana State, Zion-Benton High School (IL), New-Tech High School (IL)

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- IUPUI Council for Retention and Graduation
- Chancellor's Diversity Cabinet - Member
- Project MOSAIC – University College diversity group member/facilitator
- Education Testing Service (ETS) national scholarship review committee member
- Founder, Student African American Sisterhood National Organization, Inc.
- IUPUI Student organization advisor
- Intergroup Dialogue participant

- IUPUI Financial Wellness Council
- Nina Mason Pulliam Advisory Council
- Student African American Brotherhood national conference planning team
- IUPUI STAR Mentor
- Guion Creek Middle School mentor
- Member, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

PRESENTATIONS/RESEARCH INTERESTS/OTHER

Presentations:

04/2014   "Black women, White campus: Students Living through Invisibility", National Conference on Race and Ethnicity, Indianapolis, IN.

03/2013   "Supporting Black Undergraduate Women: Critical Imperatives for Research and Practice", American College Personnel Association, Las Vegas, NV - with Dr. Lori Patton.

02/2013   Critical Race Dialogue Series on Black Student Activism & Higher Education – panelist, IUPUI.

11/2011	"Of roots and wings: Liberatory leadership of Black women", Men & Women of Color Leadership Conference, Bloomington, IN – with Dr. Khaula Murtadha.
Annually	Facilitation of Student African American Brotherhood advisors session at national conference since 2010. Topics included: How to advise men of color, best "unknown" practices in supporting men of color, Being the best advisor – professional development as an advisor to Black and brown male students.
Numerous	"Back to the broke college student" presented to over 200 freshman seminar classes, summer bridge sections and campus offices and groups since 2003.
2001	Centralized Vs. Decentralized Scholarship Administration: National Scholarship Providers Association (NSPA) Annual Conference, Chicago, IL – with Beth Barnette Knight.
2002	Quality Applicants: Effectively Assessing Merit Qualifications: NSPA Annual Conference, Denver, CO – with Beth Barnette Knight.
2005	Survival Guide to Selection Committees: 2005 NSPA Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA. – with Beth Barnette Knight.

Teaching Experience

University College U110: Beyond "Just Us": You're Place in Cultural Connectedness
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
Fall 2013 – present
First year seminar course for entering freshmen that is an introductory course to multiculturalism and diversity. One of three courses linked in a thematic learning community with integrated learning about diversity, privilege and power.

Summer Bridge program, Faculty
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
Summer 2011 – present
Two week transition program for entering college freshman that provides intensive college readiness skills, math and writing assistance, direction to campus and community resources and other support to aid in successful transition, retention and graduation.