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WALKING ON THE RED BRICK PATH: A PORTRAIT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AT A  
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

---

A Dissertation

Presented to

Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Stephanie L. Krusemark

August 2010

Advisor: Dr. Franklin A. Tuitt

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Title: WALKING ON THE RED BRICK PATH: A PORTRAIT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

Advisor: Dr. Franklin A. Tuitt

Degree Date: August 2010

### **Abstract**

“Space, like language, is socially constructed; and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society” (Weisman, 1992, p. 2). While institutions of higher education have granted physical access to African-American women over the last 150 years, their presence on American campuses has not been readily reflected in the physical design of the walls within which they learn. In examining the historical foundations of institutions of higher education, we cannot deny institutions consciously embed their values and basic assumptions within their physical manifestation (Bess & Dee, 2008). The architectural design of a campus reflects its history as well as its future aspirations (Markus & Cameron, 2002). In this way, the built educational environment has an important role in shaping and informing its community members of what education looks and feels like (Strange & Banning, 2001). The message of predominantly white institutions still remains founded in the voice and values of those in power.

Therefore, in order for African-American women to succeed in the academy, they have adapted their racial and gender identities to fit the predominant culture (Fordham, 1993).

However, the hidden and unspoken messages that reflect the historical, social, and cultural context of American societal discrimination based on race and gender still remain in the built educational environment. In order to center the voices, experiences, and

perceptions of African-American women within a predominantly white community, this study uses a critical black feminist lens. In addition, through an interdisciplinary conceptual model founded on the tenets of equal access federal policy, semiotics, organizational cultural transmission, and inclusive excellence, this study seeks to explore the dynamic that occurs between the built educational environment and its African-American female students. Utilizing the portraiture methodology, nine women participated in the study through cognitive tours, individual interviews, self-reflective journaling, and photo documentation. The findings of the study depict a portrait of African-American women's ability to reclaim the built educational environment of their predominantly white institution by physically and psychologically walking on its red brick path.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have been blessed by my surroundings. These surroundings are filled with brilliant, passionate, transparent, and supportive individuals who have given me the strength, courage, and motivation to create a dissertation that is relevant, worthwhile, and perhaps has always existed in the subconscious of all of our minds.

Thank you to: The brave and beautiful women who participated in my study, without you this would be a dissertation of blank pages. It has been an honor for me to learn and share your stories with the many others who, I am positive, will become enlightened just as I have. The courage you possess to let your voices be heard is truly inspiring. I sincerely thank my parents and sister for their love, support, and nurturing of my visual awareness of the built spaces of the world. To my ambassador to the academy, Dr. Franklin A. Tuitt for challenging and inspiring me to transform into a critical black feminist scholar – a position I never thought I could accomplish, really it’s beyond my belief! To Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher for always providing a supportive voice filled with many creative and artistic options and for allowing me to present the portraiture methodology in his educational criticism course. To Dr. M. Dores Cruz for her camaraderie and passion for the power space can have on our memories, experiences, and cultural and national identities in a post-colonial world as well as her many home-cooked dinners and great conversations. To Dr. Jesús Treviño for serving as an inspirational role model – a model dedicated to inclusive excellence in all educational environments and realms as well as his expert editing skills that have been much appreciated! To Dr. Frédérique Chevillot for her enthusiasm and authentic conversations about life, becoming an

academic, and finding pride in standing in the spotlight. To Dr. Alma Clayton Pederson for pioneering herself as a role model in the higher educational realm as an African-American female scholar who is credited with creating the AAC&U's Inclusive Excellence Model and for her true genuine nature in taking my many phone calls and emails to work through my research idea and her continued support throughout the process. To Dr. Rodney Buxton for allowing me to explore my research idea through a mass communications lens and for making semiotics understandable. To Dr. Kathy Green who encouraged me to explore my research through a quantitative lens, only to find myself being drawn back to my qualitative research lens. To Mark Rodgers for his openness in hearing the counter-narratives of African-American women's experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the campus architecture in order to make the built environment more inclusive in the future and for his contagious passion and unlimited bounds of architectural knowledge. To the Center for Multicultural Excellence and its staff for supporting my research idea through exploratory conversations, providing access to the African-American female population, and the first CME Scholar grant. To the Morgridge College of Education and the Office of Graduate Studies for their support of my research. To Vice Provost, Dr. Barbara Wilcots for her inspiration as a brilliant, graceful, and authentic role model for all African-American women at the University of Denver. And finally, but certainly not least in any stretch of the imagination, my colleagues, inside and outside the academy, for all the intellectual discussions, creative brainstorming, continued motivation, support, and so much more!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi
Foreword	1
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION– The Origins of Values and Access to the Built Educational Environment.....	5
Modern Day Context of Diversity in the Built Educational Environment.....	5
Research Questions. ....	6
Defining Space as an Active Participant in Providing Equal Access. ....	7
The Influence of Colonialism on the American Campus Ideal.....	8
The Counter-narrative: Slavery Denies Access to Higher Education.....	12
Looking to our Past: The First African-American Woman to Access Higher Education.....	13
Centering the African-American Women’s Experience and Perception of the Built Environment of the Academy through Critical Black Feminism .....	15
Critical Black Feminism.....	17
The Human Built Environment Interaction and Issues of Race and Gender .....	21
Perceptions of Space by Race. ....	25
Perceptions of Space by Gender.....	28
Students of Color’s Experiences in the Academy.....	29
The Diversity Pipeline into the Architectural Profession.....	34
Reflecting Cultural Identity through Modern Architecture.....	36
Summary .....	41
Road Map .....	42
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, THEORETICAL MODEL, AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL.....	45
Challenging our Concepts of Equal Access.....	45
Examining the Impacts of <i>Brown v. Board of Education (1954)</i> and the Civil Rights Movement on Equal Access by Race and Gender .....	47
<i>Brown’s</i> Impact on the Southern US African-American Community .....	50
The Civil Rights Movement.....	52
The Impact of Architectural Laws Since the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 on Access by Physical Ability... ..	55
The Rehabilitation Act of 1973.....	57
The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.....	59

The Next Frontier of Equal Access: Psychological Access Based on Perceptions of the Built Educational Environment.....	61
Theoretical Framework: Cultural Transmission.....	63
Theoretical Model: Inclusive Excellence.....	69
Semiotics.....	77
Conceptual Model: Cultural Transmission of Misaligned Interpretations of the Built Educational Environment Based on Race, Gender, and Power.....	80
 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN.....	 84
The Portraiture Methodology.....	84
Portraiture.....	87
The Development of Portraiture.....	88
The Premises of Portraiture.....	91
The Situated Identities of the Portraitist.....	92
The Portrait and its Dimensions.....	93
The First Dimension: Conception.....	93
The Second Dimension: Structure.....	93
The Third Dimension: Form.....	94
The Fourth Dimension: Coherence.....	95
The Six Elements of Voice.....	96
Voice as Autobiography.....	97
Voice as Preoccupation.....	97
Voice as Dialogue.....	98
Voice as Witness.....	98
Voice as Interpretation.....	99
Voice as Discerning Other Voices.....	100
The Use of Portraiture in Educational Research.....	100
Research Design and Purpose.....	105
Research Questions.....	108
Study Sample: Current African-American Women of the University of Denver.....	108
Purposeful Criterion-Sampling.....	109
Data Collection Methods.....	110
Online Screening Survey.....	110
Cognitive Interview Tour.....	110
Reflective Journaling and Photo Documentation.....	111
Final Reflective Interview.....	112
Document and Artifact Analysis.....	112
Participant Observation.....	113
Establishing Trustworthiness and Collaboration.....	113
Interviewing for Feeling and Research Participants as Allies.....	113
Member Checking and Reflective Feedback.....	114
Researcher Connection, Reputation, Rapport, Transparency, and Reflexivity...	115
Data Validity, Analysis, and Interpretation.....	117
Validity.....	117
Analysis and Interpretation: Emergent Themes.....	119

Data Representation through Vignette and Collage.....	121
CHAPTER FOUR: Our Walk: A Compilation of African-American Women’s Experiences, Interactions, and Perceptions of the Built Educational Environment at the University of Denver.....	124
Study Setting: The University of Denver.....	124
The Pioneers: The Most Notable African-American Women of the University of Denver.....	128
Emma Azalia Hackley.....	128
Grace Mabelle Andrews.....	129
Dr. Condoleezza Rice.....	134
The Online Screening Survey: Painting the Picture of Current African-American Women at the University of Denver .....	138
Self Described Affiliations and Identities .....	139
Racial Identity.....	142
Gender Identity.....	142
Age.....	142
Country of Origin.....	143
Primary Language .....	143
Socio-Economic Status.....	143
Sexual Orientation.....	143
Religious/Spiritual Affiliation.....	143
Able-Bodiedness.....	144
Group Identity.....	144
Time on Campus and Activities.....	144
Emerging Themes from the Online Screening Survey.....	146
Feelings Evoked by Campus.....	147
Mood and Tone of Educational Environment.....	148
Campus Demographics.....	149
Social Interactions and Behaviors.....	151
Self-Image.....	152
Multiple Identities .....	153
Beliefs and Actions.....	155
CHAPTER FIVE: Those Who Spoke: The Nine Women Centered in the Portrait.....	158
The Recruitment Process.....	160
The Construction of the Narratives.....	161
Our First Meeting: The Portraitist Meets her Participants.....	161
Rachel – Navigating Visibility and Invisibility.....	164
Abbie – Caring for What is Hidden.....	166
Natalie – The Pineapple in Me.....	168
Marilyn – A Higher Standard.....	169
Poppy – First I Must Trust .....	171
Nicole – I Want to be Visible.....	174
JJ – Seeking History and Serenity.....	175
Nykol – My Tours of Duty.....	177

Nova – Here We Go Again!.....	179
CHAPTER SIX: Intertwining the Physical and Psychological: The Manifestation of the African-American Female Identity within the Built Educational Environment.....	
African-American Female Identity within the Built Educational Environment.....	182
I See Me in Thee: Reverence for Campus Aesthetics.....	182
Creating the First Impression.....	184
High Standards and Perspectives.....	185
Prestige of Place and Materials.....	191
Finding Strength and Resiliency in the Historic.....	193
I Will Survive: Finding Serenity in the Green Spaces.....	195
Bookmarks of Time: Developing a Sense of Self on the Red Brick Path.....	201
The Campus Stage: Navigating the Facades and Boundaries of Visibility and Invisibility.....	210
Center Stage: The Exteriors and Interiors of Buildings and Identities.....	212
Pushed onto Center Stage: Feeling Exposed in the Green.....	214
What You See is Not What You Get.....	218
Is this a Fashion Show or a Classroom? Socio-Economic Identity.....	222
Our Hair, Our Curves: Experiences in the Classroom, Residence hall, and Athletic Facilities.....	224
One Size Doesn't Fit All.....	225
Navigating the Back Stage: Does Visibility Come with a Price of Safety.....	229
The Boundaries of Campus Stage: The North Side and the South Side.....	233
CHAPTER SEVEN: Nurturing the Relationship between the Physical and the Psychological: Unearthing the African-American Female Identity within the Built Educational Environment.....	
African-American Female Identity within the Built Educational Environment.....	240
These Walls are Cared for, but I am Not: Concepts of Care and Neglect.....	240
Where Do I Learn?.....	242
Where Do I Socialize?.....	254
Where Do I Live?.....	258
Where Do I Survive?.....	261
Seeking out the Soulful, Hidden, and Quirky Spaces.....	267
Spaces that Speak to the Soul: The Newman Center for the Performing Arts and the Harpers Humanities Garden.....	268
The Harpers Humanities Garden.....	274
Spaces that are Hidden: The Driscoll Student Center.....	277
The Sidelines Pub and Sculpture: Finding a Sense of Self.....	278
The Basement of Driscoll Center South: Connecting with Others in the Community.....	284
Finding Self within the Quirkiness.....	287
Johnson-MacFarlane Hall: Finding a Sense of Community.....	291
Spaces Outside of the Built Educational Environment: The Learning Environment of the Home and the Virtual.....	293

CHAPTER EIGHT: Making Our Presence Known: Suggestions to Make the Built Educational Environment Reflective of the African-American Female Identity .....	300
History and Creative Whimsy Through the Use of Art .....	304
Architectural Elements to Represent Other Cultures.....	311
Transparency Through the Use of Natural Light and Glass.....	313
Sense of Warmth and Community through Use of Color and Scale.....	314
Creating Comfort in the Learning Environment Through the Use of Seating Arrangements and Smaller Scales.....	316
The Vision of the University of Denver.....	318
The Impact of the Study: Research Questions Revisited and Answered Through Collage .....	321
Data Representation Through Collage.....	323
Collage One.....	325
Collage Two.....	326
Collage Three.....	328
Collage Four.....	329
Research Themes Embedded in the Conceptual Model and Refined based on the Research Findings .....	330
Refined Conceptual Model.....	333
 CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION- The Relationship Between Space and Place .....	334
Navigating the Campus Stage: The Roles Performed and the Costumes Worn.....	335
The Impact of the External Context.....	337
The Subjectivity of the Experience.....	338
The Use of Portraiture to Study the Dynamics Between Space and Place.....	340
The Cost of Not Addressing the Built Educational Environment.....	341
Belief in the Institutional Mission Realized in the Daily Actions and Dreams of Higher Educaiton.....	343
Implications of the Study .....	345
Limitations of the Study.....	346
Further Research .....	347
 Afterword.....	350
 REFERENCES.....	352
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	364
 APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Timeline for Brown v. Board of Education.....	371
Appendix B: Study Announcement.....	372
Appendix C: Study Recruitment Email.....	373

Appendix D: Consent Forms.....	374
Appendix E: Online Screening Survey Protocol.....	378
Appendix F: Cognitive Interview Tour Protocol.....	379
Appendix G: Reflective Journaling and Photo Documentation Protocol.....	383
Appendix H: Final Reflective Interview Protocol.....	384

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Overview of Federal Legislation on Equal Access and Current Recommendations on Inclusivity to Physical Space Design Based Upon Multiple Identities .....48

Table 2: Edgar Schein’s Organizational Cultural Transmission Model – Three Levels .....64

Table 3: Key Players in the Cultural Transmission of the Built Environment .....79

Table 4: An Overview of the African-American Women Participants' Self-Ascribed Affiliations and Identities in the Online Screening Survey.....140

Table 5: Time on Campus and Activities .....145

Table 6: An Overview of the Nine Women Centered in the Portrait .....163

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Schema of Organizational Values .....66

Figure 2. Inclusive Excellence Scorecard .....72

Figure 3. Inclusive Excellence Change Model .....74

Figure 4. Semiotic Sign System of Physical Spaces .....78

Figure 5. Conceptual Model: Cultural Transmission of Misaligned Interpretations  
of the Built Educational Environment based on Race, Gender, and Power....81

Figure 6. Example of a Collage.....123

Figure 7. Refined Conceptual Model: Reclaiming of the Built Educational Environment  
by African-American Women.....333

## LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1. Emma Azalia Hackley circa 1900.....	128
Image 2. Grace Mabelle Andrews.....	129
Image 3. University of Denver, Class of 1908.....	130
Image 4. Dr. Condoleezza Rice, 1974.....	134
Image 5. Dr. Condoleezza Rice, University of Denver’s 1996 Founder’s Day.....	137
Image 6. Driscoll Green.....	165
Image 7. View from Abbie’s Window in Centennial Halls.....	166
Image 8. Pineapple above the West Entrance of the School for Hotel, Restuarant, and Management.....	169
Image 9. Inside the West Entrance of the School for Hotel, Restuarant, and Hotel Management.....	171
Image 10. West view from the Driscoll Student Center Bridge with the Penrose Library Reflected.....	173
Image 11. Buchtel Tower.....	175
Image 12. View of Sturm Hall from the Car.....	178
Image 13. Interior of classroom in Johnson-MacFarlane Hall.....	179
Image 14. View from the Driscoll Student Center Bridge above Evans Avenue.....	188
Image 15. On the Red Brick Path looking Towards the Mary Reed Building.....	188
Image 16. Buchtel Tower.....	190
Image 17. Sturm College of Law – Ricketson Law Building.....	190
Image 18. Harpers Humanities Garden.....	196
Image 19. Evans Chapel.....	198
Image 20. Harpers Humanities Garden.....	198

Image 21. Evans Chapel.....	199
Image 22. Nagel Hall.....	205
Image 23. Penrose Library.....	205
Image 24. University Hall.....	206
Image 25. Mary Reed Building Sign.....	213
Image 26. Students sitting and studying on the Driscoll Green and Patio of Sturm Hall.....	217
Image 27. Harpers Humanities Garden.....	219
Image 28. Alley next to the Women’s College looking towards Centennial Hall.....	232
Image 29. Alley next to the Women’s College looking towards Centennial Hall.....	232
Image 30. Northside of campus looking towards the Ritchie Center Tower.....	238
Image 31. Southside of campus looking towards John Greene Hall.....	238
Image 32. Driscoll Green, Sturm College of Law, and Fraternity Row.....	239
Image 33. Classroom inside of Sturm Hall.....	243
Image 34. Hallway Corridor inside of Sturm Hall.....	245
Image 35. Westside of Sturm Hall taken from inside Nykol’s Car.....	248
Image 36. Bike Rack outside of Sturm Hall.....	248
Image 37. Westside Entrance of Sturm Hall.....	249
Image 38. Streetview of Metro State College of Denver.....	249
Image 39. Driscoll Green and North entrance of the Driscoll Student Center.....	253
Image 40. Inside of the Driscoll Student Center Bridge.....	253
Image 41. Centennial Halls.....	262
Image 42. Nagel Hall.....	262

Image 43. Heading South on High Street.....	264
Image 44, Image 45, Image 46, and Image 47. Newman Center for the Performing Arts.....	269
Image 48. Harpers Humanities Garden.....	276
Image 49. Harpers Humanities Garden.....	276
Image 50. Driscoll Student Center.....	280
Image 51. Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning Sign.....	280
Image 52. Poetry in Steel (sculpture).....	283
Image 53. White Dome Chair Inside of the Penrose Library Lobby.....	289
Image 54. Basement of Penrose Library.....	289
Image 55. Classroom in Johnson-MacFarlane Hall.....	296
Image 56. Hallway Cooridor inside of Johnson-MacFarlane Hall.....	296
Image 57. Ceiling of Olin Hall.....	305
Image 58. Unnamed Sculpture in the Harpers Humanities Garden.....	305
Image 59. Alma Mater (sculpture).....	306
Image 60. Whispers (sculpture).....	309

## **Foreword**

“Out of the darkness comes the light. At that moment when one’s eyes begin to adjust, you can focus on the brilliance of the light itself or on the cracks that it reveals” (Krusemark, 2010). This portrait is comprised of both view points. As the portraitist, I must harness the ability to see the cracks and the light and to find the goodness out of the darkness. In this way, only can true emancipation be discovered and revealed. The narratives portrayed in this portrait will describe the varying levels of dark and light that the African-American women at the University of Denver felt about their experiences in, interactions within, and perceptions of their built educational environment. As a reader you will experience a portrait that is painted with different colors, textures, brush strokes, and styles. The portrait is framed from a historical context of African-American women at the University of Denver campus through modern day. The canvas of the portrait is created by the first African-American woman to begin her undergraduate studies at the institution to a group of women who are representatives of its current undergraduate and graduate student populations. Thereby, it presents a culmination and a combination of our journeys as African-American women within an educational environment where we are pioneers in the history of our institution.

The concepts of racial identity are just as diverse as the faces, words, emotions, and behaviors described within this portrait. As the portraitist, I chose to use the term ‘African-American’ in order to capture the current terminology of our modern day society. This term describes women who have direct African descent within their cultural background or have a multi-dimensional cultural heritage that includes African descent. Additionally, I chose the term in order to allow for the full inclusion of the women in this study who describe themselves as African-American, Black, biracial, and multiracial. This is a decision that allows for an empty canvas to be shaped by the stories and lives of African-American women in the academy.

I chose to focus my research inquiry on the experiences, interactions, and perceptions of those within the University of Denver community who identified in a similar manner to me as the portraitist. Why you may ask? As an aspiring portraitist, a balance of knowing and self-reflection are required when creating a portrait. I shared in their journey, an experience of an educational environment where I was not in the majority as an African-American woman. I could have opened my study up to all women of color within the study setting or all African-American students, faculty, and staff, which would include African-American men. However, as a qualitative researcher, I chose to focus my inquiry on a population that I could truly and authentically relate to. As a product of a private, liberal arts higher education at predominantly white institutions, I offered a lens that was shaped by personal experience. Additionally, from the work of scholars such as Brayboy (2004), Harris (2004), and Weismann (1992), we know that students of color and women experience architecture designed from

Eurocentric and male dominant canons uniquely. It is this uniqueness I sought to explore within the study setting from the African-American female narrative.

As an exploratory portrait focused upon the dynamic that occurs between African-American women and their built educational environment, the terms of ‘space’ and ‘place’ must be explained. Space is defined as the physical structure of the buildings and landscapes of the University of Denver campus. This includes the types of materials used to construct their physical structure whether they are red brick, marble, or copper, as well as its use of green space materials including trees, grass, rocks, and water. The next layer of the term ‘space’ includes its function. The importance of knowing what the space was designed for whether it be a space for storing books, such as a library, or a space where students live and sleep, such as a residence hall.

The transition to the term ‘place’ begins to explore the meaning, experiences, interactions, and perceptions one associates with a particular space. This involves the recognition and documentation of the historical, cultural, social, and political context of an individual’s sense of symbolism and memory. In essence, the term place explores how one psychologically reacts, interprets, and defines him or herself within a given space. In this particular study, one of the primary goals was to explore how African-American women experience, interact, and perceive the built educational environment of a predominantly white institution. Accordingly, the next goal was to explore whether the built educational environment had any significance based upon their racial and gender identities. Further, the study sought to understand if the space of the campus had any importance to the women’s senses of place, and if so, to what extent. Next, the study

explored whether there are specific elements within the built educational environment that are perceived to either reflect, or not reflect, their racial and gender identities. And finally, the study attempted to determine why African-American women at a predominantly white institution may, or may not, feel their identities were reflected within the built educational environment.

## **Chapter One: Introduction – The Origins of Values and Access to the Built Educational Environment**

### **Modern Day Context of Diversity in the Built Educational Environment**

The faces of American college and university students are the most diverse they have ever been in our four-hundred year history of higher education. This diversity is represented by race, gender, age, country of origin, and socio-economic status (Chapman, 2006; Maher & Tetreault, 2007). The colleges and universities of today need to consider issues of access and retention by traditional and non-traditional students who may, or may not, be US citizens with English as their primary language (Johns & Sipp, 2004). Therefore, the globalization of American higher education has created a modernization of university and college campuses in an effort to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> - century education (Abel, 2000). Alongside the refinement of institutional policies and practices of access and retention efforts, an overwhelming growth in the construction and expansion of the campus physical structure has occurred. American colleges and universities have spent over \$107 billion over the last 20 years in new construction and renovations with a majority of funding allocated towards new building projects (Zeisler & Abramson, 2000). The incorporation of new technologies within existing physical structures and the

expansion of college campuses have been made to accommodate the increasing student populations and their goals for a quality 21<sup>st</sup> - century education (Chapman, 2006). This leads us to consider how the physical space designs of our educational environments have impacted our notions of equal access.

The increasing diversity of the student population on American college and university campuses has called for institutions to develop diversity and multicultural programming and curriculum to integrate students from underrepresented populations (Butler, 1997; Valverde & Castenell, 1998). The physical space design of campuses have been developed under a model of establishing a residential community, one in which students from a variety of backgrounds could be exposed to learning and programming in an effort to form a true campus community (Chapman, 2006; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005). Additionally, classrooms as learning environments have been considered as conduits for ensuring students experience equal and fair learning practices based on curriculum standards and pedagogical approaches (Johns & Sipp, 2004). Therefore, the primary purpose of this portrait is to investigate the perceptions of the built educational environment based upon one's racial and gender identities.

### **Research Questions**

Specifically this portrait seeks to address the following questions of inquiry.

1. How do African-American women experience, interact with, and perceive the built environment of a predominantly white institution based on their racial and gender identities?
2. What importance do African-American women place on the built environment?

3. What specific elements within the built environment reflect, or don't reflect, their racial and gender identities?
4. Why may African-American women feel their identities are, or are not reflected, within the built environment of a predominantly white institution?

### **Defining Space as an Active Participant in Providing Equal Access**

Space, like language, is socially constructed; and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society. The uses of both language and space contribute to the power of some groups over others and the maintenance of human inequality. (Weisman, 1992, p. 2)

Space has traditionally been defined through the elements of function. To envision a space with regard to its purpose of providing shelter and safety dates back to the beginning of humankind. However, in a modern society with modern notions, space is investigated by both its function and symbolism (Bess & Dee, 2008; Weismann, 1992). Certainly one could argue that during the time of the Greeks and Romans, the monuments and statues that adorned their physical inhabitants were not built simply for the function of providing shelter. These physical spaces were erected as visual symbols to portray their homage to the Gods as well as to represent the values of their identity (Lorcin, 2000; Sibley, 1995). Similarly, I argue that the use of physical space to symbolize values, beliefs, and ideas has been embedded within the architectural design of American higher education institutions (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Strange & Banning, 2001). The very notion of the American campus was founded on the ideas of

the classical times of the Greeks and Romans. In essence, cultural rulers utilized physical spaces and objects to serve as visual ideologies in order to colonize other cultures under one identity (Lorcin, 2000).

When we consider the power physical spaces hold to define one's sense of place in the world, we cannot deny the dominant culture's values and beliefs are often embedded in their construction. In this way, those in power are enabled to build physical spaces that reflect both their ideas of national identity and their own transcendence within the physical nature of the structures. Thus, the ruling class defines the language of physical space that ultimately defines one's sense of place within the social construction of that culture (Gallagher, 1993).

### **The Influence of Colonialism on the American Campus Ideal**

In the case of colonialism, the British Empire enacted several levels of cultural transformation within the colonies (Lorcin, 2000). The Empire's first point of reason to colonize a region was the inhabitants' lack of Western education and this served as a justification for transforming the region's physical spaces and landscapes in an effort to educate them into the new Western culture (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008). The British educational system provided examples that drew from the historic Roman Empire, one which was founded under the tenets of finding justice and equality for all under the hierarchal hold of the ruling class (Gallagher, 1993). In addition, the British were using the Roman Empire as an idea and as a logical justification to establish their own empire (Lorcin, 2000). They believed, as the heirs of the Roman Empire, that they could and also should have an empire of their own. Therefore, the British Empire reconstructed the ideas

of the Roman Empire by reconstructing the colony's physical spaces into a Romanesque architectural style and thereby, resurrected their hierarchal power (Marks & Grigor, 1986).

When we reflect on the ideological foundations of the American campus we must consider the ideas that are embedded within the physical brick and soil foundations. Harvard University was the first college established in the United States in 1636 (Pearce, 2001). Named after its benefactor John Harvard, a young minister, the institution was established to train the young men of the newly settled Pilgrims for lives dedicated to the ministry. If we traced the inspiration for the original buildings of Harvard University, we would be led back to the British Empirical ideas of higher education. The 15<sup>th</sup> - century chapel of Kings College in Cambridge, England served as the initial model of the University's chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In this way, we see a direct translation of the name of the town and the architectural style and language embedded within the physical structures of the campus.

At this time in our American history, the Pilgrims sought religious freedom from the British Empire and found opportunity in America. In order to fulfill this concept of freedom, their drive to establish themselves in a new land required reference to the land they had left. Not only were the ideas of religiousness embedded in their daily lives, they were embedded in the physical structures that they erected. One must consider that their architectural references were based on the geographical and cultural landscapes they had escaped from in England. Through their own colonization of the native population, they generally disregarded the physical structures of the Native Americans and reconstructed a

new American identity based on British models and ideas. Therefore, we cannot deny the physical structures of the colonial homes and college campuses were simply erected for their functionality within the new American environment, rather they were erected to stand as visual symbols of their cultural identity and ideology as Americans.

Markus and Cameron (2002) purport that a dialogue of messages occurs between built spaces and those who experience them. Within this dialogue one must have a preexisting understanding of knowledge to interpret the built space or rather knowledge of the language of the messages that are embedded within it. For example, if we consider Harvard University as a built representation of our concept of American higher education, we cannot deny that its placement outside of the urban center in a more serene and quiet countryside, sends a message of purity and control (Thelin, 2001). Sibley (1995) asserts that we cannot ignore that the placement of colleges and universities in the countryside versus the urban center constructs a physical boundary of who could access these spaces. Further, he emphasizes this creates a dynamic between those of the ruling class and the 'other'. The other tended to be those from the non-dominant cultural groups. If we consider the placement of Harvard University, we cannot deny that those who had the financial means to travel to the campus or who were living on the lands that were in close vicinity, were the only ones who were able to escape from the debaucheries of the urban center into the serene countryside. This ability to escape allowed them to focus on their higher education and moral values of purity. In this way, the very placement of college and university campuses can communicate messages regarding who can access them.

The University of Virginia (UVA) is touted as the first ‘American’ university (Marks & Grigor, 1986; Pearce, 2001). Thomas Jefferson sought to create an American model of higher education. Jefferson felt America had no historic past to serve as a foundation for the American ideal. Therefore, he referenced the time of the Roman Empire to create a past for the American campus. He utilized the concepts of neoclassicism to create a physical manifestation of the Roman values of learning and honor into the campus design. Instead of Roman temples, he built houses for faculty. The houses served as temples to honor the faculty as deities. In contrast, students were placed in barrack-like housing to experience the rigors of higher learning, just like the Spartans (Marks & Grigor, 1986). This replicated the ideas of order, control, and hierarchy. The original library of UVA was modeled after the Parthenon, but at a half scale. The circular domed building was placed at the top of the lawn to symbolize the purpose of the institution, to educate.

The idea of the American campus was founded in values of religious and academic freedom (Thelin, 2001). These values were transmitted to those who had access to the institutions of higher education. Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> - century the majority of those who held this access were predominantly white men. Therefore, we must contemplate whether the original physical structures and continued renditions of architectural style changed their embedded messages at the same pace as the diversification of the student, faculty, and staff populations over time. One could argue the language of space is purely based on historical, cultural, social, and political context and that buildings are merely objects not representations. However, we cannot dismiss the architectural models,

canons, and ideas of aesthetic representation that the architects were and still refer to are dominantly Eurocentric and patriarchal (Markus and Cameron, 2002; Weisman, 1992). Certainly when we reflect on the Colonial period of the British Empire, the architects were referring to the physical structures of Roman monuments and statues to replicate the values and ideas of that time. These values permeated the physical space design and construction of both Harvard University and the University of Virginia, thereby, serving as a means to embed the classical ideas of the Roman Empire into the physical structures of American campuses. This served to establish a new foundational past for America both philosophically and literally.

### **The Counter-narrative: Slavery Denies Access to Higher Education**

The classical ideas embedded within America's concept of higher education did not translate to our notion of equal access. As we transition to the next section which reflects on the historical event of the first African-American woman to obtain a degree of higher education, we cannot dismiss our American history of slavery. Alongside the new American ideas of religious and academic freedom from the British Empire came the displacement and abduction of many African people to service the needs of the new Americans. This service required slaves to adapt to a new geography, landscape, culture, language, and life. During this period, slaves were denied access to the ideas of American education; however, some of the early Americans, primarily the Quakers, believed in one's ability to learn to read the Bible (Nieves & Alexander, 2008). The Bible served as a means to find a way to survive and to navigate the new American culture without the same freedoms as the dominant culture. African-Americans found strength and counsel in

religious scriptures and even inspiration to learn a new English language to express our grief and pain. The religious ideas of the new Americans gave us hope and eventually freedom to pursue education of our own free will. But our journey, as African-American people, was not so simple.

While our concepts of equal access to education have changed over time, I argue that the messages of exclusion have not changed within the physical structures of our American campuses. Instead the built educational environment maintains its original messages and language, ones that were designed for the predominant white culture. As Nieves (2008) stated, “Understanding that a segregated landscape engenders subversive spatial practice that often remains buried or hidden to the ‘trained historian’ requires our [ability to] theorize differently about landscape and the ideological significance of place for African-Americans” (pp. 305-306). Thus, the built environment of the American campus does not consider how the language and messages are experienced, perceived, and interpreted differently based on the diversity of racial, gender, and cultural identities our student, faculty, and staff populations possess (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008; Weisman, 1992).

### **Looking to Our Past: The First African-American Woman to Access Higher Education**

Oberlin College was the first predominantly white institution to admit African-Americans starting in 1833, when it was still illegal for slaves to receive a formal education (Merrill, 2003). When Mary Jane Patterson stepped onto the Oberlin College campus in the year 1858, her presence represented a tremendous step for all African-

American women within the United States. Ms. Patterson received her bachelor's degree in 1862, during the Civil War, and just one year before the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. However, the revival movement of 1857 – 1858 in the Northern United States literally preached the ills of slavery and strived to eliminate it all together (Jeynes, 2007). It believed in the foundations of religion and through this perspective everyone was entitled to pursue a free life and access to education. In other words, education was a God-given right. There is no doubt her achievement can be attributed to the passion, persistence, and perseverance of her parents and those who believed in the revival movement. This way of thinking allowed her to break the physical bounds of Southern slavery into the free spaces of Northern education. Ms. Patterson's accomplishment symbolized possibility for all African-Americans in our country, the possibility to access the physical spaces we have been denied.

At the time Ms. Patterson took her first footsteps onto the Oberlin College campus, 241 colleges and universities existed in our country (Thelin, 2001). Up until this historical date, the majority of these campuses were comprised predominantly with white men. If we consider the historical foundations of American campus architecture, we see an emulation of the Oxford- Cambridge Ideal of architectural representation (Thelin, 2001). The Oxford-Cambridge Ideal was founded in the traditions of morality that aspired to provide a life of the mind and of spiritual uplift. But this Ideal was reserved to those who identified as white and male. Their values were embedded into the colonial colleges of America and continued to influence our ideals of what campuses should look like. Aspects of quadrangles and the use of the collegial gothic-inspired architectural

style, alongside Greek-styled and Roman-styled busts, and paintings of white male presidents became key physical design attributes of any college or university during our early American history (Thelin, 2001). These physical attributes symbolized and signified ideas of intellect, spirituality, and civility.

As an African-American woman, Ms. Patterson's racial and gender identities were not reflected within these components of the built educational environment of Oberlin College. Rather, the institution reflected the cultural ideas and architectural language of the dominant culture into its physical spaces. In this way, Ms. Patterson experienced a physical environment that was not designed for her. The environment was designed for the white men who learned within its classrooms, resided in its fraternity houses, worshipped in its chapel, and socialized in its dance hall. Therefore, the built educational environments of predominantly white institutions have continued to perpetuate these ideas today.

### **Centering the African-American Women's Experience and Perception of the Built Environment of the Academy through Critical Black Feminism**

While institutions of higher education have granted physical access to African-American women over the last 150 years, their presence on campus has not been readily reflected within the physical design of the walls in which they learn, especially when we consider predominantly white institutions. In examining the historical foundations of institutions of higher education, it is difficult to dismiss the fact that institutions consciously embed their values and basic assumptions within their physical manifestation (Bess & Dee, 2008). The architectural design of a campus reflects its history as well as its

future aspirations (Markus & Cameron, 2002). In this way, the physical design of a campus plays an important role in shaping and informing its community members of what education looks and feels like (Strange & Banning, 2001). However, the message of predominantly white institutions still remains founded on the voice and values of those in power. In order for African-American women to succeed in the academy, they have adapted their racial and gender identities to fit the predominant culture (Fordham, 1993). As Patricia Williams, Professor at Harvard Law School reflects:

My Mother was asking me not to look to her as a role model. She was devaluing that part of herself that was not Harvard and refocusing my vision to that part of herself that was hard-edged, proficient, and Western. She hid the lonely, black, defiled-female part of herself and pushed me forward as the projection of a competent self, a cool rather than despairing self, a masculine rather than a feminine self. (Williams, 1988, 2004-2005, p. 20)

Classrooms on American college and university campuses are continuing to diversify with respect to race as well as socio-economic class, country of origin, able-bodiedness, and sexual orientation (Johns & Sipp, 2004). However, the dominant culture still has a strong presence. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education's 2008 – 2009 Almanac, 65% of students enrolled in colleges and universities, during the fall of 2006 were identified as White (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008). Whereas, 31% of students were identified as Asian, Black, and Hispanic, while 4% were considered international. African-American women have obtained 8% of all associate's degrees, 6%

of all bachelor's degrees, 7% of all master's degrees, 4% of all doctoral degrees, and just 1% of all full-time faculty positions (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2009).

Therefore in this portrait, I argue the racial and gender identities of African-American women are not represented within the built educational environment of predominantly white institutions. Further, when we consider the historical foundations of American colleges and universities, both figuratively and literally, it is clear that the physical spaces were designed from a Eurocentric model. This model does not account for the unique experiences and perceptions of people with different racial and gender backgrounds, rather it perpetuates the white male standard of defining the function and symbolism of space (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008; Weisman, 1992). The interaction between humans and their environment cannot be dismissed in our concept of the American campus. Therefore, it follows as a racial and gender minority group, African-American women are navigating the built educational environment of American campuses in a unique manner. In order to understand what type of manner, I utilized a critical black feminist lens. This lens allows for the investigation of lived experiences of black women in an American context through the intersection of their racial and gender identities.

### **Critical Black Feminism**

“Critical scholarship on whiteness is not an assault on white people per se: it is an assault on the socially constructed and constantly reinforced power of white identifications and interests” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pp. 58–60). Critical Black Feminism (CBF) is historically rooted in the study of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Developed in the late 1980s from the legal field, CRT also has been extended to the areas of history, sociology, ethnic studies, and women's studies (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). The basic CRT model consists of five elements focusing on:

- (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination,
- (b) the challenge to dominant ideology,
- (c) the commitment to social justice,
- (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and
- (e) the transdisciplinary perspective.

(Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, in press; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000 as cited by Solórzano, 2000, p. 63)

Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1998) are credited with introducing CRT to the field of education in 1995. CRT has been utilized to research issues within the social system of education, specifically to explore issues of power, oppression, and discrimination of women and people of color. According to Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, and Lynn (2004), CRT has become one of the major theories in educational research focused on race and racism within school structures, practices and narratives.

Inspired by the tenets of CRT, Few (2007) utilizes Black Feminism Theory (BFT) to focus on the specific social inequities Black women experience within institutions that impose a normative gaze. The normative gaze is defined as “Western, White, male, and middle class...one that holds a positivist presumption” (Few, 2007, p. 453). She further

emphasizes that Black Feminism is a theory that creates a space where the social, political, cultural, geographical, and psychological aspects of Black women can be considered. In this way, the theory allows for the consideration of the complex intersectionality that Black women face within systems of power and oppression.

Ladson-Billings (1998) highlights that concepts of knowing are socially constructed through a dominant world view that denies and omits the realities of those from non-dominant groups. Therefore, CRT allows for the views of African-American women within predominantly white institutions to express their realities as counter-narratives. Bernal (2002) utilizes CRT to inform her research with Latino and Latina students to provide “critical raced-gendered epistemologies that offer unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color” (p. 107).

The basic tenets of critical race theory that are pertinent to understanding the genesis of critical race feminism (CRF) are:

- (a) (racial and/or ethnic) identity is a product of social thought and is not objective, inherent, fixed, or necessarily biological;
- (b) individuals have potentially conflicting overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances;
- (c) racial and/or ethnic individuals and groups negotiate intersectionality simultaneously in their lives in relation to other groups and within the groups with which individuals are affiliated;

(d) and minority status presumes a competence for minority writers and theorists to speak about race and the experiences of multiple oppressions without essentializing those experiences. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001)

Crenshaw (1994) purports that in order to understand the Black female experience we must understand how both her racial and gender identities interplay into her whole experience. In this way, she merges both identities in order to “reveal how Black women are theoretically erased” by the single axis analysis of the system of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1994, p. 41). Wiegman’s (1995) work has opened our eyes to the mask of inclusion. He argues that the concept of equal rights serving as one banner under which all can achieve the American dream is false. Therefore, through the lens of CRT and specifically Critical Black Feminism, I was able to intersect the social, political, historical, physical, and psychological constructions of the racial and gender identities of African-American women within their predominantly white campus.

While the tenets of Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, and Black Feminism cannot predict African-American women’s experiences, interactions, and perceptions within a predominantly white institution, the theories automatically provided a lens that allowed their narratives to be centered (Few, 2007). The theories provide a new context outside of the universal or white standards of normalization. Through the descriptive and texturized writings of Black feminist scholars, the Black female voice finds emancipation and identity saliency and interpretation. Further research conducted by scholars who share a familiar racial and gender identity can bring to the surface what is hidden to a deeper understanding that is necessary to establishing trust and

interpretations of one's unique experience within the academy (Few, 2007). While some may see an inherent bias in this statement, I have addressed issues of subjectivity within in the Methodology and Research Design chapter of this dissertation (see chapter 3).

### **The Human Built Environment Interaction and Issues of Race and Gender**

Preempting the development of Critical Race Theory, an interest in the study of environmental cognition took importance within the fields of human ecology, environmental psychology, sociology, and geography during the 1970s. This area of inquiry focused on how one acquires knowledge of their environment through their interactions and experiences within it (Golledge, 1993; Moos, 1986). Golledge (1993) emphasizes that interactions can be direct and active and indirect and passive, yet one learns how to navigate and perform in the environment based upon one's ability to access information. We learn by experience, whether by observing others performing within the environment or through our own interaction with an environment over time.

A majority of studies sought to investigate how our experiences, interactions, and behaviors differed between the public and private spaces of our lives. With regard to public spaces, our perceptions of city streets, public parks, and shopping malls were compared with our specific communities, neighborhoods, and personal homes. During the mid-1970s into the 1990s college students' perceptions of their college campus became an area of great research focus (Atkin & Krinsky, 1996; Cole, 2005; Devlin, Donovan, Nicolov, Nold, & Zandan, 2008; Drew, 1971). Specifically, this line of investigation was concerned with students' interactions in their classrooms and residence halls. If we apply the tenets of the person-environment dynamic, we could investigate

how a new student navigates his or her new educational environment. For example, if a newly admitted student was searching for their classroom, we may assume they may follow the crowd, look for a campus map, or ask another student for directions. But what if the student noticed there were no other people that looked like him or her on campus? Further, what if the student had never been on a college campus and as a result, was unable to negotiate where the bookstore, gymnasium, or library was located? Surely after spending some time within the campus environment and developing new relationships with students and faculty he or she would have a better understanding.

The above scenario assumes that the student will be able to develop relationships with other students and their faculty members. It also assumes that by exchanging information or learning how to read the campus map, assuming one is provided, that newly admitted students will be able to navigate and learn how to interact with his or her environment. The scenario also assumes that by establishing relationships and learning how to read the language of the college that the student will be successful in their interaction with the environment. However, what if we added the fact that the newly admitted student's college environment was filled with other sources of information, such as portraits of prior deans who were all white men in his or her classroom building or featured photos of student athletes who were also from a predominantly white culture. Further, what if they had the luck of having one faculty member of color, but discovered when seeking out the faculty member they were located in the basement of the classroom building. Finally, what if the student sought out the support and resources provided by the institution's Center for Multicultural Programs, only to discover its physical location was

several blocks off campus. The refined scenario illustrates how environmental cues can impact one's sense of identity based upon one's ability to learn how to navigate one's environment. Golledge (1993) emphasizes this point when he stated:

Individuals add salience to the things and events they experience. Weight or saliencies may be attached because of functional characteristics. Thus, a blind pedestrian may give high salience to permanently fixed waste baskets, while the sighted pedestrian ignores them and instead gives weight to architectural design or color. A member of a religious sect may give high salience to his/her place of worship; to others that occurrence may be just another building. (pp. 38-39)

Thus, we must consider the impact of one's identity and the saliency of that identity in regard to their perceptions of their physical environment. As a result, "it is reasonable to accept that a given physical or built environment means many different things to the people who view it, experience it, or use it" (p. 51). For that reason, the ultimate goals of environmental cognition studies are to identify whether people hold common perceptions of specific places. While we could make the assumption that if we polled random students and faculty at any given college or university and asked them to what this place was used for, we may assume they would all reply it was a place for higher learning. However, if we dig further utilizing the aforementioned knowledge that people do experience their environment differently based on their identities and asked the same group of students and faculty if they felt welcomed in the learning environment, we would most likely receive differing answers. This logic is echoed in Gärling and Evans' (1991) recommendations on how to assess one's cognitive uses, reactions, and responses to physical and built environments. They identify three initial factors of:

- 1) identification of what is there in reality;
- 2) specification and definition of the appropriate attributes that allow description or assessment of the environment to take place;
- 3) and selection of indicators of quantity of attributes so that some measure of magnitude of occurrence can be made. (pp. 51- 52)

Gärling and Evans also emphasize, and perhaps most importantly to the nature of this portrait's topic, "[That] in assessing physical environments, it is mandatory to include both objectively and subjectively derived indicators" (p. 52). In addition, I would argue that in this assessment of both the objective and subjective elements alongside one's perceptions that it is necessary to understand the intentions behind the design of the physical environment. Further, within the design, an understanding of the intentions of its embedded messages, signals, and values are necessary. Moreover, it is important to take into context the users of a specific environment, especially when it is a physical space that is designed for public use and consumption. In this way, I argue that we must dissect the intentions of those who designed the space, not only for its function, but as a symbol of meaning. Next we must determine how the users of the space perceive the embedded meaning, based upon their constructs of meaning. When we further consider what Strange and Banning (2001) refer to as three possible impacts of the design of the physical environment's impact on one's behavior, we can begin to understand the complexity of these dynamics.

Determinism: The physical design of an environment determines one's behavior.

Possibilism: The physical design of an environment makes behavior possible.

Probabilism: The physical design of an environment makes behavior probable.

For that reason, the design of our physical environment “supports the intuitive notion that the campus physical environment, with its designs and spaces, can influence and make a difference in the lives of students, faculty, and visitors to the campus” (p. 15).

### **Perceptions of Space by Race**

McNeil and Wapner conducted a study in 1974 on the campus of a predominantly white institution to compare white and black female college students' verbal and pictorial representations of their college environment (Demick, Wapner, Yamamoto, and Minami, 2000). The study investigated whether students' racial identity saliency and their perceived role within the environment would differentiate their representations. McNeil and Wapner's findings revealed what they refer to as “striking differences between the two groups in the pictorial representations of their environments” (p. 211). The pictorial representation of a white student emphasized positive social interactions with others within the environment and a sense of home. Whereas, the pictorial representation of a black student expressed feelings of isolation, no interaction, and a sense of the environment as a wintry, cold prison. This study serves as a compelling example of how one's identity can impact one's perceptions and interactions of their environment.

This example was not an isolated study whose results were unique; Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy conducted a similar study in the 1990s that explored the experiences of Native American students in the environments of Ivy League institutions.

Brayboy's (2004) study found that the students experienced marginalization, surveillance, and oppression in relation to their campus environments based upon their interactions with those within the environment. Further, the study found that students were seeking out safety in private spaces to reestablish and express their Native American identities. In one case, a student spent a majority of his time in his dorm room and in local pub away from the campus, to find his sense of place. Another student found a sense of place at the campus gymnasium. Although this student found herself as the only female student in the gym, the male students seemed to provide her space and respect for her athletic abilities. Students, in this study, navigated the lines of visibility and invisibility in their interactions with the community as well as the private and public spaces of their environment to achieve their goal of obtaining a higher education.

“What can space tell us about race?” (Harris, 2004, p. 3). In March 2004, Dr. Dianne Harris organized a symposium at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign titled, *Constructing Race: The Built Environment, Minoritization, and Racism in the United States*. The purpose of the symposium was to “examin[e] the role of the built environment in the fortification of social constructions of racial identities and modalities of racism” (p. 2). Scholars from across the country presented papers that “focused on the spatial apparatuses that not only reflect, but reinforce and even create racially-based practices of exclusion, oppression, minoritization, and privilege in a variety of realms” (p. 2). Harris' (2004) research focused on how private homes and landscapes could serve as frameworks to shape one's racial and class identities regarding Black social class identity. Other scholars presented research that focused on the creation of racialized

white and non-white public spaces and the role that we have as citizens as well as the architects, policy makers, patrons, and government, in this process. Harris cites Angela Davis, a black activist, in her beliefs that racism still exists in our country. While it may not be expressed overtly it still lives “underground” within our public institutions that are part of our daily lives (Harris, 2004, p. 3). While Harris expresses her agreement with Davis, she notes that her focus is on the people and the social systems and structures of our institutions which disregard the power of the physical structures that the social systems construct. Thereby, Harris emphasizes we must not deem physical structures as neutral spaces of pure function, but rather as physical manifestations of social systems and concepts such as racism. If a dominant racial and class group maintains power and control of the financial resources, architectural profession, and canons of design to create our built spaces and landscapes, one cannot dismiss how physical spaces can become physical embodiments of the dominant groups’ values and beliefs. In this way, the built space acts as an agent to the development of one’s racial, class, gender, and other identities within our American society. Further, the built environment acts as a physical structure to house the systems of racism, oppression, seclusion and exclusion. For that reason, Harris challenges us to:

Question the spatial distribution of privilege and link social justice to environmental or spatial justice which can only be done through careful examination of the spaces themselves...in order to gain a better understanding of what George Lipsitz refers to in this issue as the various ‘spatial imaginaries’ that are linked to the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. (pp. 3-4)

## **Perceptions of Space by Gender**

Weisman (1992) has focused her research on the dynamics between physical space and gender through a feminist lens of man-made built environments. In her book, *Discrimination by Design*, she discusses the embedded male dominant identity in both the public and private spaces of our daily lives. She emphasizes the female identity is placed in a role of domesticity within both spheres. She further purports that, “gender, race, class, occupation, and other factors like age and disability collectively create distinctly different spatial experiences for people, even within the same environmental setting” (p. 40). Weisman also emphasizes that the design reinforces a social hierarchy of power of some groups over others, namely those from the dominant group over those that are perceived as less dominant. Consequently, the physical space serves as a physical manifestation of a social hierarchy of the dominant standards of identity, primarily white and male, over other groups both in the public and private spaces of our lives. This is cause for concern and further investigation as to whether we actually perceive the embedded messages within our physical environments.

Weisman (1992) discusses the physical attributes that Gärling and Evans’ (1991) recommend as part of the assessment of a built environment by noting the importance of height within American architecture. She refers to the concept of the cityscape, one that is developed by towers made of glass, concrete, and steel. The height of downtown sky- scrapers can be seen not only in the United States, but across the globe. Certainly, if we consider the recent development of a 1.55 mile structure in Dubai that serves as an example of the tallest building in the world, we can see the ever increasing competition

for size and stature within the global architectural community. However, these buildings serve another purpose, one that serves to symbolize a cultural identity, and even further one that represents the male identity of that culture. Weisman interprets this competition for height as a means to establish one's cultural social status within the global hierarchy. Additionally, the buildings symbolize the accomplishments of male power upon the world's landscape. She insists this symbolism is "antihuman, environmentally irresponsible man-made mountains" and further purports that this "architectural machismo is not amusing" (p. 41). Weisman's critique is centered from the lens of feminism, this lens places gender and sexism at the center of its inquiry. It dismisses that man-made structures are neutral spaces in which both men and women can interact equally, regardless of their gender and other identities. The feminist lens acknowledges that architecture serves as "a record of deeds done by those who have had the power to build" (p. 2). For that reason, when we consider the African-American women in this portrait, we must consider how their racial and gender identities are situated within the context of an institution designed by white men.

### **Students of Color's Experiences in the Academy**

The diversity of our campus populations requires educational institutions to embed cultural context within their curriculum, pedagogical practices, and the environment itself (Brayboy, 2004). Additionally, educational environments must ensure a harmonious balance between a student's physical and psychological access to learning (Fielden, 2004). We must consider the impact of the design of our campus environments. Campuses are not merely physically constructed spaces in which students and teachers

meet to perform the learning process; they are physical renditions of an institution's educational value system (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008). Therefore, we must consider the impact of those values on the students' learning process.

In the late 1980s, an increase of residence life units across many campuses were charged with responsibility for ensuring staff and resident students were exposed to diversity and multicultural training, in order to create a welcoming environment on the college campuses across the country (Valverde & Castenell, 1998). Where the academic units and affirmative action left off, institutional centers for diversity in partnership with residence life, became the primary location for building programs, training, and spaces on campus that were considered inclusive. In fact, many studies of the resident student experience within their residence hall were generated in late 1970s and 1980s. These studies provided insight into students' overall academic and personal experiences within their resident communities (Atkin & Krinsky, 1996; Cole, 2005; Devlin, Donovan, Nicolov, Nold, & Zandan, 2008; Drew, 1971; Moos, 1986). The recent work of Millem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) indicated that the location and architectural design of a residence hall can limit student interactions. Within these buildings, the space allocation given to community space and dining space can create further limited interaction. As a result, the built educational environment can transmit an institution's values on a student's sense of belonging, sense of community, safety, respect and overall interaction. Furthermore, in theory, one could argue that students' perceptions of feeling welcomed or unwelcomed, in relation to issues of equal access and inclusivity, are embedded in the

manner in which we design our built educational environments (Strange & Banning, 2001; Weisman, 1992).

Recent studies of students of color's experience within institutions of higher education, specifically those that are predominantly white institutions, have presented issues of invisibility, microaggressions, tokenism, harassment, and outright discrimination (Brayboy, 2004; Solórzano, 2000; Sue et al., 2008). Certainly student populations on American campuses are continuing to diversify and are predicted to become predominantly of color (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008). However, students of color still report experiences of a non-welcoming climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In this regard, students of color have utilized the physical spaces of American college and university campuses to exist between the realms of visibility and invisibility, in order to navigate the social system.

In Solórzano's (2000) investigation of African-American college students' experience with microaggressions, "both verbal and nonverbal assumptions about African-American students lowered [their] expectations" (p. 66). Further, it was reported that the students perceived their campus climate as racially tense both inside the classroom and outside. In his study, he developed a model that portrays the impact that racial microaggressions and the sense of invisibility can have on a students' academic and social spaces within the academy. If a student experiences microaggressions within the classroom setting – a setting that is deemed as neutral and welcoming for all students – their sense of visibility can diminish into invisibility. This in turn, impacts their sense of trust of the academic space and ultimately, may impact where they may seek out social

interactions inside and outside of the academy. If a student has a negative experience within the classroom setting, this may impact his or her willingness to seek out other social spaces, to compensate for his or her desire to find a sense of place. For example, an African-American student who is experiencing a negative classroom environment may seek out the social space of a Center for Multicultural Programs to connect and gain a sense of identity and respect. However, if an institution does not host such a space, or if the space is located on the fringes of the campus boundary, this can send a signal to the student about the institution's value of their racial identity. Ultimately, this can impact a student's sense of place based upon the academic and social spaces the institution defines for him or her.

Brayboy (2004) found similar experiences of Native American students studying at elite institutions. The sense of visibility and invisibility and the students' navigation of the physical spaces came to the surface. Their purposeful selection of spaces to either avoid or to seek out interaction with others became evident based upon their experiences in these spaces. For that reason, a student's interaction with others within the space certainly leaves an impression on the student's sense of place and respect for his or her identity. However, I argue we cannot assume the physical structures that students interact with can be defined as innocent or neutral.

Sue et al. (2008) investigated black students' perceptions and experiences with racial microaggressions in relation to the campus climate. Racial microaggressions are described as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or

negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group, and are expressed in three forms: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations” (p. 330). Sue et al. (2008)

define the three behaviors as:

- Microassaults are defined as: most similar to what has been called *old-fashioned racism* because their expression is deliberate, conscious, and explicit.
- Microinsults can be defined as actions (verbal, nonverbal, or environmental) that convey insensitivity, are rude, or directly demean a person’s racial identity or heritage.
- Microinvalidations are actions that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiences of people of color. (p. 330-331)

Six themes were found that served to illuminate the students’ experiences with racial microaggressions. The themes included intellectual inferiority, second-class citizenship, criminality, inferior status, universality of the shared black American experience, and the superiority of white cultural values and communication styles (Sue et al., 2008). This echoes the experiences found by the research conducted by Solórzano (2000) and Brayboy (2004) as well as the experiences of African-American female faculty in the aforementioned section. This leaves us with a collective experience of invisibility, tokenized visibility, marginalization, and oppression. What I investigated with this study was an exploration of how the physical space designs of the institution, a space in which my research participants learned and resided in, impacted their experience even further.

It is important to note, all the aforementioned research inquiries by Solórzano (2000), Brayboy (2004), and Sue et al. (2008) utilized qualitative methods to gather the

authentic experiences of students. The qualitative research approach allows for the exploration of social conditions by giving voice to those who have traditionally been marginalized. Therefore, I utilized the qualitative methodology of portraiture that I will describe in the Methodology and Research Design chapter (see chapter 3).

### **The Diversity Pipeline into the Architectural Profession**

In 2008, Marshall Purnell became the first African-American president of the American Institute of Architects. In an interview in July 2006, after receiving his initial nomination, Purnell brought forth the dynamics of race and architecture as one of his primary platforms (Murdock, 2006). He focused on the lack of women, African-Americans and Latinos/as entering the profession. He expressed the need for the AIA to become more present in high schools, especially in urban areas, to promote the field. Purnell expressed the importance of ensuring those doing the promotion should ideally look like the populations they are trying to attract. However he notes “it’s going to take more than diverse faces doing the recruiting and offering scholarships” (Murdock, 2006, ¶ 8). Students have noticed the lack of those who look like them in higher level areas of the profession as principals and chief architects. This brings the realization that the power structures of racism exist in the profession itself. Purnell emphasizes that 1 percent of the AIA membership identifies as African-American. When asked whether he thought the field itself was ‘too conservative’ to attract future African-American and Latino/a students to the profession, he cites examples of other creative forms of artistic expression in which minorities have excelled, such as music. He refers to the art of jazz and hip-hop as prime examples of genres that have captivated the creative talents of African-

Americans and he notes that the same tenets of creativity exist within the architectural field (Murdock, 2006).

There is a sign of hope. In 1999, Peter Kountz piloted a new charter school of Architecture and Design (CHAD) to attract high school students from African-American and Latino backgrounds. In a recent article featured by the American Institute of Architects, Ryan Brown, an African-American male student expressed his frustration with his training at the school. After a meeting with Purnell, he regained his confidence and sense of purpose to continue on, stating “I got mad at myself when I realized it was that easy” (Murdock, 2009, ¶ 2). While many may consider CHAD a model to begin filling up the pipeline with future diverse architects, it may be premature (Murdock, 2009). Like any other type of organization, especially a charter school, the reliance on funding and student interest is keys to their success. CHAD has a student body that is 85 percent African-American and more than 90 percent of its student body qualifies for the free lunch program (Murdock, 2009). I believe this will inspire and provide motivation for African-American students to become interested in the field of architecture. As a result, the graduates of CHAD will have the opportunity to bring compositional diversity to the field of architecture. My hope is that they will be trained to challenge our notions of existing architectural canons as they continue to pursue their professional education.

The Priestley School of Architecture and Construction in New Orleans and the Phelps Architecture Construction Engineering High School in Washington, D.C. share similar missions and student body profiles to CHAD. However despite Whitney Young’s famous address for the need to diversify the profession at the AIA National Convention

of 1968, the profession continues to remain predominantly white. Charter schools and mentorship programs have provide a foundation to begin to build the pipeline to funnel the future generations of African-American, Latino, and Asian-American and Native American architects; however, a leak has been discovered in the pipeline. This leak occurs during the students' college education experience. Fifty percent of African-American architects have graduated from Historically Black Colleges & Universities whereas those who pursue their training at predominantly white institutions suffer from attrition due to inclement campus climates (Sokol, 2009). Therefore, the concern is to address and ensure that the profession is promoted within diverse communities. This can only be accomplished by ensuring that they have access to a proper college education and that they have the ability to succeed within the college environments they choose to attend. In addition, to the aforementioned concerns, we must also consider the physical space design of American college and university campuses serve as educational canons for students of color. Although institutions can be categorized by their predominant cultures, the physical designs of their spaces are not reflective of particularly with regard to their communities of color. This begs the question; can physical space reflect one's race?

### **Reflecting Cultural Identity through Modern Architecture**

Earlier in this chapter I cited Dr. Harris' (2004) work on issues of space and race. Her theories and research show that space can serve as a social construction for negating one's race over another. In regard to the purpose of this study, the white racial identity over the communities of color's racial identity. The architectural community has also

toiled with this concept in recent discussion surrounding the design of the new National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington, D. C. The new museum will represent the American Black experience as a physical symbol on the historic National Mall. When considering multiple design proposals, the selection committee chose a modern design approach. The Freelon Group and SmithGroup were selected on April 14, 2009 to design the new \$500 million dollar project which is scheduled to open in 2015 (Sokol, 2009). The design was largely inspired by David Adjaye. Adjaye was born in Tanzania and raised in London. He used his multicultural background and experiences to inspire the design.

A plinth with broad overhangs topped by a volume whose patterned bronze skin tapers inward twice. Fastidiously placed windows will offer museum goers curated views of the National Mall, and incisions in this upper volume's roof will shower the interior with daylight (Sokol, 2009, ¶2). Adjaye's use of modern architectural features is unique, but also draws from a canon of modern architectural structures commissioned to represent the African-American identity in the U. S. This alludes to the continuing debate on whether modernism provides a vocabulary with which the African-American culture identifies. Throughout the debate is the division of whether the architectural elements should be overt in their intended meaning or whether they should allow those who interact and engage with it to determine their own interpretation and meaning.

The Freelon Group, the lead exterior design firm on the project, is an African-American run firm. The sixty-member team is led by Phil Freelon a native to

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who received his architectural training from MIT. Freelon established the firm to a commitment of “innovative and inspiring design through collaboration and the stewardship of our environment” (Freelon Group, 2009). The firm specializes in designing museums, cultural centers, higher education, science, and technology sites. The Freelon Group is attributed with designing the Museum of African Diaspora (MOAD) located in San Francisco, California, the International Civil Rights Center and Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina and the future Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia. Interestingly, the International Civil Rights Center and Museum’s website features an image of two doors, one marked white entrance and the other marked colored entrance. This serves as the main entry into the site reflecting the deep-seeded history of segregation that will be addressed within the center’s structure and programming. The site of the physical structure is placed where four African-American men, who were freshman students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, began a sit-in on February 1, 1960 (International Civil Rights Center and Museum, 2009). The sit-in took place at the F.W. Woolworth lunch counter where they sat at the “Whites Only” lunch counter requesting to be served. This event served as a major event to fuel the Civil Rights Movement across the country.

The SmithGroup will provide the interior and landscape design of the new National Museum of African-American History. The firm embeds a sustainable design philosophy in all of its projects and ranks as the 15<sup>th</sup> largest sustainable design firm with LEED project certification. In contrast to the Freelon Group, the SmithGroup is a larger organization who has sites across the country from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco.

The Group is attributed with designing interior spaces for the American Battle Monuments Commission building, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the National Museum of American History, and the Smithsonian Institute, among many other projects. The partnership between the Freelon Group and the SmithGroup creates a shared philosophy of sustainable design and a use of modern architectural design to reflect cultural identity.

In contrast, when reviewing many architectural descriptions by white male architects, modern architecture is described as a means to erase any identity. It is perceived as a physical manifestation of modernity, technology and non-humanity. Noted critics from the dominant community have utilized modern architecture to represent the abstract not to reflect cultural identity. In the documentary, *Pride of Place, Building the American Dream: The Campus A Place Apart*, Charles Jencks critiques the use of modernism in the campus design of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Southern Chicago. Jencks purports the design to be a bad representation of campus architecture (Marks & Grigor, 1986). He indicates IIT's chief architect, German-born Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, failed to reach the public because they could not understand the language of the architecture.

The Illinois Institute of Technology was credited with generating a modern architectural style in Chicago during the 1890s (IIT, 2009). The architects involved in its creation were deemed the "Chicago School" which included Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan and David Hudson Burnham. The school chose Mies to transition its campus

design into one of international stature. His vision for the school was inspired by his work at the Bauhaus School of Design during the 1930s. He was credited with redefining the campus' physical design as well as developing a curriculum of architecture steeped in the Bauhaus tradition of teaching. Students were first trained in theory then gained access to physical materials. Mies believed architecture “[embodied] multiple levels of value, extending from the entirely functional to the realm of pure art” (IIT, 2009). Mies also believed, “that through his interpretation of history, the aim of architecture is to truly represent its epoch, and that the architect must search out and articulate the significance of the time” (IIT, 2009). In essence, his goal was to reflect the industrial urban center of downtown Chicago that serves as a backdrop to the campus as well as the loops of highway transportation routes that surround the campus within his design.

The use of the modern architectural style has also been utilized in the redesign of national historic sites in Germany to reflect the Jewish identity (Delanty and Jones, 2002). In this way, the use of the modernistic style allows the Jewish identity to reclaim the physical spaces that were taken from them by the Nazi regime. Mies may have believed that modern architecture embodied the ability to reflect the goals of the institution to gain international recognition and stature in this way. However, I would argue that we do not see this same aspiration to design a space to reflect the predominant Black lower-class community that surrounds the IIT campus. If we compared the symbolism of modern architecture to the Jewish cultural identity or to the African-American cultural identity, we can see similarities in both groups' experiences and history with oppression. Thereby, we could argue there is a connection in the use of

modern architecture to reflect cultural identity, especially for oppressed groups. Yet in Jencks' (Marks & Grigor, 1986) critique of modern architecture as being a language of technology versus the classical language of the Roman ideas embedded in institutions like Harvard and the University of Virginia, an interesting contrast exists between the architectural styles of the dominant culture and the non-dominant culture. Further, we must consider how one's interpretation of functionality and meaning can differ based upon their position within the dominant or non-dominant culture. This encourages us to consider whether an architectural design style can in fact represent a specific human identity such as race, culture, gender, etc. This implores the question: if one is from the non-dominant culture of an institution, how does one translate the dominant architectural language of the built educational environment?

### **Summary**

The notion of the built educational environment impacting one's sense of place has been presented in this introductory chapter. The dynamic that occurs between oneself and one's environment, emerges the idea of how one's experience, interaction, and perception can be impacted not only by the historical, political, and social context, but additionally by one's racial and gender identity. Critical race theorist and critical feminist scholars purport that one's cultural background, specifically for people of color, impacts their experiences within society. These experiences are founded on the social constructions of race and the social system of racism. When we consider the intersectionality of one's racial and gender identities, African-American women have been placed in a complex social system that has historically denied their access to higher

education and I argue, even until this day, has limited their representation on American campuses. The built environment of the American campus was founded on the classical ideas of the Roman and British Empires' notions of colonialism. Within this incorporation of colonial and classical ideas, a new foundational history was built within the physical manifestations of American campus architecture. The values, messages, and architectural language that were created as a result focused on a Westernized, white, middle-class, male-dominant world view. Therefore, while African-American women have had a legal right to physically access built educational environments, they have had to make a psychological transition to learn and adapt to a white male dominant language embedded in the walls they learn, socialize, and live within. Ultimately then, this portrait argues that this dominant architectural language still exists within the physical structures and canons of architectural design from which colleges and universities work.

### **Road Map**

In the next chapter, I will present a review of the equal access laws that have affected our ability to physically access the built educational environments since *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* to the American with Disabilities Act of 1990. This examination will allow us to consider how equal access policies have accounted for our multiple identities such as race, gender, age, spiritual/religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and able-bodiedness. Further, I will challenge our concept of equal access from physical access to psychological access through the theoretical framework of cultural transmission, the theoretical model of inclusive excellence, and the study of

semiotics to present a new conceptual model to examine the dynamics between the built environment, human behavior, and perception.

In chapter three, I will present the research methodology of portraiture and how I have utilized its elements and dimensions to inform my research design. Chapter four will present the historical and physical context of the study including the setting of the University of Denver as the built educational environment and the African-American women who are part of its past and present. A compilation of current African-American women will be presented in an effort to discover their experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the study setting. This will lead to chapter five that focuses on the nine women who participated in the study. Their narratives will be presented as brief vignettes to introduce the essence of their relationship with the built educational environment of the University of Denver based upon their racial and gender identity as African-American women.

Chapters six and seven will present the women's narratives through their own authentic words, feelings, reactions, and photographic images. The key themes of reverence for the campus environment and its aesthetic, their sense of visibility and invisibility, and the intertwining of the physical space and their identities will be discovered. In addition, the sense of care and neglect felt by the women's experiences of watching the institution's dedication of time and financial resources put into building and maintaining the built environment while own their sense of well-being is discounted will be revealed. Finally, the overall strength and resiliency of these women in their ability to reclaim the built environment through their efforts to seek spaces that speak to their souls

will be presented. As a result, chapter eight will document their recommendations of how the built educational environment of the University of Denver could be refined, reshaped, and re-envisioned to become more inclusive of their racial and gender identities as African-American women. In addition, I present the study's findings to refine the conceptual model.

In the final chapter, I will revisit our notions of the concepts of space and place, now informed by the study's findings. In addition, I will reflect on how the external environment may impact one's sense of place within the built educational environment with specific reference to our racial and gender identities. Next, I will speak to the element of class identity and how this element could further be investigated in combination with one's racial and gender identities. I will address the nature of subjectivity within the study and how the use of the portraiture methodology allows us to find the essence of a given experience and ultimately, why this methodology was the appropriate choice for this type of research. Next, I will discuss the implications of the study and how they inform a direction of future research that addresses how our environment can impact our sense of well being with regard to our racial saliency. Finally, I will present the limitations of study and, as a result, I will make recommendations of how these could be addressed through further research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Theoretical Model, and Conceptual Model**

### **Challenging Our Concepts of Equal Access to Educational Environments**

In order to address our understanding of equal access to educational environments as a whole we must look to our past. I will provide a brief review of the American legal mandates that have informed our definition of equal access to the educational environment beginning with an examination of the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*. The *Brown* decision created a definition of equal access to K-12 educational environments by race. The issue of access continued to become more inclusive of one's race, gender, religion, individual freedoms, and country of origin with the establishment of the *Civil Rights Acts of 1964*. Our concept of access continued to transform into one's physical, mental, and learning abilities with the creation of the *Architectural Barriers Acts of 1968*, the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the *American with Disabilities Act of 1990*. This examination of federal policies pertaining to equal access will provide a historical context and understanding of where the notion of inclusive higher educational environments was developed.

U. S. federal policies regarding equal access based upon citizen's multiple identities as cited in Table 1, especially pertaining to institutions of education can be traced back to *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*. The *Brown* decision desegregated the K-12 education environment by allowing school children from different racial backgrounds to participate in the learning process together (*Brown* Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research, 2004). The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* ensured protection from discrimination pertaining to one's race, gender, religion, country of origin, and individual freedoms (The National Archives, 2008). The subsequent *Architectural Barriers Act of 1968* was enacted to ensure that federally funded facilities be designed, constructed and altered to be accessible to persons with a physical disability (Access Board, 2004 & 2009). Shortly thereafter, Section 502 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* established the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) to ensure compliance with the standards prescribed by the *Architectural Barriers Act of 1968* (Access Board, 2004 & 2009). The Access Board later created Section 504 of the *American with Disabilities Act of 1990* which granted and enforced equal physical access to those with a mobile, visual, auditory, or cognitive impairment (Access Board, 2004 & 2009). The Association for American Colleges & Universities Inclusive Excellence Model of 2005 defines equal access by accessing campus equity, climate, structure, policies, and the psychological and behavioral elements of the academy (Millem, Change, & Antonio, 2005).

## **Examining the Impacts of *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* and the Civil Rights Movement on Equal Access by Race and Gender**

Although it has been fifty-five years since the *Brown v. Board of Education 1954* federal decision to desegregate the K-12 public school environment, its impact on providing equal access has still not come to total fruition. The *Brown* decision also impacted access to institutions of higher education. The Supreme Court's rulings on the *Sweatt v. Painter* and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* cases highlighted unequal access by black graduate students in the states of Texas and Oklahoma (Anderson & Bryne, 2004). The *Sweatt v. Painter* ruling found that the University of Texas Law School had created a separate law school for its black students within its basement, that was comprised of "two rented rooms and no library" (Cottrol, Diamond, & Ware, 2003, p. 103). The Supreme Court deemed this was not a correct interpretation of the 'separate but equal education'. Whereas in the *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* case, the University of Oklahoma required George McLaurin, a black graduate student to "sit in separate sections of, or in spaces adjacent to, the classroom, the library, and the cafeteria" (Cottrol, Diamond, & Ware, 2003, p. 17). The Court ruled the university's action to be unconstitutional based on the impact on "his ability to study, to engage in discussions and exchange views with other students and, in general, to learn his profession" (Cottrol, Diamond, & Ware, 2003, p. 17). Only in counterbalance to the racial strife experienced in predominantly white institutions, we must not forget those who were able to obtain their education as a result of the *Brown* decision. Tavis Smiley (2004) purports in the introduction of his book, *The Unfinished Agenda of Brown v. Board of Education*,

Table 1. Overview of Federal Legislation on Equal Access with Reference to Multiple Identities and Physical Space Design

<b>Federal Legislation or Recommendation</b>	<b>Main Purpose</b>	<b>Areas of Identity Addressed</b>	<b>Physical Space Design Addressed</b>
Brown v. Board of Education (1954)	To desegregate schools	Race	Physical access to schools, no design considerations
Civil Rights Act of 1964	To provide protection from discrimination and fairness in law to all citizens	Race, gender, religion and individual freedoms, country of origin	
Architectural Barriers Act of 1968	To ensure buildings and facilities are accessible to the public	Physical ability due to disability	Design, construction and alternation of buildings
Rehabilitation Act of 1973	Establishment of the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board)	Physical ability due to disability and age	Design, construction and alternation of buildings
Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990	Supplement existing minimum access guidelines and requirements	Physical and mental ability due to disability, learning and age	Design, construction and alternation of buildings
Inclusive Excellence Model of 2005	Active and intentional engagement and structuring of campus environments to incorporate diversity and academic excellence	Race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual affiliation, able-bodiedness, learning style	Campus climate psychological and behavioral aspects

“Brown, with all its flaws, stands as the most important governmental act of any kind since the emancipation proclamation” (p. 5).

*Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* challenged the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution based on the premise of “separate but equal” to consider that state funded separate educational facilities are inherently unequal (Cottrol, Diamond, & Ware, 2003; Roundtree, 2004, p. 49). This caused further examination of the amendment to determine that this specific type of inequality in the realm of education was simply unconstitutional. Therefore publicly funded educational institutions were ordered to desegregate in order to allow equal access to education, including equal quality facilities, resources, curricula and teachers.

It is important not to dismiss the realities within America during the time of the *Brown* decision. Professor Derrick Bell speaks to the “time of terror” for blacks in America even after the decision (2004). Many white Americans felt the *Brown* decision took away the freedoms and rights they had become accustomed to and therefore, were motivated to fight back for their rights (Bell, 2004). The laws of Jim Crow were still very much alive within the educational environments the Supreme Court acted to overthrow (Irons, 2002). In fact during the *Brown II* decision in 1955, Judge Warren indicated the precedent of “integration should proceed as quickly as feasible” (Irons, 2002, pp. 169). However, this required flexibility and support by each district judge to allow for:

the consideration of the physical condition of the school plant, the school transportation system, personnel, revision of school districts and attendance areas into compact units in addition to a revision of the local laws and regulations which may be necessary in solving foregoing problems. (Irons, 2002, pp. 169-170)

In essence, “with all deliberate speed” equated into slow in practice (Sunstein, 2004, p. 119). After the *Brown* decision, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund faced the resistance to desegregation in Virginia in order to defend the students of the Negro Robert Moton High School’s appeal of non-equal facilities. The high school was described as “overcrowded, with leaking roofs, two working water fountains, and inadequate heat” (Rhode & Ogletree, 2004, p. 72). This description was not unusual for many Black segregated educational environments. The students’ petition sought to have equal facilities to those of their white student counterparts or to be allowed access into the White public schools within the Prince Edward County which were better maintained. NAACP attorney, Oliver Hill, held the primary premise that in order to gain equal and fair access and treatment from a system of oppression, education is the “bedrock of access and achievement in America” (Rhode & Ogletree, 2004, p. 73). He stated further that:

Even though we initially sought enforcement of the separate but equal rule, I once argued before the court of appeals that if a school board built two schools side by side, brick for brick, room for room, with identical materials, curricula and furnishings and limited Negro children to attending one school and white children to attending the other; I would still say it was discriminatory against the Negroes. As long as Negroes are excluded from the societal mainstream, they will continue to be relegated to a form of second-class citizenship. (Rhode & Ogletree, 2004, p. 73)

***Brown’s impact on the Southern US African-American Community***

Many African-Americans in the southern United States can easily recall the sight or stories of signs posted on public water fountains, entrances to buildings, buses, benches, and other public spaces that read ‘Whites only or Blacks only’ (Rhode & Ogletree, 2004). The physical space itself sent messages that could be verbalized into

overt statements that assumed those it was directed towards had knowledge of its language and its hidden messages. While the *Brown* decision strived to desegregate the public education environment, the public spaces of the communities (i.e., water fountains, restrooms, restaurants, and public transportation) in the South were still clearly segregated. Therefore, the language and values of those in the dominant position still were reinforced overtly outside of the educational environment and covertly within the educational environment through the treatment of non-white students. With this stated, it is important for us to consider that the physical space and resources of the educational environment were also impacted by desegregation cases.

Julian Bond, son to Horace Mann Bond, who was one of the primary researchers who supported the *Brown* decision stated:

The white schools were better only because the facilities were better, the books were newer, the buses that they took the kids to school were better and the playgrounds were better. It wasn't whiteness that made them better, except in the sense that whiteness meant access to superior resources. The only way we were going to get equality was to get in that building with those children. (Portales, 2004, pp. 130-131)

The quality of the space defined equal access however; we must consider the building design was based on a Eurocentric idea of how an educational environment should be composed. The lens of Eurocentricism defines the notion that the white idea of life and the way in which those ideas are interpreted into a physical representation is and becomes normalized (Sarat, 1997). Then the multiple identities of our community that have not had the opportunity to be considered nor recognized become foreign, strange, and unconsidered in the realm of the physical design of our homes, legal buildings, or schools (Weismann, 1992).

## **The Civil Rights Movement**

Consider the image of James Meredith studying in his dorm room at a wooden desk with a lamp and piles of books, while an FBI agent is seated at a smaller desk next to him in the room to provide him protection (Rhode & Ogletree, Jr., 2004). Meredith was the first African-American student to be allowed college admission into the University of Mississippi in 1962. The legacy of the *Brown* decision continued into the 1960s in which the federal government engaged with local government authorities to uphold its order that all public institutions of education must be desegregated. The physical barriers that non-white students experienced to access K-12 and higher education institutions came in the form of what Samuel Meyers (1989) refers to as *absolute defiance*. Absolute defiance occurred during the period immediately following the *Brown* and *Brown II* decisions. This defiance took the form of harassment, threat of physical harm, signs with hateful words, and physical barriers to prevent entry (Williams, 1997). Consequently, for those lucky enough to make it into the educational environment, safety was not always assured. Riots and threats by non-white students and overt statements by those in leadership roles were there to greet them. Non-white students attending colleges and universities had to consider their safety in accessing the physical spaces that their white student counterparts could do so with ease (Farrar, 2008). The stable campus spaces of the classroom, library, athletic facility, cafeteria, or dormitory were accessible, but at a non-white student's own risk.

The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* began national recognition of the importance of upholding every individual citizen's right to be safe that included freedom from

discrimination based upon one's "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" (Sarat, 1997, p. 112). The Act impacted access to college and university campuses. In fact, the federal government provided funding to all public colleges and universities to support their equal and fair admissions policy practices (Rudenstine, 2001). However, it is important to consider while one had a lawful right to physically access all levels of education, the general culture of colleges and universities across the country, especially in the South, were still not welcoming environments. While the policies of admissions and the signs separating the use of public water fountains and restrooms were removed, the embedded values and messages of who had the right to access education were still there within the physical design of the campus (Rhode & Ogletree, Jr., 2004).

The federal government offered financial aid incentives to publicly funded institutions of higher education to entice college and university administrators resistant to adhere to the *Civil Rights Act* to change their college admissions policies (Williams, 1997). Specifically the *Civil Rights Act* included Title VI to "prohibit schools, colleges, and other institutions and agencies that discriminate on the basis of race from receiving federal funds" (p. 3). However, neither Title VI nor the *Civil Rights Act* made any mention of the physical space design of educational environments beyond one's physical access. In other words, colleges and universities eager to take advantage of federal funding could also do so while keeping their existing physical structures to reinforce the embedded messages that non-white students were not welcomed. Rows of fraternity and sorority houses were often physical structures that reinforced the unwelcoming of non-white students. As Farrar (2008) notes at the University of Maryland at College Park,

None of the schools Greek-letter fraternities and sororities had black pledges or members. Most of them were housed in a horseshoe-shaped complex of houses across U.S. Route 1 from the campus. This complex, called “fraternity row”, was a constant reminder to black students of their exclusion from one of the mainstays of college life. (p. 139)

It was also not uncommon for some of the fraternity houses to display the confederate flag on their porch as another visual sign that black students were not welcomed on this part of the campus community (Farrar, 2008). The administration did not take any steps to address this act, nor did it acknowledge or listen to its black students’ requests for hiring black faculty and staff (Farrar, 2008). Therefore the embedded racist culture was reinforced through the barriers of access to the entire campus community, its activities, overt behavior, and disrespect of its students and administration. However, this did not stop black students from forming communities and protests to get their voices heard.

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, fueled their cause and emotions. A student group comprised of a majority of black students and a few white students stopped the annual convocation by the president to voice their demands for “the establishment of a black studies program, increased recruiting of black students, hiring of black faculty and staff and more courteous treatment by the campus police” (Farrar, 2008, p. 140). The students were mobbed by state police, but held steady which inspired the entire black student community to raise their voices. The group of students chose to change their name from CORE to the Black Student Union and thus decided to leave no further room for white student participation within their activities (p. 140). While they had no physical space allocated to them within the confines of the campus structure, they were able to design a space for freedom of voice and expression

psychologically within their oppressive and predominant white environment. Through their efforts they managed to get the institution to establish a black studies program by late May 1969.

### **The Impact of Architectural Laws since the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 to the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 on Access by Physical Ability**

The nation's need for a diversified and qualified workforce emphasizes an importance upon colleges, universities, and places of employment to ensure non-discrimination within their admissions and hiring practices. The *Architectural Barriers Act of 1968* was the first law of its kind to ensure one's access to all publicly-funded built environments (Access Board, 2004). The *Barriers Act* mandated buildings and other federally-funded facilities be designed, constructed, and altered to be accessible to persons with a physical disability (Access Board, 2009). In addition, the *Barriers Act* emphasized that any building that was constructed, altered, leased and wholly or partially financed by the United States after August 12, 1968 has to abide by the *Barriers Act's* mandates. This included the oversight by the Secretary of Health and Human Services of all General Services facilities, public residential structures of the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the oversight of all Department of Defense structures by the Secretary of Defense and the oversight of all United States Postal Service structures.

[T]he term "building" means any building or facility other than (A) a privately owned residential structure not leased by the Government for subsidized housing programs and (B) any building or facility on a military installation designed and constructed primarily for use by able-bodied military personnel the intended use for which either will require that such building or facility be accessible to the public, or may result in the employment or residence therein of physically

handicapped persons. (Access Board, 2009)

As a result, any publicly funded college or university must adhere to the rules and regulations of the *Barriers Act* to ensure those with any physical disability were provided equal physical access to campus spaces including classrooms, libraries, athletic facilities, cafeterias, and dormitories. In total the *Act* affected 3,000 new or remodeled buildings by 1975. However hearings were held in October 1975 by the Subcommittee on Investigations and Review of the Committee on Public Works and Transportation before the House of Representatives and Congress in an effort to address the negative and disrespectful societal attitudes about people with physical disabilities. Ultimately the hearing was held to discuss how the regulations could be more strongly enforced and to decrease the widespread non-compliance (United States Committee on Public Works and Transportation, 1975). During the hearing, a video clip of a non-compliant wheelchair ramp at Emory School of Law library was shown that featured a current senior law student on crutches as an example of the dangers of non-compliance. The subcommittee noted the design and construction of the library cost six million dollars under the Architectural Barriers Act, “[but] somehow, this ramp qualified” (p. 8). Additional non-compliance violations were documented by the University of Colorado at Boulder regarding wheelchair access to the public restrooms and the University of Illinois at Champaign for lack of accessible bus transportation (United States Committee on Public Works and Transportation, 1975). The University of Southern Illinois was highlighted for its effort to build a new athletic stadium that included barrier-free design methods in half of its design (United States Committee on Public Works and Transportation, 1975). The

chairman of the subcommittee, Representative Jim Wright from Texas, shared his experience at Tarrant County Junior College where he spent the whole day in a wheelchair to get a first-hand account of the barriers students were experiencing. He stated:

It is really an experience for anyone and I should think it would be a good experience for anybody to begin to realize what handicaps these are. You begin to realize how very difficult it is to move out of a wheelchair to another type of convenience, without using your legs. (United States Committee on Public Works and Transportation, 1975, pp. 47-48)

### ***The Rehabilitation Act of 1973***

The purpose of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* continued its refinement of ensuring “full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society” to citizens with any physical or mental disabilities within public built environments (Access Board, 2009). The primary purpose of the *Rehabilitation Act* was to encourage one’s ability to find gainful employment, become self-sufficient and independent within their living accommodations, engage and participate fully in society through research, training, and demonstration with the guarantee of equal opportunity (Access Board, 2009). Additionally the *Act* established the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) to ensure compliance with the standards prescribed by the *Architectural Barriers Act of 1968*. The Access Board was charged to develop advisory guidelines, provide appropriate technical assistance, and establish and maintain minimum standards prescribed by the *Architectural Barriers Act of 1968*.

Architect Stephen Cotler created a guidebook in 1976 for architects regarding the construction and design of college campuses in order to incorporate the Architectural Barriers Act. He stated, “Any student should be able to pursue as fine an education and to whatever level he or she wishes. While there are many realistic limitations to this ideal, lack of architectural accessibility should not be one of them” (Cotler, 1976, p. 1). Robert Sorensen (1979) also authored a book to assist and guide architects and designers in their future construction of publicly accessible buildings including exterior design, interior design, and furniture design elements. Sorensen stated, “I feel certain that as more architects and designers become aware of what they can do – easily – to provide accessible building and facilities, they will remove the unnecessary burdens which have been unknowingly placed on the lives of the handicapped for too long” (p. vii). What is interesting about both Cotler and Sorensen’s statements are their emphasis on the architectural design not serving as a barrier to students’ educational experience.

Imagine a photograph of the physical plant director at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville leading a group of physically-disabled visitors on a campus tour in a wheel chair during the institution’s “Handicapped Awareness Day” (AAPA, 1979, p. 12). While the physical plant director is able-bodied, images and special institutional days to recognize the perspectives of those with physical disabilities was a means for universities and colleges across the country to express their awareness. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University developed workshops for administrators and professionals involved in making decisions and implementing design principles to remove physical barriers for the disabled community (AAPA, 1979). Syracuse University, in partnership with the

University Center and Center for Instructional Development and the Gerontological Society created a three-part workbook and evaluation guidelines to help build “barrier-free environments” for the elderly and aging community through knowledge about their challenges and methods in which the architectural design of public buildings and housing communities could be adapted and constructed (Syracuse University, 1975). The AAPA (1979) indicates the key to making places match people “necessitates matching places to the people who use them, instead of requiring handicapped persons to overcome barriers” (p. 16). The University of Texas at El Paso incorporated its handicap awareness within a mascot design for the cover of their Office of Student Affairs which features the university mascot in a wheelchair (p. 26). These serve as examples of how American campuses addressed the nation’s concern of ensuring the physical design of its buildings and pathways were equally accessible based on one’s physical ability.

### ***The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990***

The *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* granted and enforced equal physical access to those with a mobile, visual, auditory, or cognitive impairment (Access Board, 2009). The Act added buildings on the National Register of Historic Places and those considered historic under state or local law to those publicly funded buildings or facilities that must adhere to the standards of the *Architectural Barriers Act of 1968* and the *ADA Act of 1990*. The Access Board ensured the *ADA Act of 1990* would:

- promote accessibility throughout all segments of society,
- investigate and examine alternative approaches to the standards,

- determine what measures should be taken by federal, state, and local governments or other, publicly funded organizations and non-profit agencies regarding the standards,
- promote the use of international accessibility symbols and signage,
- report to and make recommendations to the President and Congress,
- and ensure public conveyances are readily accessible to the public.

(Access Board, 2009, p. 7-8)

The Access Board is comprised of 13 members appointed by the President which included both members of “the general public of whom a majority shall be individuals with disabilities” (Access Board, 2009, p. 7). Specifically the board is comprised of department heads from Health and Human Services, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, the Interior, Defense, Justice, General Services Administration, Veteran Affairs, the United States Postal Service, Education and Commerce.

Current federal legislation and enlightened pedagogical classroom practices have brought to light the need to provide accommodating environments to college students with physical, mental, and learning disabilities (Fielden, 2004). The language of defining one’s disability has become more inclusive and more refined. The American National Standard’s 2003 edition of *Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities*, defines disability in the context of “inability to walk, difficulty walking, reliance on walking aids, blindness and visual impairment, deafness and hearing impairment, incoordination, reaching and manipulation disabilities, lack of stamina, difficulty interpreting, and reacting to sensory information and extremes of physical size” (p. 1). Furthermore, they

state the intention of the guidelines are to “allow a person with a physical disability to independently get to, enter and use a site, facility, building, or element,” which counteracts the language of the architectural principles during the *Architectural Barriers Act of 1968* relayed by Sorensen (1979).

### **The Next Frontier of Equal Access: Psychological Access Based on Perceptions of the Built Educational Environment**

Barry D. Yatt, an associate professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at the Catholic University of America, authored a book entitled, *Cracking the Code: An Architect's Guide to Building Regulations*, in 1998. Yatt's book attempts to make sense of the legal regulation language and put it into architectural terms. His reasoning is because “buildings are bigger, more complex and contain more people than ever before” (p. 2). Yatt emphasizes the users are not involved in the design process, but must be represented by those at the design decision-making table. He defines the user group as “anyone who occupies, or is affected in any way by the project” (p. 19). The user group therefore brings an agenda of need that includes maintaining property value while ensuring mood, safety, quality, and access. Those with financial investment and ultimate responsibility for maintaining the building want to ensure that the building will have longevity and sustainability. Additionally within the construction and design of a project, one wants the design to evoke feelings. In the case of college or university buildings, one may want to evoke feelings related to learning, knowledge, and the mission of the institution. While establishing a mood within the built environment may not have market value, it certainly can build a sense of loyalty and embedded respect for the nature and

purpose of the building itself. In this way, Yatt emphasizes that maintaining the market value of a property is equally as important as evoking a mood. The idea of safety invokes one of providing shelter, the idea that one will not be harmed within the built environment. The feeling of safety from the building also translates to those who occupy the building. In the case of college or university buildings, students can expect a safe environment based upon the quality of professors, instructors, and professional staff. This includes the quality of the building itself. If a campus building has a leaking roof or is inaccessible by a student with a physical disability, this may evoke a negative mood and feelings of being unsafe. Likewise, if a campus is designed or decorated or the allocation of space is determined without reflecting the multiple identities (race, gender, age, etc.) of its campus community, it can impact whether one feels included or excluded by the institution. This has indications for the focus of this dissertation research inquiry, how are the racial and gender identities of African-American women reflected within our concept of equal access to campus design?

The Association for American Colleges & Universities purports through the Inclusive Excellence Model (2005) that in order to create inclusive environments, institutions of higher education must create campus climates that reflect awareness and respect that can only be achieved through shifts in organizational structures, policies, curriculum, and diverse campus compositions. The IE model further argues that it is through social interactions that members of a campus community can begin to learn from one another and consider alternative perspectives and experiences. I argue for our consideration of how the physical manifestations of predominantly white institutions

have embedded institutional values, beliefs, and assumptions on not only regarding what higher education is, but how it will be experienced by those who learn and teach within its built spaces. Therefore, I argue that we must embed the values of inclusive excellence within the physical space design of our college and university campuses. In order to explore the psychological access that one experiences and perceives within the physical spaces of the built educational environment I have developed an interdisciplinary conceptual model that I will explain in the next section of this chapter.

### **Theoretical Framework: Cultural Transmission**

Schein's (1992) theory of organizational cultural transmission argues that an institution's values, beliefs and assumptions are embedded within its artifacts, physical environment, and behaviors. Therefore, whether the organization is a retail shop or a college or university, the manner that the physical environment is designed communicates who the organization is trying to engage. For example, if an institution's buildings are named after predominantly white men, we can make several inferences. The white men whom the buildings are named after were men who became successful enough to contribute financial resources in order to erect a building in their name. The men were strongly influential to the institution and therefore, the building was named in order to recognize and honor them. A more endemic inference would be that we must consider the institution's history of providing equal access to non-white men and women and their ability to become successful or influential within the realm of higher education in order to have a building erected in their honor. Further, we could consider whether the non-white students, faculty, staff or alumni of the predominantly white institution have positive

experiences that would motivate them to donate their financial resources into a built space in their honor. Further, we must contemplate whether their experiences have impacted them in such a way that they are not motivated to give back in this way.

Institutions of higher education provide challenge and nurturing within the learning and transformation process of students becoming more knowledgeable and skilled to engage as informed global citizens (Strange & Banning, 2001). Bess and Dee (2008) argue that institutions need to consider the process in which students receive information about institutional values, beliefs, expectations, and standards. In other words, institutions are not only conduits for learning, but also transmitters of culture and their physical manifestation represents the meaning (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008). An institution’s core ideology is defined by its culture (Bess & Dee, 2008). Culture is reliant upon social interactions and constructions of what a community values and how it functions (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988). According to Schein (1992), organizational culture can be transmitted through three levels: *artifacts*, *values* and *basic assumptions* as illustrated in Table 2 (Bess & Dee, 2008).

Table 2. Edgar Schein’s Organizational Cultural Transmission Model – Three Levels

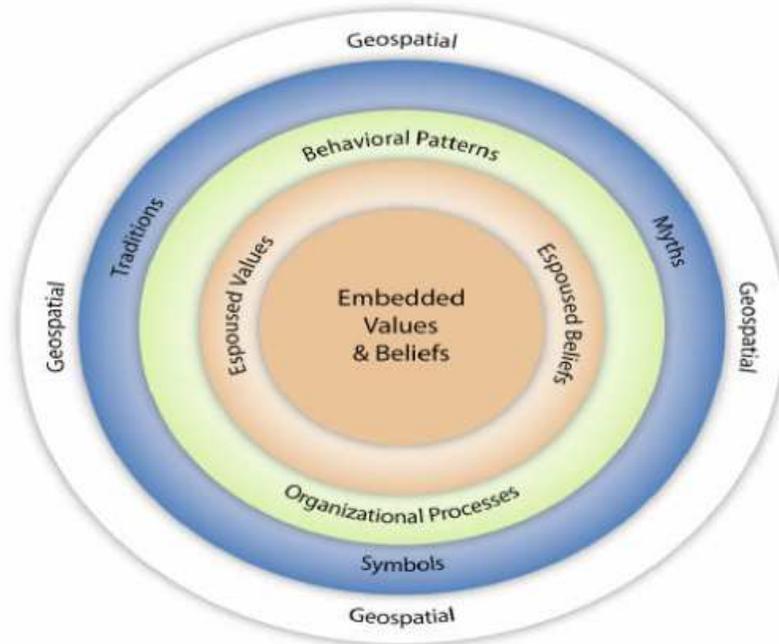
<b>Artifacts</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Basic Assumptions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical environment</li> <li>• Social environment</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Overt behavior</li> <li>• Symbols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalized as beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relation to the environment</li> <li>• Nature of reality</li> <li>• Nature of human nature</li> <li>• Nature of human activity</li> <li>• Nature of human relationships</li> </ul>

The first level is that which is visible and according to Schein's traditional model (Figure 1) of organizational value transmission is the easiest to change and transform (Williams et al., 2005). This level includes the physical design and use of the educational environment. For example, on a college campus the community can distinguish which physical spaces are used for classroom learning, library research, or purchasing a book. Similarly, the primary language utilized in the learning process can be determined based upon the language which the institution's books, brochures or signs are written in. However, when considering the built environment, one must consider how the exterior and interior design aspects communicate values, stories, rituals and Figures the institution holds with great importance (Kuh, Shuh, Whitt, et al., 1991). Therefore, the display of portraits of great white men who have held leadership roles within the institution can relay a visual message of those the institution deems could become a leader. Another example could be the gothic looking gargoyles placed at the entrance of buildings as guardians or protectors. Consequently, while the architectural and interior design of an institution's physical spaces initially can be perceived through functionality, the design also transmits a non-verbal communication with symbolic meaning to those who view and interact with the environment (cf., Eco 1968 as cited by Nöth, 1990; Strange & Banning, 2001).

The second and third levels are transcended through the conscience and unconscious behavior of those within the institutional community, which communicate the institution's values and basic assumptions (Bess & Dee, 2008). Institutional values are institutionalized as beliefs which can be learned through observation and interaction

with the students and faculty of college or university environment. For example, if we asked a random sample of students and faculty what value they place on diversity and in

Figure 1. Schema of organizational values (adapted from Schein 1985)



responding they place a high value on diversity, we could interpret the institution itself to hold diversity as a high priority (Strange & Banning, 2001; Treviño, 2008). Whereas, the basic assumptions of an institution may be observed through its “relation to the environment, nature of reality, nature of human nature, nature of human activity, and nature of human relationships” (as cited by Schein, 1983, 1992 by Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 372). Therefore, assumptions can be perpetuated by a collective institutional identity which holds certain beliefs on notions of good and bad, reality and truth, learning and knowledge, and authority and power in the relationship to itself and those who are part of it. For example, within a college or university environment we assume that those who are

part of the community believe in the value of higher education. In addition, the curriculum, pedagogy, and learning environment that the institution creates adhere to its notion of what engaging in the process of higher education means. As a result, if an institution chose not to offer any courses pertaining to issues of race, gender, or culture this would communicate the institution's assumption that higher education does not include these areas of study.

If the goals of institutions of higher education are to recruit and retain the next generation of college students to fulfill their purpose to educate, the manner in which they represent themselves to an increasingly diverse audience must be considered (Dey & Hurtado, 1995; Miller, 2004; Treviño, 2008; Tuitt, 2008). One of the methods an institution utilizes to attract and recruit students is through its physical environment, as represented by its institutional architecture. The perceptions of institutional architecture can impact students' understanding of the institutional culture and values (Callejo Pérez, Fein & Slater, 2004; Moos, 1986; Strange & Banning, 2001). Whether students are engaged in learning within a classroom, studying in the library, socializing in the student union, exercising in the athletic center, living in a residence hall, or simply walking about campus, the level of inclusiveness represented within the campus environment can impact her/his perceived respect for identity, sense of belonging, safety, and inclusion (Atkin & Krinsky, 1996; Cole, 2005; Devlin, Donovan, Nicolov, Nold & Zandan, 2008; Drew, 1971; Miller, 2004; Strange & Banning, 2001; Sylva, 1972).

Thus, Schein's conceptual framework provides an opportunity to focus my inquiry on the artifact level in an effort to understand the cultural transmission that occurs

between those within a college or university community and the physical environment of the campus. Specifically, the framework allows me to make the assumption that the physical environment plays a role in transmitting an institution's values and basic assumptions. However, the model does not discuss how the transmission of organizational culture may differ for each individual of the organizational community based upon their multiple identities of race, gender, country of origin, age, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. This is important because of the multiple identities represented by the growing diversity of American college and university student populations. While the model does indicate that the dominant population and ideas of an organization tend to determine how its artifacts, values, and basic assumptions are defined, it does not address how underrepresented populations can become represented. I attribute its lack of focus and inquiry on these issues to its foundations in management theory which speaks to the history of the relationships between employer and employee. The management relationship model tends to investigate the quantity of transmission versus the quality of transmission.

Schein's model has influenced the creation of the Association of American Colleges & Universities' Inclusive Excellence Model (IE) and Scorecard developed in 2005. The IE model, which I will discuss in the next section, like Schein's framework, emphasizes the importance of social interaction in order to transmit organizational values such as inclusion. This allows me to investigate how the values of inclusive excellence are transmitted to community members within an institution through its physical environment, specifically pertaining to its architectural features and elements. For this

reason, the framework has had influence in the higher education arena, providing a road map of how to investigate the dynamics of organizational transmission within colleges and universities. The framework also provides an opportunity to center my inquiry on one higher educational institution as a unique social system. Specifically it allows me to consider how the racial and gender identities of African-American women within a predominantly white institution experience, interact with and perceive the built educational environment and ultimately to explore what messages are being transmitted.

### **Theoretical Model: Inclusive Excellence**

Institutions of higher education need to adapt to and prepare for the changing demographics in the student population (Millem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Treviño, 2008; Tuitt, 2008). In order to create environments to attract and retain diverse student populations, institutions will need a strategic plan in place that addresses the college student of the future, one who brings unique learning needs and expectations, identities, financial support, and network systems (AAC&U, 2005, Maher & Tetreault, 2007). To provide guidance to institutions facing this new challenge, the Association for American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) developed the *Making Inclusive Excellence* model. The inclusive excellence model provides a structured guide to reconceptualize the concepts of *diversity* and *excellence*. The concept of diversity considers individual and group/social identity differences while excellence recognizes an institution's ability to maintain high standards of academic achievement. Thereby, the concept of inclusive excellence emphasizes the need for active and intentional engagement and structuring of a campus environment and climate which allows for its community to interact, engage,

and build a greater comprehensive understanding of their differences while achieving high academic standards.

Inclusivity is defined by the AAC&U (2005) as:

The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in people, in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase one’s awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathetic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact with systems and institutions. (p. vi)

The definition of inclusive excellence is comprised of four principles that include:

1. *A focus on student intellectual and social development.* Academically, it means offering the best possible course of study for the context in which the education is offered.
2. *A purposeful development and utilization of organizational resources to enhance student learning.* Organizationally, it means establishing an environment that challenges each student to achieve academically at high levels and each member of the campus to contribute to learning and knowledge development.
3. *Attention to the cultural differences learners bring to the educational experience and that enhance the enterprise.*
4. *A welcoming community that engages all of its diversity in the service of student and organizational learning.* (Williams et al., 2005)

Therefore, an institution’s ability to become inclusive to all members of its community requires the purposeful embodiment of inclusive practices toward multiple identity groups (Millem et al., 2005).

With the historical legacy of laws on equal access and the current goals of inclusive excellence, it is important to examine the manner in which colleges and universities have utilized them as guides to adapt the design of their campus climates in order to be accessible and inclusive to the increasing diversity of students. Specifically, how have institutions of higher education adapted themselves to become inclusive? The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) developed the Inclusive Excellence Scorecard to help institutions target key areas of their organizations. The Scorecard (Figure 2) highlights the four areas of *access and equity, diversity in the formal and informal curriculum, campus climate and student learning and development* (Williams et al., 2005).

Access and equity pertains to the “equity of representation and outcomes for underrepresented populations” within the student body, faculty development and leadership engagement (Williams et al., 2005, p. 22). Along with equitable representation in the institutional community, all members of the community should feel a sense of respect, belonging, and safety within their educational endeavors. Diversity within the formal curriculum incorporates issues of diversity within the required core learning objectives of an institution. Good examples of this are issues of race, gender, and multicultural perspectives infused into the required core curriculum. Additionally, a second example is the presence of on campus centers that aid in providing services and

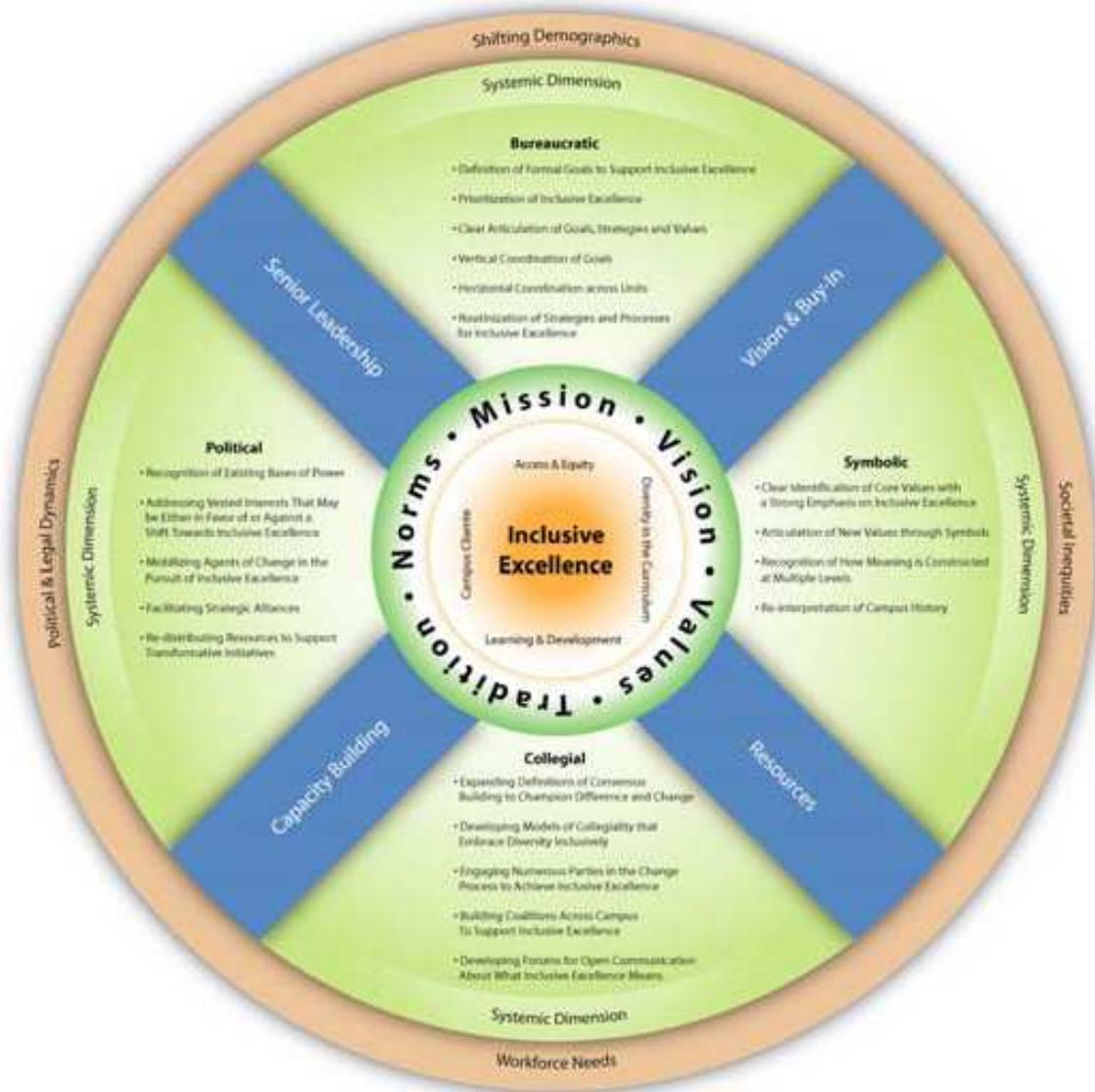
Figure 2. Inclusive Excellence Scorecard

IE Area	Definition	Sample Indicators	Source
Access and Equity	The compositional number and success levels of historically underrepresented students, faculty, and staff in higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Number of students, faculty, and staff members of color at the institution</li> <li>▪ Number of tenured women faculty in engineering</li> <li>▪ Number of male students in nursing</li> <li>▪ Number of historically underrepresented students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields</li> </ul>	Bensimon et al. 2004; Hurtado, et al. 1999; Smith et al. 1997
Diversity in the Formal and Informal Curriculum	Diversity content in the courses, programs, and experiences across the various academic programs and in the social dimensions of the campus environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Courses related to intercultural, international, and multicultural topics</li> <li>▪ Campus centers, institutes, and departments dedicated to exploring intercultural, international, and multicultural topics</li> <li>▪ Articles, monographs, lectures, and new knowledge that is produced around issues of diversity</li> </ul>	Smith et al. 1997
Campus Climate	The development of a psychological and behavioral climate supportive of all students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incidents of harassment based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation</li> <li>▪ Attitudes toward members of diverse groups</li> <li>▪ Feelings of belonging among ethnically and racially diverse groups on campus</li> <li>▪ Intergroup relations and behaviors on campus</li> </ul>	Smith et al. 1997; Hurtado et al. 1999
Student Learning and Development	The acquisition of content knowledge about diverse groups and cultures and the development of cognitive complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Acquisition of knowledge about diverse groups and cultures</li> <li>▪ Greater cognitive and social development derived from experiences in diverse learning environments</li> <li>▪ Enhanced sense of ethnic, racial, and cultural identity for all students</li> </ul>	Gurin et al. 2002

support to the community to facilitate discussion about diversity issues. The campus climate pertains to the perceptions and experiences by students and faculty of their institutional environment. For that reason, this area focuses on the behavioral and psychological dimensions of intergroup interactions or lack thereof, as well as the role that the physical environment plays on the sense of inclusivity for all community members. Finally, the area of student development and learning holds the institution accountable for providing learning opportunities to develop the intellectual character of its community, but additionally its human conscientiousness of respecting everyone for their multiple identities. Thereby, developing a democratic society, one that inspires and shapes a student's ability to critically think within a dynamic, global, and diverse world.

With the emergence of unprecedented diversity within the current and future generations of college students, pressure exists for campus leaders to align structures and processes to better meet the academic, cultural, and social needs of all students entering higher education and to better utilize such diversity in the service of learning (Maher & Tetreault, 2007; Williams, et al., 2005, p. 6). The Inclusive Excellence Change Model (Figure 3), describes the institution in a manner that allows the assessment of the environment based on the four areas noted in the Scorecard. Additionally the model (Figure 3) considers the impact the external environment has upon the organizational culture and behavior which impacts the campus climate as a whole. Therefore, if we consider the federal policies that have impacted one's physical access to the educational environment and further how society's ideas of how an educational environment should

Figure 3. Inclusive Excellence Change Model



function and be designed, then we realize the larger impact that the external community has on one's psychological access to an inclusive educational environment.

Specifically, the institution's historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion, compositional diversity, and organizational/structural dimensions must be considered within the campus climate (Millem et al., 2005). An institution's legacy of inclusion and exclusion can be determined by its compositional diversity of students and faculty through history. Laws such as the *Brown* decision and the *ADA of 1990* impacted how institutions of higher education adapted their admissions and hiring policies based upon one's race and physical ability. The organizational and structural dimensions of an institution pertain to its system of hierarchy in the realm of who is at the decision-making table and the levels of power allocated within the community. If the majority of the decision-making power is given to the upper-level administration and not filtered to the students and faculty of the institution, there is no guarantee that the institution will have a clear understanding of the diverse needs of its community. For that reason, in order to establish inclusive excellence, existing structures of power must be reconsidered and restructured to provide an equal representation as well as methods for the entire community to voice their needs from the institution. Along with this restructuring, a system of institutional accountability must be put in place to ensure the institution itself is being responsible to those whom it intends to serve.

When we consider the IE Scorecard and the IE Change Model, the role of the physical structure on the campus is briefly considered. However, both do not take into consideration of how much the built educational environment plays in impacting one's

perception of an inclusive environment (Strange & Banning, 2001). While the Scorecard area of access and equity assesses the physical access one has to an institution, it does not consider the role the built environment plays in one's sense of feeling welcomed.

Conversely, the area of the campus climate in the Scorecard does consider the psychological and area of the campus climate in the Scorecard does consider the psychological and behavioral dimensions that may result in:

[perceptions] of harassment based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation; [institutional] attitudes toward members of diverse groups; feelings of belonging among ethnically and racially diverse groups on campus; and/or intergroup relations and behaviors [and interactions] on campus. (Millem et al., 2005, p. 21)

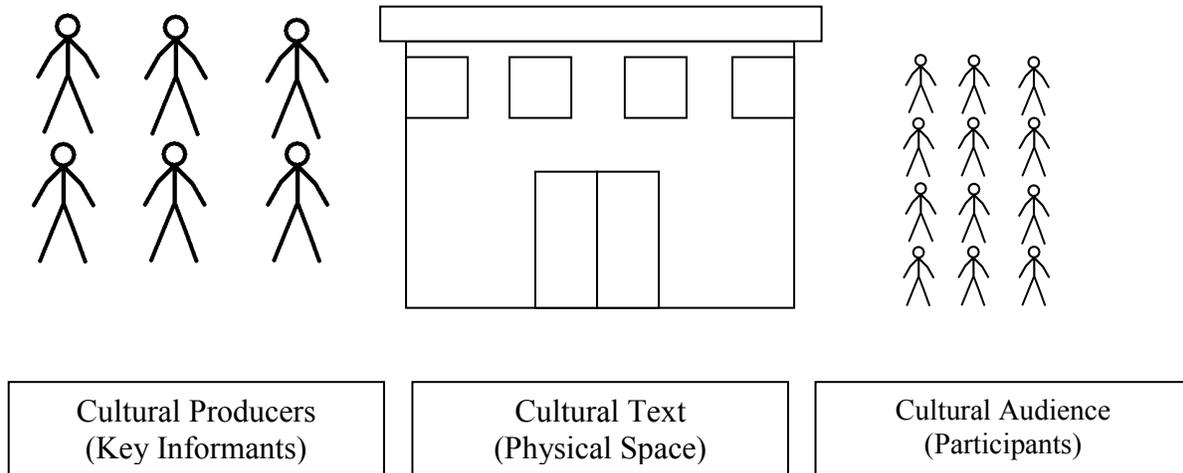
Therefore, if we consider the Scorecard as a guide to assess the level of inclusivity within a higher education environment, we can consider the areas of access and equity and the campus climate to determine the impact of one's psychological access based upon their multiple identities. Specifically, how have the architectural construction, exterior and interior design, and space allocation of our campuses been adapted to accommodate and embody the values of inclusivity to truly welcome this growing diverse student population (Flowers, 2004; Valverde & Castenell, Jr., 1998)? Further, we can explore what the importance of the physical environment has in living out the tenets and values we espouse to offer students. Ultimately we can determine the impact of students' perceptions of their fit within the institution (Callejo Pérez, Fain, & Slater, 2004; Moos, 1986; Strange & Banning, 2001; Weismann, 1992). While Schein's cultural transmission model and the Inclusive Excellence model allow us to examine the structures and interactions of an organization, I feel it is important to take into account how we make

meaning of our built environment. Such a framework exists that considers the cultural transmission of meaning and values within forms of media (advertising, television, film) and architecture (Abel, 2000; Broadbent, Bunt, & Jencks, 1980; Preziosi, 1979; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). This framework is semiotics.

### **Semiotics**

Semiotics is derived originally from the study of language and literature to investigate meaning assigned to the oral and written word within a sign system. In the 1970s, scholars began to apply semiotics to consider the built sign system of architecture (Hawkes, 1977, 2003; Broadbent, Bunt, & Jencks, 1980). Most recently semiotics has been utilized to interpret the interactive sign systems of mass communications, media, advertising, film, television, and popular culture. Thus, allowing for the analysis of cultural group formation through media forms. The built environment therefore can function as a cultural transmitter just as a television show, film, brand of clothing, or virtual community can. The creators of the physical spaces serve as the cultural producers, whereas the physical spaces as the cultural text and the participants who interact with the physical spaces are the cultural audience (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009, see Figure 4). To understand how architecture as it is manifested within its physical form, serves as a sign system that sends messages to those who view and interact with it, I will utilize a semiotic analysis approach.

Figure 4: Semiotic Sign System of Physical Spaces



Semiotics is defined as:

[A] science studying *all* cultural phenomena *as if* they were systems of signs – on the hypothesis that all cultural phenomena *are*, in reality, systems of signs, or that culture can be understood as *communication*– then one of the fields in which it will undoubtedly find itself most challenged is that of architecture. (Broadbent, Bunt, & Jencks, 1980, p.11)

The study of meaning within architecture is complex; however, it is clear that architectural design does make an impact on our senses which create meaning to us based upon our existing multiple identities as human beings (Preziosi, 1979). Meaning is derived from a stimulus that is generated through one’s experience which leads to a response, the denotative, while the interpretation is through connotative meaning (Broadbent, Bunt, & Jencks, 1980). Therefore, within the analysis of the gathered qualitative data, both elements of denotative and connotative will be captured.

Since this study is being captured through the lens of cultural transmission and inclusive excellence, semiotics allows me to examine meaning-making through a triangulated system of signs. This system identifies the key informants in the role of the

*cultural producers*, the building and the architectural design as the *cultural text*, and the African-American female students are thus the *cultural audience*.

Table 3. Key Players in the Cultural Transmission of the Built Educational Environment

<b>Cultural Producers</b>	<b>Cultural Text</b>	<b>Cultural Audience</b>
Chancellor, architects, donors	Built Spaces of the University of Denver campus	African-American female students, faculty and staff members

The semiotic approach will allow me to analyze how and whether the intended messages the cultural producers embed within the cultural text are perceived as intended by the cultural audience. If the intended meaning is not perceived, we must ask why and whether the cultural audience’s racial and gender identities, as well as position of power, were considered within the design of the cultural text.

Therefore, I believe that by utilizing this approach I can truly and authentically discover the intentions of the key informants in designing the physical spaces. Next, through the screening surveys, cognitive tours, and reflective interviews, I can understand whether the intended meaning embedded within the built educational environment is being interpreted as it was intended. Thus, the process of cultural transmission within the framework of inclusive excellence can be truly documented and analyzed.

Within the research design chapter of this portrait, I present a combination of data collection, analysis, and interpretation strategies to include a holistic perspective, context sensitivity, and voice/perspective/reflexivity (Patton, 2002). I will utilize a holistic perspective to consider “the whole phenomenon under study [to be] understood as a

complex system that is more than the sum of its parts” (Patton, 2002, p. 41). Further from this context, importance will be placed on the “social, historical, and temporal context” of this specific case in order to discover “the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space...to allow for possible transferability and adaptation in new settings” (Patton, 2002, p. 41).

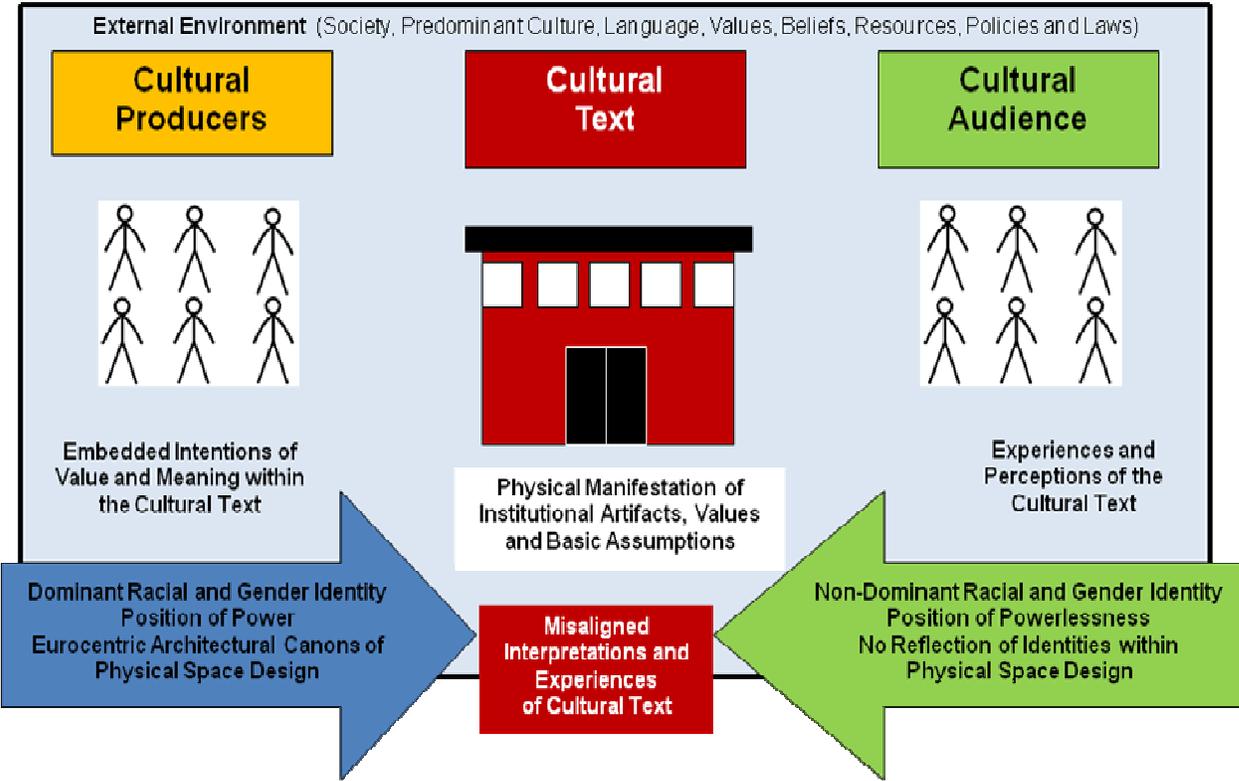
**Conceptual Model: Cultural Transmission of Misaligned Interpretations of the Built Educational Environment Based on Race, Gender and Power**

“One’s race, ethnicity, cultural background, religion, and gender can all be sources of different understandings and different questions about what is good, what is bad, what is really, what is right, what is beautiful, and what is just.” As a result, this is a source of knowledge and truth (Hazel Markus as cited by Maher and Tetreault, 2007, p. 1). With these considerations as the contextual backdrop, I have developed a new conceptual model (Figure 5) that draws upon the first level of Schein’s (1992) organizational culture transmission model pertaining to the institutional artifact of the physical environment, the AAC&U’s Inclusive Excellence Scorecard’s elements of access and equity and campus climate, and the semiotics system of signs. In addition, the conceptual model is founded in the laws pertaining to equal access since the *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*.

By combining the concepts of cultural transmission through an institution’s artifacts, particularly the physical environment and its role in providing access and equity to the campus climate, I propose to understand what elements should comprise an inclusive higher educational built environment. Specifically, this conceptual model places the physical environment of the campus climate between those who create the

physical environment and those who interact with it. I am defining the campus climate through three primary elements, the geographical location, architectural design and the dynamics that occur between the physical built spaces and the campus community as students, faculty, staff, and administrators. By doing so it borrows from the concepts of Semiotics which studies the dynamics of meaning-making through three elements: the *cultural producer*, the *cultural text*, and the *cultural audience* (Nöth, 1990; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). The *cultural producers* are those who hold the power to control access and the physical design of the cultural text. Additionally they determine what institutional values will become embedded within the cultural text and how these

Figure 5: Cultural Transmission of Misaligned Interpretations of the Built Educational Environment Based on Race, Gender, and Power



values will be relayed through the geographic location and exterior and interior design elements of the building.

In this way, the *cultural text* serves as an institutional artifact that represents the basic assumptions and values of the institution within a physical form. This physical manifestation represents the cultural producers' ideas of what an educational environment is and how it should function, look and feel to the cultural audience. This places the cultural producers' basic assumptions and values of who the cultural audience is and how they will perceive their physical and psychological access into the cultural text. Likewise, the *cultural audience* that is comprised of the students, faculty, staff, and greater community bring their own basic assumptions and values of the higher educational environment through their perceptions. Functionally the cultural text is designed for the interaction of learners and teachers to engage within the educational process; however, the dynamics of their interactions with the built environment itself must be discovered. Therefore, while African-American women may be able to gain physical access to the cultural text, their psychological access may differ based upon their racial and gender identities.

The conceptual model provides a foundation for further investigation into the relationships and perceptions of the built campus environment and those within the campus community. Thus, the model serves to address the psychological perceptions and behavioral activities of the cultural audience within the cultural text. Ultimately, the model serves to explore whether the basic assumptions and values of the cultural producers that become embedded within the cultural text are perceived as intended by the

cultural audience. In this way, the model serves to explore the next frontier of equal access by investigating the dynamics of meaning-making that occurs between the cultural producer, cultural text, and cultural audience in the realm of one's psychological access to the built educational environment. This provides the opportunity to determine whether the inclusive excellence element of access and equity is impacting the cultural audience's perception of their campus climate. Ultimately the model will serve to enlighten us on how the built educational environment is perceived by the cultural audience and how we may refine our campus climates to become more inclusive.

The historical influence of equal access policies and the conceptual model that has been developed as a result of these policies in combination with Schein's (1992) organizational cultural transmission, the AAC&U's Inclusive Excellence Model (2005), and the study of semiotics will break new ground in the use of the portraiture methodology that will be described in the next chapter. The portraiture methodology allows for the centering of voice in relation to one's experience within a situation, an environment, or a larger historical, political, social, and/or cultural context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2005). Therefore, the conceptual model will be utilized as a working sketch to inform the design of the study that seeks to capture the narratives of the African-American women of the University of Denver with regard to their experiences, interactions with, and perceptions of the built educational environment.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design**

### **The Portraiture Methodology**

Our experience of our educational environments differs based upon our multiple identities of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and able-bodiedness (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008; Strange & Banning, 2001; Weismann, 1992). Therefore, in order to authentically capture their different perceptions expressed through words, emotions, voices, and behaviors I utilized Dr. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot's qualitative research methodology of Portraiture.

Portraiture places the social and cultural context of one's perception, experience, and voice at the center of the inquiry of research (Chapman, 2005). This centering allows the portrait to be created through the voices of the portraitist and his/her subjects in a dialogical relationship (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987). This method allows for the portraitist to incorporate the experiences of those being researched alongside the historical, political, social, and cultural elements that may be influencing the experience itself. Additionally the portraitist's experience during the research process is given a space to comment and provide subjectivity in order to form a dialogue. This dialogue becomes the portrait.

In this chapter, I will review the portraiture methodology. This will include the historical qualitative roots of influence that include aesthetics, ethnography, critical race theory, oral history, and narrative inquiry. I will emphasize the premises of this methodology that embed a search for the authentic experience in order to reveal the stories within the research context. This method of inquire is rooted in finding the goodness of a situation, context, or experience as an emancipatory act. By revealing the genuine feelings, emotions, perceptions, and actions of the research participants, the portraitist is able to expose both the good and the bad of the situation. Through the purposeful intention of seeking the truths of those who have not historically had a voice in the research context, the portraitist utilizes his or her power to make public the heart of the matter.

The multiple identities of the portraitist are situated in the research. The background, expertise, experiences and intentions of the portraitist influence the frame and direction of inquiry (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Therefore the portraitist must knowingly expose his or her presumptions and interpretations within the research process. This requires the establishment of trust with his/her research subjects through rapport, connection and transparency. Thus, a two-way relationship must be formed during the research process by creating boundaries that protect and respect both the portraitist and their subjects (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In this way, “The portraitist navigates the distance, the depth, and the intensity of the encounters by seeking a symmetry and reciprocity with the actors, by staying focused on the work, and by

developing a contract (written or oral) with the participants that clearly articulates the commitments and responsibilities of the relationship” (p. 153).

The portrait is comprised of four dimensions: a) conception, b) structure, c) form and d) coherence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Each dimension becomes part of the overall composition. If we consider the portrait to be a tapestry, or a quilt, comprised of colors, textures, patterns, threads, and stitching, then the portraitist becomes the artisan and the research participants become the substance. I will describe my approach to creating the portrait by “interweaving or combining the research elements into a complex whole (weaving the incidents into a story), or contriving something complex or elaborate (weaving a tale), or interlacing strands or strips of material (weaving a basket), or spinning (a web) (p. 247).

The use of voice is intertwined and weaved within the methodology in six elements: a) voice as autobiography, b) voice as preoccupation, c) voice as dialogue, d) voice as witness, e) voice as interpretation, and f) voice as descending other’s voices (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The voice of the portraitist and his/her research subjects are presented in a dialogue. This dialogue serves to blur the boundaries of scientific inquiry and artistic expression in order to create a rich, textured representation of the research. “Boundary-crossing promises not just factual but also truthful representations that span the separated realms of artist and child, science and art, realism and poetry, imitation and imagination, fact and interpretation “(p. 37). Thereby, the portraitist gathers data through observation, interviews, focus groups, documents and artifacts, and visual imagery in order to capture the full context of the research.

Next, I will briefly outline how the portraiture methodology has been utilized in the realm of educational research. Particularly I will highlight the new iterations that have occurred in blending this method with other forms of qualitative research particularly critical race theory and its influence on the development of new forms of inquiry such as *jazz methodology* and *poetic afriographies*. These recent studies serve as examples of how revelation can be reached through the voices within the educational environment. They provide deep, rich textural narratives that take the form of their research participants in order to represent their authentic experiences.

### **Portraiture**

Portraiture is a qualitative research method that situates the research within an inherent social and cultural context that impacts both the researched and the researcher (Dixson et al., 2005). The larger perspective of its focus of inquiry is considered within the context of the societal climate, values, and ideas. This allows for the subject of the research to be placed accurately within the genuine moment when the research is occurring. The portraitist is enabled to describe their positionality within this larger context and how this influences their choice of the specific research focus and questions (Chapman, 2005). In this way the portrait becomes framed by the contextual history, events, and environment as well as the portraitist involved in the study. This method of qualitative research “blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. xv). Hence portraiture lends itself as an

appropriate method of inquiry to capture the dynamics between the aesthetics of the built educational environment and the perceptions of the students who learn within its walls.

### **The Development of Portraiture**

The portraiture method has been in existence for the last 25 years with historical roots in the arts and empirical science (Chapman, 2005). Portraiture is best described as a blending of qualitative methodologies – aestheticism, ethnography, auto-ethnography, critical race theory, oral history, and narrative inquiry, through a naturalistic style of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This naturalistic style of inquiry centers on the abundant description of one's experience through the expression of their voices and stories (Lather, 1986). It validates the lived experiences of each individual as unique and real, lending itself to a post modernistic form of inquiry. This allows for multiple ways of meaning-making to be brought to the essence of the research, each individual story is treated as an elemental piece to the overall composition of the portrait.

The aesthetic nature of the portraiture method draws from the work of Elliot Eisner, Valerie Janesick, and Laurel Richardson that centered their research on the educational environment through an artistic lens. The artistic lens allows the portraitist to represent the voices, perspectives and experiences of those being researched in a genuine manner (Dixson et al., 2005). The reader is presented with the emotions, moods, and tones within the narrative that is situated within the deep and rich descriptions of the research context. Use of poetry, visual imagery, story vignettes, and collage are a few examples of how the artistic display of the data can be rendered. Through the

presentation of the narrative in an artistic manner, the portraitist strives to inspire the reader's contemplation and transference to make change.

### **The Premises of Portraiture**

Portraiture is rooted in the notion of boundary-crossing. Boundary-crossing requires the portraitist to embrace a blending of the aesthetic nature of the arts with the rigors of empirical scientific inquiry within the portrait (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987). It is also embedded in the manner the voice is captured through narratives, observation, and the co-creation of the portraitist and his or her subject of research inquiry (Chapman, 2005). This allows the portraitist and his or her subjects to navigate and guide the research process in partnership, giving validity to the research inquiry as well as the data shared. Additionally, within this process of boundary-crossing is the inherent responsibility of the portraitist to recognize the larger societal and cultural context in which they themselves, his or her subjects, and the research inquiry are placed (Lawrence –Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In this way, the portraitist must take the responsibility to utilize his or her research in an effort to create change to the existing environment in which the research is placed. However, it should be noted that, the goal of the portraitist is not to take a purely critical lens to his or her research, seeking only the negative elements of the study. Rather the portraitist seeks to present the stories of those who are succeeding at negotiating the environment in an effort to discover the good as well (Dixon et al., 2005). Hence while some methodologies strive to bring light to stories of those who may be failing to navigate the environment, this method strives to find those who are succeeding despite the negative. Thus, this provides hope to all.

Portraiture “is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 9). Therefore, the portraitist who enters his or her inquiry in the search of goodness is likely to embody a different reality than the researcher who is seeking to critique. This is not to say this methodology only seeks what is working, but rather it requires the portraitist to see both sides, to blur the boundaries in order to understand how those, within the context, make meaning and define what is good.

The artistic process within this methodology allows for the human experience to be genuinely documented alongside the human voice, thereby allowing a multitude of possibilities in the use of creative methods to render the portrait. By allowing for artistic expression blended with scientific forms of data collection, the portraitist can create a portrait that is transformational (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987). Further, in order to engage in the portraiture method, the portraitist must establish rapport and trust with the subjects, in order to fully engage in an authentic process of creation and interpretation. Trustworthiness is established by the portraitist establishing boundaries with the subjects through a consensual written agreement that is reinforced verbally, emotionally and behaviorally by the portraitist with their subjects. Additionally, this trust is interwoven throughout the research process through respect, safety, and reflection by both parties. Thus, this method requires an understanding of the context in which the relationship between the portraitist and the subjects are formed. It is through the establishment of a trusting relationship that an emancipatory act takes place. A partnership is formed

between the portraitist who holds power in the shaping of the research inquiry and their subjects whose voices are brought to the center of the inquiry (Dixson et al., 2005).

### **The Situated Identities of the Portraitist**

“The drawing of a portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image” (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. xv). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) declare the method of portraiture requires the portraitist to consider and incorporate the social and cultural context by crossing and interplaying on the boundaries of art and science. This method allows the researcher to become the creator of the portrait, thus the portraitist. In order to craft the portrait, the portraitist seeks to “record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of those being researched by documenting their voices and their visions – their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, xv). This allows for the use of multiple methods to capture the human voice as the primary form of expression, thus providing insight into their psychological and emotional conceptions of their environment. However, in order for the portraitist to capture authenticity of voice, a relationship of trust must be established through a continuous dialogue and shared shaping of the final portrait (Chapman, 2005). This requires the use of rapport to establish a relationship between the portraitist and the subjects. Thus, the portraiture method inherently provides power and control to the portraitist, but requires him or her to maintain transparency in his or her subjective choices and decisions within the creation of the portrait. As a result, portraiture allows for the consideration of the subjectivity that

both the researcher and the researched bring through his or her unique experiences, backgrounds, and perceptions of the world. In studying students' perceptions of their built educational environment, a recognition and respect for their multiple identities is possible through portraiture. In addition, my experience as the portraitist allows for a respectful and empathetic positionality and subjectivity to occur (Dixson et al., 2005). As an African-American female graduate student, within the same campus environment and community as the students I am researching, it was necessary for me to bring to the forefront my own experience within the built educational environment. Thereby, providing a full contextual description of my presuppositions and interpretations within the research process. Portraiture, therefore, allows for the portraitist to become a boundary-crosser in the research realm, providing a path for the researcher to join in the experiential journey of those being researched (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).

### **The Portrait and its Dimensions**

Portraits serve as historical documents that reveal a particular point in time and period of a cultural situation, inviting the reader to reflect on what is presented much like a work of art (Tierney, 2004). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1987) describes the portrait as a woven tapestry full of colors, textures, fabrics, and stitches to create an aesthetic whole. She further describes the process as involving four dimensions: the first is the *conception*, which refers to the development of the overarching story; second is the *structure*, which refers to the sequencing and layering of emergent themes that scaffold the story; third is the *form*, which reflects the movement of the narrative, the spinning of the tales; and the last is the *cohesion*, which speaks about the unity and the integrity of the piece (p. 247).

I will describe each of the four dimensions in an effort to explain the aesthetic whole of the finished product.

### **The First Dimension: Conception**

When the portraitist begins to shape the whole, she must identify the overarching story. The portraitist draws the emergent themes and organizes the multifarious threads of the individual and collective experience. Once identified and articulated, the conception both embraces and shapes the development of the narrative. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, pp. 247-248)

As the portraitist I began to lay out the stories of the research participants alongside my own observations of the physical campus space. The initial research question sought to understand the dynamic between the intentions by those who have created the built educational environment and the experiences, interactions, and perceptions of those intended to utilize them. Specifically, I inquired how the research population defined an inclusive or non-inclusive built educational environment through their voices. Therefore, the conception dimension began to identify how the built educational environment is spoken about.

### **The Second Dimension: Structure**

The structure serves as the [scaffolding] for the narrative – themes that give the piece a frame, stability and organization. As the portraitist builds the structure she is both guided by the conception and responsive to the emergence of the larger pattern. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, pp. 252-253)

Therefore, once the overarching story of how the built educational environment began to take shape, I searched for specific themes of inclusivity and exclusivity based upon specific architectural design styles and elements of the campus. For example, if a campus building was perceived as a non-inclusive space for African-American women based upon their racial and gender identities, I featured this space within the structure of the narrative. During this process, the themes that arose from the narrative directed the method of data representation. Initially, I created several collages to represent the overall story of the built educational environment, as inclusive and non-inclusive. The collages allowed for the representation of the historical, political, social, and cultural context to rise to the surface. Additionally, they allowed me to structure the portrait with themes alongside a rich description of the built environment based upon the research participants' voices. One could consider the collage as a visualized table of contents of the environment's story, one that provided the organization and direction of the overarching narrative.

### **The Third Dimension: Form**

For the portraitist, form is the texture of intellect, emotion, and aesthetics that supports, illuminates, and animates the structural elements. Standing alone, the scaffold is stark, bare and unwelcoming – unconvincing in its abstraction. But form—expressed in stories, examples, illustrations, illusions, ironies – gives life and movement to the narrative, providing complexity, subtlety, and nuance to the text, offering the reader opportunities for feeling identified and drawn into the piece. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. 254)

During the forming dimension of the portrait, I transformed the data into overarching themes and began to identify specific vignettes based on the shared experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the built educational environment. For example, one theme that emerged was a reverence for campus aesthetics. Specific buildings, architectural elements, and green spaces were identified by many women as feeling either inclusive or exclusive. Therefore, I combined their narratives and alongside the photographic images they captured of the spaces to describe how they personally experienced the theme. Since the intention of the portraiture methodology is to seek the good, in the final chapter I provide a final vignette to capture the participants' recommendations of how to create an inclusive campus environment.

#### **The Fourth Dimension: Coherence**

Finally, the aesthetic whole emerges through the development of *coherence* – when there is a logical and aesthetically consistent relation of the parts, when all the pieces fall into place and we can see the pattern clearly. To achieve this unity, the portraitist must have identified the overarching vision for the piece (conception), underscored the emergent themes creating a scaffold for the narrative (structure), and given insight, aesthetic, and emotion to the structure through the texture of stories, illustrations, and examples (forms). In addition to conception, structure, and form, the portraitist shapes the aesthetic whole by developing narrative coherence, which includes the framing and sequencing of events and experiences and the articulation of a clear and consistent voice and perspective. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, pp. 255-256)

It was my hope to generate a convincing and inspiring story of the built educational environment by providing a panoramic view during the portrait's conception. Through the identification of structure by illuminating specific architectural elements and/or spaces of the campus, the story becomes defined by the perceptions of the research participants. They enabled me to direct the elements of the environment that they perceived as inclusive or non-inclusive. During the form dimension of the portrait, the participants' voices are brought to the surface, placed at the center of the narrative, informed by their experiences and backgrounds. Thus, during the coherence dimension, as the portraitist I was enabled to move from the panoramic view to the close-up angle of the environment through the research participants' experiences, interactions, and perceptions with a blending of my observations. This created a dialogue between us, one that centered each woman's voice alongside my own to create the overarching story. The portrait is a "document[ation] and illumina[tion] [of] the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, [one that] the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 13). It serves as a single case in which it is hoped the reader will "discover resonant universal themes" (p. 13). These themes serve to speak to a broad audience in a manner to evoke transformational reflection of change within other contexts.

### **The Six Elements of Voice**

While all methods of research utilize the element of voice, whether through a response from the research subject on a survey or the transcripts of a recorded interview, portraiture outlines six specific manners in which the researcher and the researched can

utilize their voices within the research process. Therefore, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1987) emphasize “the use of voice must be recognized, evaluated, and integrated within the telling of the data” (Chapman, 2005, p. 34).

1. **Voice as Autobiography:** The researcher brings her own history – familial, cultural, ideological, and educational – to the inquiry. Her perspective, her questions, and her insights are inevitably shaped by these profound developmental and autobiographical experiences. She must use the knowledge and wisdom drawn from these life experiences as resources for understanding, and as sources of connection and identification with the actors in the setting, but she must not let her autobiography obscure or overwhelm the inquiry. (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. 95)

As the portraitist, I have discussed my positionality and interest in the research topic in the introduction chapter of this dissertation proposal. As a current graduate student, within the setting, it was my obligation to make my experience within the campus as well as my interest in the research inquiry, known. I expressed this in writing in the recruitment and consent documentation for research participants. This provided a platform for me to bring my intentions for the research to the surface and at the same time invite the research participants to bring their experiences within the built educational environment of a predominantly white institution to the center of the inquiry.

2. **Voice as Preoccupation:** With increasing presence in the text, the portraitist’s voice as preoccupation refers to the ways in which her observations and her text are shaped by the assumptions she brings to the inquiry, reflecting her disciplinary

background, her theoretical perspectives, her intellectual interests, and her understandings of the relevant literature. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. 93)

I have outlined my qualifications and intentions in conducting this study in the introduction chapter of this portrait. Additionally, I have outlined the relevant literature on the research topic within the literature review. Within this methodology chapter, I have featured the work of other scholars who have utilized portraiture in educational research to validate my choice to utilize it for my study. By doing so, I have revealed and made my lenses of inquiry transparent to the reader. Thereby, allowing the reader to have insight into my positionality and existing knowledge of the research subject.

3. **Voice as Dialogue:** With voice in dialogue, the portraitist purposely places herself in the middle of the action (in the field and in the text). She feels the symmetry of voice – hers and the actors – as they both express their views and together define meaning-making. (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. 103)

The portraiture methodology will allow me to capture the dialogue held between myself as the portraitist and the research participants. This will be represented by including the research questions and prompts throughout the data collection methods of survey, cognitive interview, reflection journaling, and reflective interview. Additionally during the creation of the portrait I will include my observations and perceptions alongside those of the key informants and women in the study.

4. **Voice as Witness:** This use of voice underscores the researcher's stance as discerning observer, as sufficiently distanced from the action to be able to see the

whole, as far enough away to depict patterns that actors in the setting may not notice because of their involvement in the scene. We see the portraitist standing on the edge of the scene – a boundary sitter-scanning the action, systematically gathering the details of behavior, expressions, and talk, remaining open and receptive to all stimuli. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. 87)

During the data collection process, I conducted observations of the participants' experiences in, interactions with, and perceptions of the physical spaces of the campus. Additionally, I utilized archival information from the institution to describe the larger context of the research study.

5. **Voice as Interpretation:** Here we not only experience the stance of the observer and her place of witness, we also hear her interpretations, the researcher's attempt to make some sense of the data. She is asking, "What is the meaning of this action, gesture of communication to the actors in this setting?" and "What is the meaning to me?" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. 91)

During the data collection process, I obtained written, audio-taped, and video recorded information that will enable me to begin to make meaning of the stories that were shared by the research participants. In essence, to understand how the physical campus spaces were being experienced, interacted with, and perceived. Additionally, through the analysis of artifacts, I was able to gain a more detailed understanding of how the built educational environment was designed. Thus, through the blending of experiences and descriptions, I began to understand and interpret the perceptions of the campus.

6. **Voice Discerning Other Voices:** When a portraitist listens for voice, she seeks it out, trying to capture its texture and cadence, exploring its meaning and transporting its sound and message into the text through carefully selected quotations [and notation of physical gestures or behavioral action]. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987, p. 99)

During the cognitive tours described in the next section of this chapter, I will be able to capture the words, emotions, and physical reactions of the African-American women who utilize the physical spaces of the campus. This allowed me to interpret their voices through their spoken language alongside their tone and reactions that added richness to the meaning-making. For example, if a participant described a space as feeling welcoming based upon its location within a given building, I could discern if their body language echoed their words. In addition, I was able to document how often, and in what capacity the participant utilized the space, to determine how they were defining an inclusive space.

### **The Use of Portraiture in Educational Research**

Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1983) first portrait, *The Good High School*, illuminated the imbalance of power within the learning environment, emphasizing the importance of building a community of shared power amongst teachers, students, and administrators (Featherstone, 1989, p. 377). Throughout this portrait, Lawrence-Lightfoot meshes her own educational experiences with the experiences of the teachers and students she is researching. She includes her subjective comments and experiences as a co-participant within the learning community. Negotiating her place as the researcher and as a

participant within the environment, she reveals the authentic voices and experiences of the teachers and students within their authentic high school context. The result of this landmark study was presented to the school administrators of the high school which was met with positive comments and feedback. Thus, this form of research inquiry enabled her to present a portrait comprised of the lived human experiences of the school's teachers and students. This process allowed for the sharing of stories, experiences, and perceptions through their own voices, words and emotions. Additionally, the findings of this study presented negative experiences within the environment, but also stories of hope from those who were able to succeed despite them. In this way, this form of inquiry allows the portraitist to represent the stories of despair in order to search for the goodness in the environment and ultimately the opportunity to make positive changes.

In a recent special edition of *Qualitative Inquiry*, five educational researchers describe the next generation of portraiture through a blending with other forms of qualitative inquiry and the development of entirely new methods founded upon the premises of portraiture. Adrienne D. Dixon (2005) explores the compositional elements of portraiture in relation to a new frame of jazz and critical race theory in which the experience of African-Americans within the research process becomes emancipatory through a creative form of visual display and expression. The jazz methodology is “delineated through solos, breaks, and rifts that compose the art of jazz” (Dixon et al., 2005, p. 21). The researcher's identity moves from the portraitist to the “bandleader who co-creates the musical text with teachers, students, parents, and the community” (Dixon et al., 2005, p. 21). Dixon's 10-month study of two black female elementary school

teachers utilized interviewing as the primary method of data collection. Through the jazz lens the elements of call and response were embedded in the dialogue between the research participants and the portraitist.

Thandeka K. Chapman (2005) blends portraiture with critical race theory in an effort to explore “a veteran white teacher’s pedagogical choices when teaching literature by authors of color in a school district that were recently segregated” (Dixson et al., 2005, p. 21). Through this method of blending, Chapman (2005) enables issues of race, class, and gender to be placed at the center of her inquiry while balancing a search for goodness. Her utilization of voice allows her to situate her identities as the researcher within the study. Chapman’s study was conducted over one academic semester with one white teacher and her 26 students. Chapman utilized observations, individual interviews, group interviews, focus groups, and preliminary document and archive record analysis as her primary data collection methods. It is important to note Chapman audio-taped and video-taped all focus group interviews which enabled her to facilitate the process and to be fully present. However, she discovered after videotaping four class sessions that the camera created a barrier in the classroom and ultimately, a separation of the students into two groups. Therefore, she adapted to videotaping a few class periods to enrich her observation notes.

Dianna A. Hill (2005) developed the *poetic afriographic* method to capture the voices of three black female teacher educators situated in higher educational environments. This method utilizes the voice in the form of poetry to create poetic portraits of each woman’s biographical experiences (Dixson et al., 2005). Hill utilized

interviewing, observation and shadowing, and document analysis as her primary data collection methods. Her primary research questions were, “*In what ways do the participants’ experiences as outsiders-within inform their practices? and How does the theme of race uplift inform the participants’ pedagogy?*” (Hill, 2005, p. 95). She found that each woman had a strong sense education, community, and spirituality that guided their teaching and self-identity within the academy.

Heather A. Harding (2005) utilizes portraiture as her primary method to investigate how race impacts learning between white teachers and students of color in an urban classroom. Specifically, she investigates one specific teacher over the span of a year period to learn why she was more culturally relevant in teaching students of color than her peers. Harding (2005) utilized traditional qualitative interviews and observation to gather “...emergent themes [that included] the construction of an “urban” identity, which shapes this teacher’s choice to teach students of color and to select a pedagogy and practice that “empowers kids” (p. 54).

Roberta M. Newton (2005) blends two methods of portraiture, poetry, and collage, to capture the lived experiences of two female Arab preservice teachers after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. She argues the artistic approach to research inquiry allows her to co-theorize the impact of this event to the women’s lives, thereby blending her own experience as a woman during this historical period in our country. In order to create a safe creative space, Newton coordinated the use of what she refers to as a place where “deep talk” could occur. Newton (2005) refers to the West African deep talk metaphor that Maya Angelou

describes as “ever deepening spiral of revelation, truth-telling, truth-seeking, meaning-making, and planning” happens (p. 82). This allowed each participant to talk to each other and to her through interview and observation. The final result of their sharing, meaning-making, and storytelling resulted in self-authored poetry and collage on graffiti mat (large poster boards with written words/images). This is one example of the physical manifestation of portraiture; the subjects’ words and artistic expression become a visual documentation of their experiences and stories.

In the forthcoming book, *The Best of the Best: Becoming Elite at an American Boarding School*, Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) utilizes portraiture to document the privileged lives of 36 male students within a New England boarding school. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) develops a portrait to reveal how the students’ identity of privilege is defined by their membership within the school community, their “Westonian” identity. In other words, he is able to allow the students’ voices to define their own identity. Additionally, Gaztambide-Fernández is able to portray the hierarchal nature of their Westonian identity that is based on race, class, sexism and physical looks. Within this year long study, Gaztambide-Fernández utilized interviews, focus groups, and observations to capture the students’ words and his experiences within the community.

The above research examples provide an illustration of how the portraiture methodology has been utilized and additionally serve as a foundation in the creation of new methods of qualitative inquiry and representation. Each example illustrates the premises of the methodology that center around the search for goodness through

emancipation. The emphasis on voice and the situation of the researcher's identities and experiences within the research process are vital.

Additionally, the above research illustrates a methodology that allowed me as the researcher, to draw upon my identity and unique experiences to inform my positionality. The focus of this inquiry placed the built educational environment under a critical black feminist lens. The environment has historically been shaped by a white male perspective. Therefore, as a female scholar of color, the portraiture methodology enabled me to bring my identities into the structure and dialogue of the research. Further, it allowed me to discuss how the racial and gender identities of the research participants' were being impacted by the built educational environment. In this way, the portrait allowed the female voice to find a space to freely express itself in the name of making change in our educational environment. Thus, as a female scholar of color focused on the research of the built educational environment, I found this method of research inquiry to be emancipatory to my own identities as well as those I intended to research.

### **Research Design and Purpose**

The goal of the study was to capture the experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the research participants in order to: a) understand what they experienced, how they interacted with, and perceived their built educational environment based upon their racial and gender identities, b) understand what importance the built educational environment had to them, c) discover what architectural elements they felt reflected, or do not reflect, their identities, and d) explore why they may have felt their identities were reflected, or are not reflected, within the built educational environment (Moos, 1986; Strange &

Banning, 2001; Weismann, 1992). In creating a portrait, the portraitist asserts that the relationship between the empiricism of science and the aesthetics of art is necessary to blur the boundaries of what is deemed as the authentic experience in an effort to portray what is real (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). The portrait serves as a record and interpretation of those being depicted through the composition. Therefore, the portraiture methodology assumes there is an existing social and cultural context in which the subject of the portrait and the portraitist exist (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). This context impacted the relationship between the participants and me as well as the choice of what resources of information I could access to create the portrait.

In this next section, I will discuss the strategies I utilized to focus the research inquiry on the African-American women in the study. I employed a purposeful criterion-sampling strategy. All participants had to meet a minimal criterion to participate, that was contingent upon their willingness to participate in the study and their racial and gender identity saliency. I will discuss the ways in which I ensured data validity through the use of member checking and reflective feedback. This allowed all research participants' the ability to ensure that their voices have been captured genuinely and provided an opportunity for additional reflection on the research process itself. I will discuss the importance and methods I employed to establish trustworthiness within the research process. This included the creation of a trusting relationship through rapport, one that was reciprocal in the sharing of experiences, presuppositions, and perceptions by the research participants and me as the portraitist (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). This study utilized a mixture of data collection methods in an effort to capture the context of the built

educational environment itself and the participants who interacted within its physical spaces. A combination of a screening survey, an audio-taped and video-taped cognitive interview tour, reflective journaling, photo documentation, and a final reflective interview were utilized.

Finally, I will discuss my methods of data interpretation and representation through my conceptual model and the use of collage and vignettes. The conceptual model allowed me to capture the research participants' interpretation of meaning placed upon the built educational environment including elements of space and place. As a result, I was able to embrace the tenets of forming the portrait by capturing the dynamics between the research participants and the context of the built educational environment. Through this form of analysis, I was able to begin shaping the conception and structure of the portrait into a collage; a panoramic representation of the built educational environment's story. Through the identification of emergent themes, I was able to define specific architectural elements and spaces within the built educational environment to shape into vignettes. Each vignette portrayed a particular story of perception defined by the experiences and voices of the participants.

The purpose of this portrait was to explore and discover the experiences of African-American women at the University of Denver where they are not readily reflected within the compositional diversity of their campus. Additionally, to determine whether this underrepresentation impacted how they experienced, interact with, and perceived the built educational environment. In addition, to determine whether the American context of denial and limitation of access to educational environments by

African-American was relevant in the context of the women's own narratives. Finally, I aspired to bring together the shared stories of African-American women and their images of a predominantly white campus together to reflect the dynamics that exist between them today.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do African-American women experience, interact with, and perceive the built environment of a predominantly white institution based on their racial and gender identities?
2. What importance do African-American women place on the built environment?
3. What specific elements within the built environment reflect, or don't reflect, their racial and gender identities?
4. Why may African-American women feel their identities are, or are not reflected, within the built environment of a predominantly white institution?

### **Study Sample: Current African-American Women of the University of Denver**

In order to capture the lived experiences of the African-American women within the University of Denver, I recruited current undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff to share their perceptions and experiences (Patton, 2002). This ensured an intended balance of information shared by women who are in different roles within the institution. Thus, attempting to eliminate one group's perspective that could be "limited, selective, and biased" (Patton, 2002, p. 321). Targeting several groups of African-American women within the institution also provided triangulation of the data collected. As a further measure to triangulate the data, I utilized several methods of data collection

that included a screening survey, a cognitive interview tour, journal reflection and photo documentation, and a final reflective interview. Each method will be described in greater detail below. Triangulation can serve the purpose of cross-checking, referencing, finding convergence, as well as, discovering inconsistency and contradiction within the data (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & McCormack Steinmetz, 1991).

### **Purposeful Criterion-sampling**

“Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful sampling*” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Purposeful sampling is specific to qualitative research it allows the researcher to select the research population based upon specific research purposes. In this case, I utilized a purposeful criterion-sampling approach in order “to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance, a strategy common in quality assurance efforts” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). All research participants met the following criteria.

- Currently a member of the University of Denver community
- Identified as an African-American woman

The purposeful criterion-sampling approach enabled me to capture the perspectives of African-American women within the University of Denver community. The primary unit of analysis will be each participant. Their perceptions, interactions, and experiences of the built educational environment of a predominantly white institution based upon their racial and gender identities quantified them.

## Data Collection Methods

- Online Screening Survey (Recruitment goal: 20-40 participants, Recruitment result: 27 participants, Survey length: 10 open-ended questions, Protocol: Appendix B): In partnership with the Center for Multicultural I distributed a recruitment email with a link to the online screening survey. An overview of the study was provided along with an invitation to participant in the survey. The survey was comprised of 10 open-ended questions pertaining to the participant's identity, demographic information, the amount of time they spent on campus, campus activities, and thoughts on how their perception of the built educational environment was impacted by their racial and gender identities as African-American women. Upon completing the survey, the participants were invited to participate in a series of individual interviews about their perceptions. The survey was offered through the University of Denver's Qualtrics software interface. The university's Center for Teaching and Learning maintains secure protection of all survey data. All survey data was kept confidential and secured by the researcher.
- Cognitive Interview Tour (Recruitment goal: 9-12 participants, Recruitment result: 9 participants, Interview length: 60 – 120 minutes, Protocol: Appendix C): Based upon the cognitive mapping literature, which focuses upon a person's mental congruence, "spatial behavior is dependent on each person's subjective or cognitive map of the physical environment" (Moos, 1986, pp. 132-133). Therefore, the process of cognitive mapping can inform about "[t]he process of acquiring, coding, recalling, and decoding such information about the 'whereness'

and other physical attributes of various features of [one's] environment" (p. 133). Within this process, one's multiple identities can impact one's cognitive map. Therefore, in order to fully understand how one makes meaning of their environment and even perceived environment, understanding how one behaves, and interacts with their environment is necessary. According to Moos (1986) the best methods to capture one's cognitive reactions and perceptions are through participant-observation (allowing the participant to take you on their daily route), audio-tape (capture their verbal expressions and reactions), and video-tape (capture their physical behavior) (p. 420). Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and McCormack Steinmetz (1991) indicate "Video-tapes show context, people in verbal interaction and such non-verbal elements as the sounds of voices, gestures, facial expressions, light, color, activity, and relative bustle or quiet" (p. 82). With this in mind, I asked participants who volunteered for a tour to walk me through their daily pattern of navigating and interaction the University of Denver campus to provide insight into their interaction with its physical spaces. The tour was taped by the researcher in order to capture the interaction between the participant and the built educational environment. All video-tapes were kept confidential and secured by the researcher.

- Reflective Journaling and Photo Documentation (Protocol: Appendix D): Each participant was asked to reflect on the cognitive interview tour by writing her thoughts down in a journal and capturing photographic images of the campus. Each participant was provided a journal and a disposable camera. Participants

were given a two-three week period to conduct this activity. This activity allowed each participant to continue her thoughts about the built educational environment of the University of Denver campus. In addition, by providing a disposable camera, participants were able to capture and document specific spaces and elements that were impacting their perceptions. I also provided each participant with five prompting questions to begin their reflection process. In addition, I requested permission to use their journal entries and photographs to incorporate into the dissertation to serve as artifacts of their experiences.

- Final Reflective Interviews (Protocol, Appendix E): In an effort to gain participants' meaning-making of the built educational environment of the University of Denver campus, a 45-90 minute follow-up interview was conducted to provide an opportunity for the participant to reflect on the experience and to share her comments, thoughts, feedback or feelings on the topic or the process itself. I encouraged participants to utilize their reflective journal and photographs to reflect on their experience, interactions, and perceptions. Thus, serving as an emancipatory activity as part of the research process. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and McCormack Steinmetz (1991) indicate "Audio-tapes add the nuance of a person's voice, to the words that the print provides" (p. 82). Therefore, the reflective interviews were audio-taped. All audio-tapes, transcriptions, and notes were kept confidential and secured by the researcher.
- Document and Artifact Analysis: In order to triangulate the design, I conducted an analysis of historical records including photographs, newspaper clippings, and

press releases from the institutional archives. In addition, I reviewed institutional marketing materials including the university website and printed promotional materials (view book, brochures, etc.) to understand how the built educational environment was described and promoted to prospective and current students.

- **Participant Observation:** Several observations of the built educational environment were conducted over the entirety of the study in order to capture the sights, sounds, and smells of the campus environment. In addition, I participated in a prospective student campus tour to gain insight into how campus representatives spoke about the environment. This provided a balance of contextual knowledge based upon individual perceptions and institutionally defined descriptions of the built educational environment.

## **Establishing Trustworthiness and Collaboration**

### **Interviewing for Feeling and Research Participants as Allies**

Klaus G. Witz (2006) describes an essentialist approach to the portraiture methodology by developing an ally relationship with research participants. The portraitist and the participants become co-creators of the research process. This process involves interviewing with the intention of seeking the participant's subjective experience rather than simply objective information. In this form of interviewing the portraitist can engage in a casual conversation with the participant in order to allow them to bring information they feel is relevant to the research topic. This allows the participant to share feelings, emotions, perceptions, past experiences and struggles to express richness and texture to the conversation. As Witz (2006) notes:

Only after I started to understand the [participant's] perspective on the subject and her or his subjective experience and feeling would I start exploring with the student some questions I had, hypotheses that had come to me while the participant was talking and so forth. (p. 248)

This approach allows for the participants to become involved in the overall research goal. They are enabled to become part of the search for goodness in this emancipatory act. This goal is to inform who designs and promotes the built educational environment with an understanding of how participants perceive their environment as inclusive or non-inclusive based on their race and gender. In this way, those who participate in the research are central to providing the key to the underlying research goal. Therefore, in my recruitment materials and conversations, I described the study as an opportunity for participants to share their stories and experiences within their built educational environment in order to speak for those who have come before them and those who will come after them.

### **Member Checking and Reflective Feedback**

In order to ensure the process of data interpretation is valid with the existing data, I engaged in the process of member checking with every research participant. This ensured the data was authentic and genuinely represented each participant's words, feelings, and experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Witz, 2006). As the portraitist, it was important for me to ensure the data I utilized in the composition of the portrait, were true to those who have provided me with their stories. I provided the original transcripts from the cognitive interview tour and final reflective interview to each participant to review, edit, and provide feedback in order to ensure their words and behaviors were captured in an authentic manner. By member checking I ensured the data

used in the interpretation process and the final data representation reflected the real stories and perceptions of the participants.

In addition, I encouraged participants to submit any additional comments, feedback, or thoughts on their experience in the study as a result of reviewing the transcripts. This provided an opportunity for the research participants to share their reflections in a manner they deemed appropriate whether it be additional written or typed comments, poetry, stories, drawings, photos, or imagery. In this way, their voices could be heard outside of the primary collection method protocol, allowing for emancipation and inclusiveness within the research process. As the portraitist, I requested permission to utilize their reflective feedback within the portrait to help create a richer, textured, and in-depth context for the research inquiry.

#### **Researcher Connection, Reputation, Rapport, Transparency, and Reflexivity**

Since this study focused upon personal experiences, interactions, and perceptions based upon the participants' multiple identities, transparency and reflexivity was utilized in order to establish a trusting relationship with the research population. Mauther, Birch, Jessop and Miller (2008) argue for the importance of establishing relationships with those who are the focus of our research (participants) with those who are utilizing our research (audience). In order to create a trusting relationship, transparency through open communication regarding the research process, including describing the research focus and goals, data collection methods, and the final report.

In order to establish my reputation as a researcher, I gained support from the Center for Multicultural Excellence. As a result, I requested the staff's permission to list

them as supporters within all recruitment material and they were willing to distribute the study recruitment email to current students, faculty, and staff that self-identified as African-American women through their list serves, which included the Black Student Alliance and the Black Faculty group.

Establishing rapport involves obtaining informed consent, professionalism, managing of emotions, awareness of language, manner of attire/dress and developing trust through a professional relationship. In reference to their ethics of qualitative research with women, Mauther, Birch, Jessop and Miller (2008) describe rapport as:

tantamount to trust, and trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make ... When you are warm and caring, you promote rapport, you make yourself appealing to talk to, and, not least, you communicate to your respondents, 'I see you as a human being with interests, experience, and needs beyond those I tap for my own purposes.' (p. 110)

I ensured my appearance and presence were maintained in a professional manner during the research process. I would always seek the truth from the research participants without preconceived notions or ideas and allow them space and time to reflect on the research inquiry itself. I asked participants for the honor of hearing and sharing in their stories in order to give a voice to their experiences, interactions, and perceptions with the hope that they would inspire change.

Additionally, during this process the researcher must utilize reflexivity in order to establish how much to reveal about themselves in order to gain credibility and access to the research participants and the researcher's academic community. Mauther, Birch, Jessop and Miller (2008) indicate reflexivity:

holds together methodology, epistemology, and ethics; and we conceptualize reflexivity not only in terms of social location, but also in terms of the personal,

interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological, and ontological influences of our research. Moreover, in speaking about the ethical significance of reflexivity, we are referring to its relevance to issues of honesty, transparency and overall accountability in research. (p. 125)

With this stated, I revealed my identity as a current doctoral student at the University of Denver. In addition, in order to exercise reflexivity within the research process, I revealed my racial and gender identities as an African-American woman. This allowed the participants to have an understanding of who I was as the researcher. Finally, I divulged my own presuppositions by journaling about my experiences during the research process. This is apparent in the foreword and afterword of this dissertation as well as embedded within the overall portrait. This includes an explanation of what led me to select this particular topic which focuses upon African-American women's perceptions, interactions and perceptions of their built educational environment at a predominantly white institution of higher education.

### **Data Validity, Analysis, and Interpretation**

#### **Validity**

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) emphasize once the portraitist is in the field, she "begins by listening and observing, being open and receptive to all stimuli, acclimating herself to the environment, documenting her initial movements and first impressions, and noting what is familiar and what is surprising" (p. 187). In addition, they emphasize the importance of "at each stage of data collection, at the close of each day, the portraitist gathers, scrutinizes, and organizes the data and tries to make sure of what she has witnessed" (p. 187).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refer to the work of Goertz and LeCompte (1984, 1993), Maxwell (1996), and Eisner (1985) in relation to the difficulty in proving the validity of qualitative work, especially in the use of the portraiture methodology. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refers to the data validation process in terms of a quilt maker metaphor, where the portraitist determines which pieces of fabric, thread, textures and colors are necessary for the composition. “What evolves is a piece of writing that conveys the tone, style, and tempo of the school environment as well as it’s more static and behavioral structures” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1987, p. 244). Goetz and LeCompte (1984, 1993) refer to the validation process as a jig saw puzzle in which the ethnographer shapes the frame and determines what shape the edges of each piece must take in order to create a credible and believable story. Within this process the importance is placed not on the puzzle as a whole, but on the process it took to assemble it. Maxwell (1996) discusses how the researcher must engage in creating a trustworthy narrative, one that is seen as credible and valid. He emphasizes that the importance is not on the objective, but rather the holistic “...correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 87). He further stated that the importance of proving the validity of qualitative data is realizing “the idea of objective truth isn’t essential to a theory of validity that does what most researchers want it to do, which is to give them some grounds for distinguishing accounts that are credible from those that are not” (p. 87). Eisner (1985) further emphasizes “the researcher’s goal of finding corroboration among the pieces of the puzzle underscores Maxwell’s concern with “creating a whole” that is believable (as cited by Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis,

1997, p. 245). He indicates that two elements are necessary for validity, structural corroboration and referential adequacy. Structural corroboration “is a process of gathering data or information and using it to establish links that eventually create a whole that is supported by the bits of evidence that constitute it” (Eisner, 1985, p. 241). Referential adequacy relies on the researcher’s expertise and her knowledge of the setting being studied in order to “[test] the criticism against the phenomena it seeks to describe, interpret, and evaluate...the empirical check of critical disclosure” (Eisner, 1985, p. 244). Therefore, the researcher’s role as the quilt-maker, jigsaw puzzle-maker, and tester of the data rely upon their deep understanding of the environment and their ability to pick up on the subtleties and complexities of the research. With this in mind, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend three primary elements the researcher must avoid during the validation process of the final data interpretation and representation phases.

- *Holistic fallacy*: interpreting events as more patterned and congruent than they really are, lopping of the many loose ends which social life is made.
- *Elite bias*: overweighting data from articulate, well-informed, usually high-status informants and under-representing data from less articulate, lower-status ones
- *Going native*: losing your perspective...being co-opted into the perceptions and explanations of local informants. (p. 263)

### **Analysis and Interpretation: Emergent Themes**

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) cite the emergent theme development approach of Marshall and Rossman (1989) that stated, “this phase of the research process is the most ambitious and intellectually challenging, as the researcher tries to

stay grounded in the authentic experiences of the actors while at the same time creating a coherent category system” (pp. 189-190). In order to identify themes in the perceptions and experiences of my research participants’, I utilized their spoken and written words, physical emotion and expression, and photos. In this way, I was able to analyze multiple formats and modes of meaning-making to validate the emergent themes that arose (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In addition, I highlighted my own interpretations as the portraitist along side of the participants to create a validation process through dialogue of words and visual imagery. In this way, I was able to value each research participants’ perceptions and experiences as unique, a process that allows their voices to be recognized, respected, and analyzed in order to identify themes of commonality (Patton, 2002). The portraiture method allows for thematic coding as the primary tool for analyzing the data captured during the research process. However, within this process the researcher as portraitist takes the ultimate responsibility in selecting the narratives to create the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Marshall and Rossman (1989 as cited by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997) state that the key to identifying emergent themes is to identify themes of saliency and reoccurrence in ideas, language, gestures, emotions, and beliefs that connect research participants. As a result, the pattern of themes begins to shape and form the quilt of meaning-making. Miles and Huberman (1994) offer emphasis “pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (as cited by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 190). They go on to explain the process of identifying emergent themes forms that data into “more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (p. 190).

Miles and Huberman (1994) also note that there are four important functions of conducting the process of pattern-coding.

- 1) It reduces large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytical units.
- 2) It gets the researcher into analysis data collection, so that later fieldwork can be more focused.
- 3) It helps the researcher elaborate a cognitive map, an evolving, more integrated schema for understanding local incidents and interactions.
- 4) For multicase studies, it lays the groundwork for cross-case analysis by surfacing common themes and directional purposes. (p. 69)

#### **Data Representation through Vignette and Collage**

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1987) quotes Aristotle's work titled, *The Poetics*, to illustrate the importance of the portrait having a basic foundational structure that includes "a beginning, middle, and an end" (p. 264). The vignette provides a representation of themes supported by verbatim narrative and expression provided by research participants. In this case, the vignette presents the experiences and perceptions of African-American women within the physical spaces of a predominantly white institution. In addition, the vignette shared the story of the context utilizing the first person. By utilizing vignettes in the portraiture method, I could also present contrasts and contradictions. In this case, the stories of those who felt specific spaces were inclusive or non-inclusive based upon their racial and gender identities. Therefore in the following example, I present a hypothetical vignette about a fictitious classroom building.

## Classroom Building: A Space of Racial and Gender Exclusion

“Isn’t this the place Condi Rice graduated from? I see her picture in the newspapers and on the television, but no photos of her within the school she attended.”

“When I went to find my advisor, I was surprised to find her in the basement of the building. Her office felt small and there were only a few windows. I felt like she had been placed in the dungeon. Is this how the institution treats all African-American female professors?”

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1987) also provide words of advice on how one can illuminate and implement the narratives of the portrait into a complete and cohesive end product. Therefore in the spirit of the portraiture method, I intended to create a portrait that includes the written and spoken words of the research participants, visual illustrations of building blue prints and personal drawings, archived photos, images of the building from the website, brochures, and events, scanned images of artifacts, excerpts from archival documents alongside my own words. Thus, this creative process resembled a collage approach, one which utilized various forms, textures, materials, and manners of stitching together the whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1987). This approach allowed the meaning-making process to come to light through narratives, stories, quotes, and visual imagery to present the reader with an authentic picture of the physical space context and those within it (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Example of a Collage

<p>“Her office was hard to find and then when I found it, I was surprised to find her in the basement. I mean she is a professor, a doctor and this is where the university places her.”</p>	<p>Classroom Building</p>	<p>“The institution is undergoing growing pains. When new faculty join us it can be difficult to find them office space. But we do our best.”</p>
<p>As I examine the wall of past deans of this school, not one African-American woman is included. This seems odd given that the target population of the school is focused on underserved, minority populations.</p>		<p>As she looked at the walls of the student lounge, her eyes began to tear up and her mouth dropped.</p> <p>Her mouth was pursed as her hands moved to the rhythm of her voice.</p> <p>How many African-American women do you see on campus? Where are we?</p>

The above example illustrates the initial organization of narrative and visual images in order to provide a collage of words from the key informants, participants, the portraitist and the space itself. This type of display provides the reader with a highlighted understanding of the building story.

**Chapter Four: Our Walk: A Compilation of Current African-American Women's Experiences, Interactions, and Perceptions of the Built Educational Environment at the University of Denver**

“The campus evokes a sense of history and pride. I like seeing all of the old buildings and thinking of all the students who were here previously.” (Graduate student)

**Study Setting: The University of Denver**

Located in Denver, Colorado, the University of Denver was founded in 1864 by John Evans. Evans had founded Northwestern University in Chicago in 1850 (Northwestern University, 2009). His intention was for the university to serve as a place of higher education to those in the West. This vision would eliminate the need for the sons and daughters of those who had moved from the East to travel back to attend an elite institution, such as Harvard. In essence he had dreams the institution would become known as a ‘The Harvard of the West’ (University of Denver, 2008). Originally located near downtown Denver in the Park Hill area, the institution relocated to Southeast Denver as a result of a gift by Rufus Clark in 1880. Clark’s potato fields served as the perfect pastoral setting to serve the institution’s goal of removing itself from the ‘less than

utopian lifestyle' of the downtown saloons and brothels (Fischer, 2009; University of Denver, 2008).

Evans was appointed as the second governor of the state of Colorado by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 (Fischer, 2009). The University of Denver was originally founded as the Colorado Seminary with a partnership between Evans and the Methodist Episcopal Church. In addition to providing a Western place for higher education, Evans envisioned creating a serene and spiritual place where the youth of the West could become pioneers of the day. In a sense Evan's vision of a Western institution of higher education was similar to John Harvard's and Thomas Jefferson's. The goal was to establish a unique identity founded in the notions of the Roman Empire.

In an effort to embed these values, Evans commissioned the design of the institution's first building, University Hall. The building housed the entire university and was comprised of its classrooms, administrative offices, a library, a chapel and a gymnasium (Fischer, 2009). The building was erected in the Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style (University of Denver, 2008). "This style emphasized [the] design elements on a grand scale, including the use of stone exteriors, low Roman archways, and grand staircases" (University of Denver, 2008, p. 10). In 1899, the institution's chancellor had visions of expanding the campus to include several buildings and as a result, created a campus plan to serve as the road map. The new expansion included separate buildings to house the library, chapel, science hall, and gymnasium. The library served as the center piece of the expansion, built in a neoclassical architectural design style. The campus continued to expand on a limited fashion during the 1920s, amidst the Depression and

World War II. In 1947, a new master plan was created to add new buildings to serve for spaces to study engineering, arts and sciences, and speech, as well as a new administrative building, dormitories, and a gymnasium. The architectural style of the institution took a turn from its Collegiate Gothic style to modern design. The goal was to embed the innovations of technology into the frontier of the West. The 1960s brought more construction on a limited fashion and a new turn to an International style of architecture. The Boettcher Center for Science, Engineering, and Research and Ben Cherrington Hall (houses the Josef Korbel School of International Studies) were both erected in this style. The goal was to embed the institution's modernized and global world view alongside its desire to generate scientific discovery and international diplomacy. Thus, this served as a physical recognition of its desire to make its place in the nation and the world. During the 1980s – 1990s, the university erected a “hodge-podge of architectural styles” (University of Denver, 2008. p. 22). In a way, this foretells the state of affairs that were occurring financially at the institution. At the brink of bankruptcy, the institution was about to consider closing its doors. Chancellor Daniel Ritchie, a well off business man and Westerner idealist, offered his personal financial resources and social network to bring the institution out of the red and into the black. His vision started with trying to build a cohesive campus design, “an inspirational place for thinking and learning” (University of Denver, p. 22). During Ritchie's tenure as Chancellor, its older buildings were renovated and new buildings constructed to symbolize the institution's readiness for the future. Ritchie hired G. Cabell Childress as his Chief Architect to make his vision a reality. Together they envisioned and constructed

500,000 square feet of new physical space on the campus. They were both determined to utilize a mixture of textures, materials, and ideas of building a unique style of architecture reflective of the University of Denver. Together Ritchie and Childress created an architectural style that was influenced by their extensive travel experiences to England, France, Germany, and Italy. While I credit these two visionaries with saving and rejuvenating the physical space design of the University of Denver campus, I argue that their ideas were influenced by the same Eurocentric models discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

For the majority of the University of Denver's history, the institution has primarily been accessible by white men and women in the Colorado Territory. In the year 2009, the institution reports 3.2% of students as Black and non-Hispanic (University of Denver, 2008). Certainly one could argue the aforementioned statistical representation is reflective of other predominantly white institutions. However, one could trace the reputation of the University of Denver still conclude it limits access to non-white populations. Even further one could reflect on the social and political tension amongst the white and non-white populations of the city of Denver itself, further separated by geographical class boundaries. However, this serves as the primary reason to focus on the African-American women population within the institutional community. In essence, this portrait provides an opportunity to hear the experiences and perceptions of those who have gained access to the institution, despite its reputation.

## **The Pioneers: The Most Notable African-American Women at the University of Denver**

### **Emma Azalia Hackley**

While completing this dissertation, I was notified that a woman by the name of Madame Emma Azalia Hackley (1867-1922) was discovered as the first graduate of the University of Denver's School of Music in 1900 (Peterson, 2010). From the age of 3, Hackley learned how to play the piano and the violin, as well as to sing. While at the University of Denver she composed a piece that was performed by fellow student, Erica Papillion-Posey, a soon-to-be African-American graduate during the Provost's concert at the Lamont School. Hackley was married to Edwin Hackley, the first African-American to pass the state of Colorado's bar exam and the editor of the *Denver Statesman*, the only African-American newspaper in Denver at this time. She was initially not recognized as an African-American based on her light skin color. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> - century it was not uncommon for African-Americans to lighten their skin and straighten their hair to appear more acceptable to the dominant white culture. Based upon the university's archival process of identifying students, one based upon a visual review of their photograph, Hackley's skin appeared so light that she was thought to be a White student. This reflects the sense of visibility and invisibility that has been identified as a theme within this study.



Image 1.  
*Emma Azalia  
Hackley. Circa 1900*

Hackley utilized her classical music talents to embed and inspire the use of African-American spirituals among the African-American people as a tool for social change (Brevard, 2001). As a result, spirituals were sung as a way to fight for freedom during the Civil Rights Movement. Her voice, songs, and outspoken advocacy for African-American classical musicians could be evidenced by her cross-country tours. While her appearance could have allowed her to easily pass as White, she was deeply rooted to her African-American culture. She expressed her deep devotion through several influential publications that included a guide to the use of the musical voice and a book dedicated to the beauty of African-American women.

On a cold and overcast gray day during the winter break of 2009, I began my archival research in an effort to trace the history of African-American women at DU. To my surprise, the library archivist helped me locate Grace Mabelle Andrews. Grace began her undergraduate journey at DU as a freshman in September, 1906 and graduated as a senior in May, 1909. She was one of forty students to graduate in 1909. (Researcher's notes from December 18, 2009)

### **Grace Mabelle Andrews**

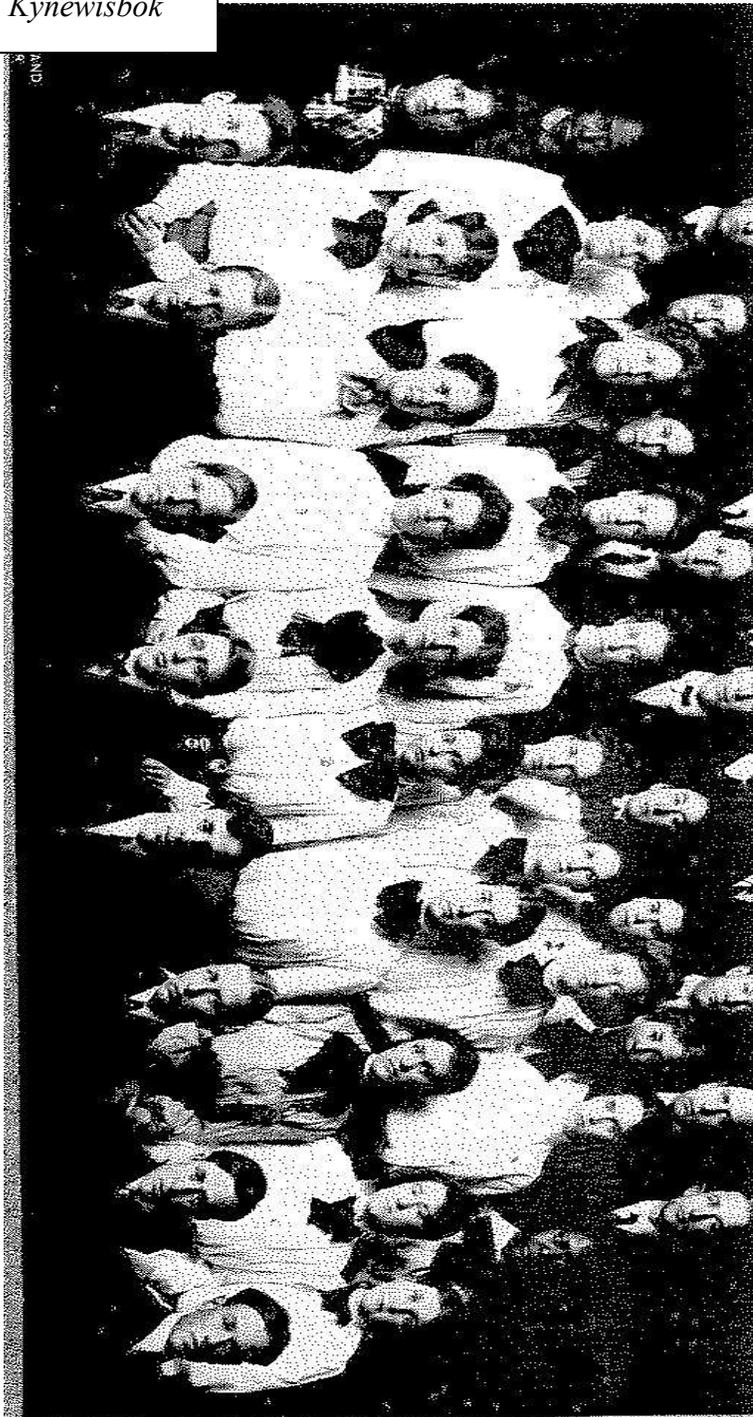


Image 2.  
*Grace Mabelle  
Andrews.*  
University of  
Denver 1907  
*Kynewisbok.*

The Denver University men's football team faced the Colorado State University Aggies during the fall of 1905, losing by a 0-12 victory. "Disastrous fumbling and poor work in the Denver University line enabled the Aggies to win...in a practice football game at Fort Collins yesterday afternoon" is noted by

the DU Clarion newspaper. What is not mentioned about the game is that the DU team initially refused to play the CSU Aggies because one of their players was black. During the same time,

Image 3. *Class of 1908.*  
1906 University  
of Denver  
*Kynevisbok*



Grace Mabelle Andrews was beginning her undergraduate studies at the University of Denver.

I scheduled a meeting with DU archivist through email on December 11, 2009 to gain access to any written and/or visual documentation I could find on the recognized first African-American female student to attend the university.

I hope this email finds you well and enjoying a bit of the winter term break. I am contacting you regarding my dissertation research. I would like to schedule an appointment to identify any photos and data information you may have on African-American women at the University of Denver. Specifically, I am curious when the first African-American woman was admitted to DU. Secondly, I am curious of any photos/images we may have regarding African-American female students, faculty, and staff in the DU community. (Researcher's Journal)

The university archivist, Steven Fisher replied, "How about Friday at 9. Next week is swamped for me. I am afraid there is going to be very little here, but we can talk."

This made me feel anxious, as if I wouldn't know where to begin. Then to add to my anxiety after confirming my appointment at 9:00 am on Friday, December 11, Steve wrote,

"Sounds good. One thing to understand is we do not file images by "African-American" (or any other such designation such as black, Negro, etc.) so be thinking of different search strategies. We know who the first African-American female student was and have one photo but not much more information."

To my surprise and delight, Steve welcomed me with books that included photos of Grace from 1906-1909 as well as some additional books about Chancellor Buchtel during his twenty year tenure as from 1900-1920. Steve also anecdotally shared that he included a copy of an article from the Clarion in 1906 that documented the DU football team roster against the CSU Aggies. He noted, while it was not cited in the article, he

heard the DU football team walked off the field during their first game against the Aggies in protest to the team's black player. As Steve shared this knowledge with me, information that was not documented in the archival records of the university, it made me feel angst. Even more so it made me wonder how Grace felt at the time she was attending not only a predominantly white institution, but an institution that clearly allowed public racism to occur.

In the 1906 edition of the University of Denver's *Kynewisbok*, the institution's undergraduate student year book, Grace Mabelle Andrews is seen in a black and white photo of the class of 1908. While the group is comprised of forty-three students, twenty-three who appear as females and twenty who appear as males, Grace's presence in this group is notable, she is African-American. She is positioned on the left end of the third row, partnered by another African-American female who appears on the right end of the same row, this woman goes unnamed. As I continued to explore the *Kynewisbok* from 1907 and 1908, I recognized Grace's image, but there is no visual record or naming of the other African-American woman who appeared with her in their class picture taken in May 1905.

In the 1907 *Kynewisbok*, I noticed her name changes from 'Grace Mabelle Andrews' to 'Pearl Andrews', or is this referring to the other unnamed African-American woman who appeared with her earlier in the 1906 *Kynewisbok*? I began to question whether this woman was somehow related to Grace or was the name of Pearl how Grace referred to herself by at that time, and if so, why did she change her name? In addition, the woman that was initially pictured with her in the 1906 *Kynewisbok* is not noted ,or

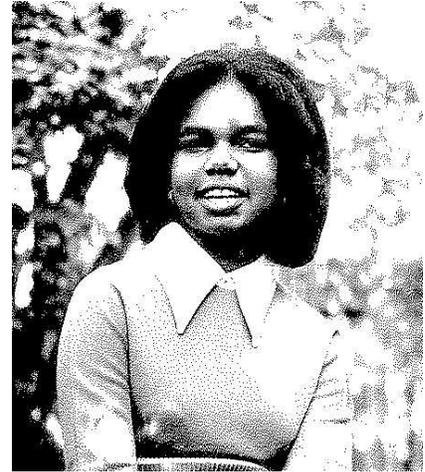
rather if she is noted in the list of names, her name remains unknown. Grace is photographed once more in the section of juniors, referred to as the Class of 1908, in the 1907 *Kynewisbok*. She is pictured in an individual black and white photograph with her name spelled as ‘Grace Mabel Andrews’, with a major in Latin and a minor in French. I began to question, why did the spelling of her middle name change from ‘Mabelle’ to ‘Mabel,’ or was this simply a misspelling on the part of the yearbook editor? She looks directly at the camera, with what appears to be a fearful look and perhaps tearful eyes. Her somewhat indirect stare into the camera is in contrast to the two white male students who appear in a similar styled photograph, who look directly at the camera with a sense of confidence and conviction. She wore a darkly colored dress-like garment with a lightly colored collared shirt that has a darkly colored thin line that circles her neck. Her hair appears short, straightened, and similar to the style of the time.

During her senior year at the university, she is referred to as ‘Grace Mabelle Andrews’ in the 1908 *Kynewisbok*. We must ask again, why do we see this change in the spelling of her middle name once more? She is captured in an individual black and white photograph attired in a darkly colored graduation cap with her tassel pulled to her left side with and similarly darkly colored graduation gown with a lightly colored button up shirt underneath. She seemed to be looking away from the camera, off into the distance to her right, perhaps wondering what the future will hold for her. The yearbook notes Grace majored in Latin and double minored in French and Economics. She was a member of the Latin club and an accompanist for Physical Culture. Her personal creed reads, “I believe in playing the piano in Gym. It may be hard work, but an hour’s credit is worth it.”

**Dr. Condoleezza Rice**

As I entered Penrose Library on December 22, 2009, it occurred to me that the campus looked completely different from what it looks like today, when Emma and Grace were here. I began to wonder whether either of these women were still living or whether any of their relatives are still in the Denver area. I began to feel that I should make a trip to the DU Alumni Association, the Denver Public Library, and the Blair Caldwell museum to inquire for future research. As I walked down the stairwell from the main floor to the basement, the smell of dusty books caught my nose and I realized each time I visited the archives my nose started to run. Why is this important? Because each time I spent time archives I had mixed emotions of excitement, frustration, sadness, and happiness. Perhaps this was the only way my body could physically respond to the moment or perhaps this was just silly observation. But from a sensory perspective, the dust I smelled was a product of time, a time when these women, Emma, Grace, and Condi were here. Their existence on this campus is encapsulated in old dusty photos and articles. My only interaction with them was through the dusty documents. I desired to engage with each of them in person, to ask them the questions that were present in my mind, and that were informing my research. While my assumption was that both Emma and Grace had passed away, I was aware that Condi was still living. I wondered what it would take for me to be able to connect with her for future research. At that moment, I began to flip through the

Image 4.  
*Dr. Condoleezza Rice.*  
University of Denver, 1974



dusty documents in order to paint a portrait of the historical and modern context of African-American women within the built environment of the University of Denver.

As the portraitist, I began to question whether we as African-American women have been trained or groomed or brainwashed not to question our built environment. But rather to fit in, blend in, or almost become invisible or assimilate to our existing surroundings. Have we been trained to perform within the educational environment; to aspire to higher education as a means and a way of washing away our identity, our racial and gender identities in order to assimilate and fit in, to achieve? Have we been trained to aspire to walk the pathways and into the buildings of higher educational institutions? In this way, it's seen as a marker of success. But I question whether or not we come out the same way as we enter? Or do we come with a preconceived notion or idea of wanting to learn how to assimilate, how to become one of the elite? In doing so, do we leave behind the historical notions and the experiences that our American culture has purported on us as African-American women? Do the existing walls of the institution reinforce these messages without our knowing or without our seeing? Therefore, I commit to utilize my research to open those doors, as a means of communication, to allow the walls to talk.

In 1972, Dr. Condoleezza Rice began her studies as a freshmen student at the University of Denver. As I scanned the photos of Condi when she was a young girl of 16 beginning her higher education experience, I find it interesting that she, like Grace, has straight chin length hair. I find it interesting that they look a lot alike in their strength, yet unsureness in their eyes. Condi is poised as a young girl with a back pack, flip flops, a short skirt, a long sleeved sweater with a white collared button down shirt underneath,

and a headband in her hair. She is seated casually on a wooden bench with a backpack at her feet. In contrast, I found a photo dated 1990, where she appeared as a grown and polished woman with a dark conservative suit and a more confident look in her eyes. I stumbled upon two additional photos from this same time period, one where Condi appeared with the Dean of Graduate School of International Studies and Chancellor Ritchie, and the other pictured her with the President of the DU Alumni Association, and Chancellor Ritchie. In these two photos she appeared in pearls with her trademark smile ready for the camera. How amazing was that? This young, brilliant girl transformed into a global leader. One who is clamored to by the highest leadership of the institution?

Dr. Rice gave the graduation ceremony speech in May 1996 at DU. She emphasized the importance of embracing diversity, realizing education is a privilege, and finding something you are passionate about then pursuing it at all costs. As I continued to flip through the dusty documents, I began to gain a better picture of how Condi came to DU. Her family grew up in rural Alabama during the times of segregation. She recalled how her elementary school teachers used their own money to purchase textbooks for the students. This made me recall some of the narratives from the book *Brown at 50* and especially the words by one of the NAACP's attorneys Oliver Hill held the primary premise that in order to gain equal and fair access and treatment from a system of oppression, education is the "bedrock of access and achievement in America" (Rhode & Ogletree, 2004, p. 73). Dr. Rice's words focus less on issues of segregation, racism, and harassment and more on using the privilege to access education in order to become successful. Her words echo Tavis Smiley's (2004) which encourage us to celebrate and

act on the rights *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* gave to African-Americans.

I share their hope in the notion that through education we can overcome and achieve, but at the same time I feel we must not forget our past. By this I mean to say, we cannot dismiss the lack of African-Americans' history and current presence in the walls



Image 5.  
*Dr. Condoleezza Rice.*  
1996 Founder's Day at the University of Denver.

of the academy. Not just by numerical representation, but our cultural influence on the way in which the physical spaces of the academy are organized, designed, and utilized. We must hold our heads high and move forward with hope and possibility. We cannot pretend not to speak about the continued influence of racism on our ability to equally access and thrive within institutions of higher education. Have we considered what our campus would look like if those who envisioned, funded, and designed it would have included our ancestral roots from Africa within its architectural canon? What if the definition of learning was about community and group knowledge and not based on the individual or the survival of the fittest? What if we incorporated our natural environment within the design of our walled spaces? What if we used less gold on the towers of our campus and grounded it in earth tones and natural landscapes reflective of the area?

### **The Online Screening Survey: Painting the Picture of Current African-American Women at the University of Denver**

The initial goal of this study was to capture an understanding of existing African-American women's experiences in, interactions with, and perceptions of the built educational environment. Therefore, the online screening survey allowed me to take a pulse of the feelings the built educational environment evoked, the importance placed upon it, and how it was being perceived based upon their racial and gender identities. The recruitment process of current African-American female students, faculty, and staff to participate in the study through an online screening survey began on December 8, 2009. The initial recruitment email was sent on December 8, 2009 to 204 undergraduate and graduate students and on December 17, 2009 the email was sent to 6 faculty and 22

staff members, by the University of Denver's Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME) on my behalf. With a goal of collecting 20-40 online screening surveys, the recruitment period was concluded after a six-week period on January 15, 2010. In total, 37 women indicated their interest in completing the survey and at the end of the recruitment period 27 followed through. The women who completed the surveys were comprised of 13 undergraduates, 10 graduates, 2 faculty members, and 2 staff members. It is also important to note four of the women who identified as graduate students were also working as full-time staff members in the university.

### **Self-Described Affiliations and Identities**

In order to empower participants' involvement in this study, I utilized nine open-ended questions within the online screening survey. The first section of the survey asked participants to identify themselves by name and email address. Additionally, this section asked them to select their DU affiliations (Table 4). They were provided four affiliations to select from that included undergraduate, graduate, faculty, or staff. Participants were instructed to select as many affiliations that applied. As a result, a majority of survey participants (48%) identified solely as undergraduate students. A few of the participants identified themselves as fitting into several community affiliations, such as a graduate student and as a full-time staff member. In addition, depending on the length of time a participant may have been affiliated with the DU community, they may have affiliated as an undergraduate student, a graduate student and a staff member. This is a good illustration of a participant who has been involved in the community from a longitudinal perspective.

Table 4. An Overview of the African-American Women Participants' Self-Ascribed Affiliations and Identities in the Online Screening Survey

DU Affiliation		Age		Racial Identity	
UG	13	18-22	10	African American	9
GR	6	23-29	8	Black	10
FA	2	30-40	5	African American + Other	4
ST	2	41-50	4	Black multiracial/ biracial	3
GR + ST	4	Age Range	18-50	African	1
		Average Age	28.85		

Class Identity		Sexual Identity		Religious/Spiritual Affiliation	
Lower Middle Class	3	Heterosexual/Straight	22	Christian	12
Middle Class	20	Lesbian	2	Roman Catholic	3
Upper Middle Class	1	Bisexual	1	Baptist	2
Other	2	Other	1	Muslim	1
NA	1	NA	1	Believer/Spiritual	2
				None/NA	7

This particular type of participant offers a longer history of interaction, experience, and perception with the built educational environment of the study setting.

At this point in the research, an opportunity to consider the length of time a participant had been affiliated with the study setting presented itself. I began to consider whether time was an element that may impact a participant's experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the built educational environment. Seventy percent of survey participants indicated they had been part of the DU community for one to five years. While twenty percent indicated they had been part of the DU community for only one quarter as entering "Freshmen" or "New Student". One of the participants in this group indicated her mother worked for the institution and that as a result, she had been familiar with the campus since a young age, beyond her initial 2.5 years as an undergraduate student. While another indicated she had been part of the DU community for ten years, starting as an undergraduate and now graduate student and full-time professional for the institution.

The next section of the survey provided participants with nine identity categories which they completed through self-description. The nine categories included racial identity, gender identity, age, country of origin, primary language, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual affiliation, and able-bodiedness. While the study was primarily focused upon the participants' racial and gender identities, in relation to their built educational environment, I felt it was necessary not to dismiss participants' multiple identities that may be impacting their experiences, interactions, and perceptions. As Crenshaw (1994) purports, we know our identities cannot be separated, rather they are

immersed and thus, provide a greater understand of our social, cultural, historical, political context within our educational environments (Gärling & Evans, 1991; Moos, 1986; Strange & Banning, 2001; Weisman, 1992). It is important to note the unique ways in which the participants self-described their racial and gender identities, as well as their other identities of age, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual affiliation, and able-bodiedness.

### **Racial Identity**

A majority of survey participants described their racial identity as Black (37%), African-American (33.3%), or as Biracial (26%), as expressed by the following descriptors, “African-American/White”, “African-American and German”, “Biracial – half black, half white” and “Biracial” and “Black – multiracial”. While one participant described herself as “African”, although when looking at her country of origin self-description she indicated “America”. This was a beautiful representation of the dynamics and variances that occurred in the self-description of survey participants’ racial identities. As a result, it was important for me to take note of this rich texture of racial self-identification within each woman’s understanding of race within the study.

### **Gender Identity**

A majority of survey participants (96%), self-described their gender identity as “female”, with one participant describing herself as “woman”.

### **Age**

The age range of survey participants was 18 – 50, with an average age of 28.85 and a median age of 21.

### **Country of Origin**

A majority of survey participants indicated their country of origin as “United States”, “USA” and “America” (89%), while two participants indicated their country of origin as “Jamaica” and one participant indicated her country of origin as “Somalia”.

### **Primary Language**

All participants indicated their primary language was “English”.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

While 74% of survey participants self-described their socio-economic status as “Middle-Class” and 11% described it as “Lower Middle-Class”. One participant indicated her socio-economic status as “Upper Middle Class” and another as “Working”.

### **Sexual Orientation**

A majority of survey participants (81.5%), self-described their sexual orientation as “Heterosexual” or “Straight”, while two participants identified as “Lesbian” and one as “Bisexual” and another as “Just Me”.

### **Religious/Spiritual Affiliation**

When asked to describe their religious/spiritual affiliation, a majority of survey participants (44%), responded “Christian”, “Christianity”, “Roman Catholic” and “Baptist”. While a few survey participants described themselves as a “believer” and “spiritual”. One participant described herself as “Muslim”. It is important to note 26% of survey participants indicated “None” or “NA” to reflect their religious/spiritual affiliation.

### **Able-Bodiedness**

A majority of survey participants (96%), described themselves as “able-bodied”, while one participant indicated she has a “learning/visual disability”.

### **Group Identity**

As a group, the survey participants self-described identity is strongly Black and African-American, female, mid-20s, English speaking, middle-class, American, heterosexual, Christian, and an able-bodied population.

### **Time on Campus and Activities**

Participants were asked questions pertaining to the amount of time they spent on campus and what activities they engaged in while they are on campus. I wanted to gain a better understanding of how the elements of time and interaction may have impacted the participants’ experiences and perceptions of the built educational environment. As a result, I found a large range from 6 hours to 168 hours per week with an average of 58.75 hours a week being spent on campus (Table 5). However, on average a majority of the participants spent 21-39 hours (44%) on campus. Those who spent an average amount of time on campus, according to the aforementioned range, tended to be those who affiliated solely as a graduate student or staff member. This could have also been in accordance with non-residential students or those who strictly affiliated as a faculty or staff member and thereby, spent time on campus as required by their teaching or work day schedules. While the survey participants who spent the most time on campus (37%), indicated they had an on-campus position that required them to live on campus, such as serving as a resident advisor or resident director.

Table 5. Time on Campus and Activities

Amount of Time at DU		Amount of Time on Campus		Types of Activities while on Campus	
Less than 1 year	6	1- 20 hours	3	Academic related (attend class, lab, study, research)	16
1-2 years	10	11 - 20 hours	2	Work related (work, attend meeting, campus event)	9
3-5 years	9	21 - 30 hours	5	Physical activity (work out)	6
More than 5 years	2	31 - 39 hours	7	Social activity (attend concert, eat, sporting event, lecture, group meeting)	22
Average amount of time	2.54	40 or more	10	Spiritual activity	1
		Average time on campus	58.75		

indicated they had an on-campus position that required them to live on campus, such as serving as a resident advisor or resident director.

A majority of survey participants indicated that while they were on campus they were engaged in socializing (81%) and academic related activities (59%). Social activities included attending social clubs, athletic events, performing arts activities, guest speaker engagements, and to eat. While academic related activities included, attending

class, visiting the library, participating in study groups or lab sessions. Over a third of the survey participants indicated while on campus they worked (33%). While one-fifth indicated they worked-out in the athletic center (22%), and one participant indicated they engaged in spiritual activities.

### **Emerging Themes in the Online Screening Survey**

The online screening survey allowed for the exploration of the dynamics that exist between African-American women and their built educational environment. The University of Denver was founded in predominant Christian religious beliefs for men and women students settling in the Western frontier. During its establishment, as an institution of higher education, this predominant Christian view recognized those of ‘good moral character’, which translated into those who were religious, heterosexual, and able-bodied. Over 150 years later, when we review the current campus demographics, we can see a predominantly white, female, heterosexual, American, English-speaking, Christian, middle class, and able-bodied student population (University of Denver, 2005). As we consider the current campus climate of the built educational environment, we see a commitment to inclusive excellence. This commitment strives to provide a welcoming environment to all members of the campus community with respect and engagement in understanding differences pertaining to one’s multiple identities, backgrounds, abilities and perceptions. Therefore, many of the self-described identities by the survey participants are representative of the larger campus population, except with regard to their racial identity.

Seven key themes were identified through the online screening survey to understand the experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the built educational environment by African-American women, they were:

- Feelings Evoked by the Campus
- Mood and Tone of the Educational Environment
- Campus Demographics
- Social Interactions and Behaviors
- Self Image
- Multiple Identities
- Beliefs and Actions

#### **Feelings Evoked by the Campus**

When asked “What feelings does the DU campus evoke?” a majority of survey participants used descriptors such as, “love”, “warm and loved” and “comfortable and safe”. Additionally, a majority of participants described the campus as “beautiful” and “pretty”. The aesthetics of the University of Denver campus made a positive impression on the majority of women who participated in the survey. One participant described her first impression of the campus as,

I fell in love with the campus the first time I visited DU. The aesthetics of the campus was one of the things that made me want to attend. I love the red cobble stone pathways and the fully-grown trees on campus. I also liked how small DU was compared to other college campuses. The regal setting at DU--with its rich landscape and towering brick buildings--gives me a sense of home. The setting is comfortable and seems to fit my personality. The set up of the campus honestly also makes me feel important and proud because of the way it looks; it is above average and people can tell by the scenery that it is a more elite school.  
(Undergraduate student)

However, what was interesting was that while others express positive assessments of the campus aesthetics, the element of time seemed to be a vital and necessary element for the campus to “grow on them”. As an example, another participant indicated that while she felt the campus was “pretty”, the lack of diversity represented made her feel the campus was “less welcoming”. A graduate student in the survey indicated,

I love DU – I think it’s a great place to go to school and work but these are feelings that have evolved over time. My first year here at DU was really rough. I grew up in Hawaii, so moving to Denver was a big change and not just because of the weather but adapting socially was hard too. Hawaii is very diverse! I went from being in an atmosphere where everyone was a “minority” to being in a place that was mostly white. The cultural understanding and awareness was definitely lacking and at times I was teased because my perspective and background was very different from my classmates.

This dual dynamic between the reverence for the campus aesthetics and the inner emotions and perceptions of African-American women feeling like a minority, involved a complex dynamic and relationship that occurred between the built educational environment and its communities of color.

### **Mood and Tone of the Educational Environment**

The campus environment transmits a mood and a tone for education and learning. Many participants spoke to their feelings of pride and success in being admitted to such a beautiful place. A place that evokes tradition and history, yet at the same time there was a recognition that the history of African-American women was not reflected within the design of the built educational environment, as is alluded to by an undergraduate student.

I feel pride when I walk around my campus because it is well maintained and it's very beautiful. I feel comfortable on campus and familiar with the campus because it has so much history and you can tell that many people have been through it before you. I feel a sense of coldness on campus because everything is

brick and gold and there is nothing that reflects the ethnic diversity that is beginning to permeate DU society.

There was a recognition that the university invests time and financial resources to built spaces that are reminiscent of older elite East coast institutions but, in this process the representation of diverse communities that are not white and male have not been considered. Yet, this was somehow outweighed by their general feelings that the campus was still a nice-looking place, a place where they could feel loved and safe. For another student felt that by simply being on campus, made her a more successful student.

I love the campus, from what I've seen of it thus far. When I am there I feel, "successful" as determined by me. It brings me back to my younger days when I first started going to school, dreams of what a campus would look like, as compared to the campus' of the CUNY schools.

The campus evoked a mood of collegiality and a tone of high standards of learning in an aesthetical manner that was reminiscent of “what a campus would look like” even from many women’s childhood experiences. As I recalled from my own experience on the University of Minnesota –Twin Cities campus, that first experience walking on, seeing the large almost ethereal buildings, smelling its green grass ways, and hearing the sound of people on the move, made a lasting impression on me as a young child that a certain type of campus aesthetic was expected.

### **Campus Demographics**

Many survey participants expressed their recognition of the University of Denver being a predominantly white institution. This caused them to be keenly aware of

“whether their identity as an African-American woman impacted their experiences on campus?” One graduate student stated,

My identity as an African-American Women has impacted my experience more than I would have ever thought. I didn't initially think that my race would ever come up as a visual reminder so often. Being here actually as forced me to see who I am being African-American. I stick out like a sore thumb at times and it's shocking almost. I've experience being in a room of 200 new Freshman at my music school and I was the only women of color in that room.

In this way, African-American women were aware of their visibility within a community filled with faces that do not reflect their own. However, they had found ways to navigate and seek out other communities of color to find a sense of place, a place that provided them a sense of safety of being surrounded by like-minded and diverse communities. An undergraduate student reflected on one of her first experiences living on campus in a residence hall.

I was part of the Social Justice Living and Learning Community my freshman year and we had a very racially and socio-economically diverse class, and the faculty and staff of that program were very supportive and always willing to talk with me about any problems I was having. I also feel extremely connected with the Sociology Department, some of the students and especially the faculty has all been very supportive of me. Being in that department is great because I can talk about issues that are important to me (including race) in an academic setting without singling myself out.

This begins to hint to the next emerging theme that reflects on the social interactions and behaviors these women utilize in order to build a sense of place within the built educational environment.

## **Social Interactions and Behaviors**

Many participants indicate their social interactions are generally restricted to the type of affiliation they have on campus. Therefore, as an example, if a woman was a freshman student, their interactions were generally limited to their classmates in the classroom environment and their roommate in their residence hall. However, they demonstrate their ability to determine the level of social interaction with certain community members and their behavior with them. One undergraduate student stated,

I think my racial identity definitely impacts my perceptions of the campus a lot. I think I make a lot of generalizations about students at DU, that they are all rich and white, which obviously isn't true. I feel like I always need to be on guard and defend myself from any white person. A good friend of mine told me that she didn't notice that I was a different race than her when she met me, but I don't believe her. It's like I'm so worried about experiencing any prejudice that I am prejudiced against everyone else.

While another woman who is a faculty member at the university stated, "I realize that it is a white campus and when I have students who are Black I want to really talk to them and make sure they are okay." There are also spaces that women choose to avoid because of the visibility they felt when they walked by them.

I'm sure my identity as an African-American woman does impact my experiences and feelings on campus. Especially when it comes to the fraternity and sorority houses on campus, I always feel as though those are buildings that I should just stay clear of and have nothing to do with me, especially as they are almost exclusively white. (Undergraduate student)

This represented the characteristics of intentional navigation and avoidance as well as strategy and resiliency these women utilized in order to seek out social communities that would provide support and visual recognition of their diverse identities. This led to

another theme that was discovered that pertained to how these women saw themselves within the built educational through their own self-image.

### **Self-Image**

An undergraduate student shared how she navigated her positive perspective on the beauty of the campus in comparison to its lack of diverse representation, and how this in turn made her feel like she could not truly be herself.

I think DU's campus is really pretty I especially love the little ponds with lily pads which make me feel serene and calm, and the buildings are really cool. The campus also makes me feel a bit like a stranger though just because I'm not used to going to school without seeing a lot of my race everywhere. I guess I don't feel connected somehow just because I'm thrown out of my norm and I tend to act differently. More reserved in a way that I'm better accepted.

The predominantly white educational environment has provided a sense of place where these women felt objectified based upon their racial and gender identities. In the undergraduate student's account of her experience of living in a residence hall that offered a community bathroom, the physical characteristic of her hair has become an object that those in the majority feel the need to investigate because it is seen as something different. One undergraduate student stated, "Sometimes when I talk with my white friends I get asked questions about why I don't wash my hair everyday or stuff like that." While another shared her anxiety over having to explain how she cared for her hair to fellow residents in her residence hall during her freshman year.

Another thing about the physical layout of the campus and its buildings, inside and out, was regarding my hair. I realized that I would be sharing a giant bathroom with 30 other girls on my floor and (correctly) assumed that I would be the only African-American on my floor. I worried about having to explain how my hair was different from theirs, and wasn't necessarily styled or washed in the same way or frequency as well. This is something I kind of got over, as I

explained my hair to my white roommate who knew nothing about wrapping hair at night or not washing it every day, and she is very comfortable with it, but I do still feel uncomfortable using the public showers in relation to my floor mates. May seem odd, but I've actually discussed it with other African-American girls on campus, and they've said they've worried about it before too.

The visibility the built educational environment has also invoked a desire to not be noticed as different, to blend in, and to dismiss one's racial identities entirely. In my journal I explored this concept at a deeper level.

As African-American women we've been trained or groomed or brainwashed not to question our built environment. But rather to fit in, blend in or almost become invisible or assimilate to our existing surroundings. We've been trained to perform within the educational environment. To aspire to higher education as a means and a way of washing away our identity, our racial and gender identities in order to assimilate and fit in. To achieve. We've been trained to aspire to walk the pathways and into the buildings of higher educational institutions. In this way, it's seen as a marker of success. But I question whether or not we come out the same way as we enter. Or do we come with a preconceived notion or idea of wanting to learn how to assimilate, how to become one of the elite. In doing so, do we leave behind the historical notions and the experiences that our American culture has purported on us as African-American women? And whether or not the existing walls of the institution reinforce these messages without our knowing or without our seeing. Therefore, my research seeks to open those doors, those means of communication to allow the walls to talk.

### **Multiple Identities**

The next emerging theme that came out of the participants' responses to the survey, was one that spoke to the multi-layered and multi-dimension complexity of our identities, not just as African-American women, but our socio-economic identities, our learning abilities, and our dual roles within the university community as students, faculty and staff members. An undergraduate student felt that she was not the traditional type of student for which the university was designed.

Sometimes it makes me perceive that the campus has only a certain type of student that should go there, and that I'm not that type. That in order to be part of the DU community I would have to be a "white- preppy student with a trust fund" to enjoy what DU has to offer.

While another undergraduate student shared that her perceptions of the overall built educational environment have not been impacted by her racial and gender identities, but more so by her interactions within the classroom environment.

My perception of the physical campus I don't believe to be affected by being an African-American woman, by my perception of the institution certainly has been. I feel like I have become somewhat cynical of my peers and generally assume that because the majority of my classmates are upper-middle to upper-class, Caucasian, affluent students that they won't understand or won't care to learn about my diverse background. This assumption has been formed by my experiences.

For other women, the built educational environment has brought over attention to her racial identity, making her feel very visible and causing her to feel that she had to prove her identities.

... I don't have a choice no matter where I go people see my color. I am lighter skin so the blacks are often apprehensive about approaching me; they're not sure if I identify as white and may be a tad spoiled or out of touch. While the whites aren't sure if I'm Mexican, black or whatever and feel like before we can be friends they need to discuss all of our differences- (how do you come your hair, wow your mom is black etc). So my perception of campus beyond my established friends it. I will always be an educator or wearing my white cap to get past the questions and get on with my day.

Another undergraduate student corroborated this need to prove her biracial identity because she did not visibly present as African-American, which has resulted in her ability to pass as White.

I feel as though my self-identity tends to not impact my experience unless I choose to focus on it because I am biracial and can easily "pass" as a white

student. When I make an effort to correct assumptions or distinguish myself, I find that I get a multitude of responses, most of which express confusion or disbelief. I feel as though I have been negatively impacted by my own fear of confrontation or from feeling as though if I make an effort to express and share my racial identity, then I will be forced into conversations that are somewhat uncomfortable. I do not feel like the DU undergraduate student body embraces racial diversity to the greatest extent and I have often allowed myself to "pass" as a white student because of the advantage I think it gives me in working with other students.

While a current graduate student reflected that during her undergraduate experience in a more diverse community and how her current experience at the University of Denver has led to feeling excluded.

I would say that my identity majorly impacts my perception as both an African-American and as a woman. There are not many people of color on the DU campus. In particular, I feel that there are not many African-American women on campus which I feel as a point of loss. Coming from a setting where I saw many women of color leading or attending institutions it has made me perceive the DU campus as unwelcoming. In my perception, the community largely promotes itself to affluent white students and it seems almost as if the school only admits students of color so that they can claim diversity when in reality many of the systems such as the physical spaces are not friendly to others.

These examples expressed the spectrum of reverence for the campus environment and its aesthetics, while at the same time the awkward and even hurtful social interactions it could cause for African-American women. An amazing discovery found as a result of this study was that all of the women shared an inner strength, courage, and resiliency in order to walk on the red brick path.

### **Beliefs and Actions**

The final theme that surfaced from the survey responses, one that spoke to their beliefs, actions, and convictions to succeed by working, learning and teaching within its built educational environment. A majority of the women who participated in the survey

indicated their keen awareness of how their racial and gender identities impact their experiences in, interactions with, and perceptions of the built educational environment.

While some reflected on the experience with the authentic reality that were visible within a predominantly white community that reflected what they perceived as, White, upper-class, affluent, and traditional collegial values, through its physical space design, they still excelled. For example, a staff member stated,

... I wear that identity like a badge of honor. I know when I step on the campus that everyone that encounters me recognizes me as an African-American woman and I know that everything I do could quite possibly impact the way people on campus view all African-American Women.

In this way, they thought about themselves as a community, not only as individuals pursuing their higher educational goals and dreams solely. Rather they accepted and purposely took action to generate and represent their racial and gender identities in the best way they could to build awareness and understanding of their right and qualification to be present in the campus environment. Another woman spoke about her actions to make herself visible on campus and to find classroom environments and on-campus resources of support.

...I chose the University of Denver fully realizing that it was a predominately white university, so I have exclusively taken part in events and classes with the attention of diversifying those around me. All freshman undergrads must choose a freshman seminar during the first quarter, and I intentionally chose a class on the Harlem Renaissance, as it was a celebration of black thought and expression (taught by a black man, and a class consisting of mostly minorities) in a place where white privilege can allow for a simple disregard of minority issues. I also attended events like the Diversity Retreat sponsored by the Center for Multicultural Excellence as a way of including myself in the tight knit group of people that includes BSA, LSA, ASA, Hillel and QSA.

To me there are almost two DUs. The first is the dorm-loving, partying and hockey playing side of DU that I am not fully comfortable with, but can adapt to.

The second DU is the diverse side of DU that discusses things like social justice and racial consciousness. I am much more comfortable with that side, who don't exclude themselves from the first side; they just maintain their identities and perceptions throughout.

The emergent themes discovered from the online screening survey were utilized as an initial sketch of areas of importance that may also be discovered in the narratives of the nine women who continued their participation further in the study. I referred to this list of emergent themes and began looking for them in similar or differing iterations within the narratives of the nine women centered in the portrait. In the next chapter, the group of women who shared their feelings, emotions, reactions, behaviors, and thoughts of the built educational environment will be introduced. In addition, in the chapters that follow the dynamics of their relationships with the built environment and the four primary themes that became consistent across their narratives will be revealed. The historical steps of the African-American women that served as pioneers of the University of Denver and the current picture of African-American women that was painted by the online screening survey served as the foundation to these women's journeys along the red brick path.

## **Chapter Five: Those Who Spoke, the Nine African-American Women Centered within the Portrait**

As a result of the online screening survey, nine women self selected to participate in additional research activities to extend my knowledge and understanding of the African-American experience. The women are comprised of five undergraduate students and four graduate students (Table 6). It is important to note two of the four graduate students are also staff members within the institution. This group of women range in age from 18 to 49. The women have spent an average of 2.68 years within the community engaged in attending class, attending social functions, working out, and attending athletic events in the Ritchie Center for Sports and Wellness, meeting classmates for study groups and labs, and reflecting on their lives in the campus pub, coffee shop, library, and green spaces of campus. A majority of the women live on campus and as a result spend a majority of their time on campus and in the peripheral neighborhood. However, they also find a sense of community by visiting their families in the local area and engage within their home communities by attending church, sharing a meal with their loved ones and finding some time to rest and study away from their residential communities on the DU campus. While another portion, a majority of the graduate students, experience the

campus as commuters, coming to campus only for class related purposes. These women utilize their homes and other spaces in their communities to study and socially interact. They tend to live away from the campus, at least a five mile radius, to interact with their communities as non-DU students but rather as themselves. Many of the undergraduate women express the safety and comfort they take in their ability to visit their family homes and neighborhoods in the local area. They also express their attraction to the university's Office of Community Engagement and Service Learning as a means to connect to the local community outside of the DU community. Therefore, for a majority of the undergraduate women, DU is their home away from home while the graduate women see DU as a place to gain their higher education only.

I will introduce all nine women by utilizing a self-selected pseudonym they chose. In the remainder of this chapter you will become familiar with each woman through personalized vignettes that will include their words and a few visual images that they captured during our time together. The nine women participated in a series of in-depth interviews, self reflective journaling, and photo documentation in an effort to share their stories, feelings, emotions, behaviors, and outlooks on their experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the built educational environment over an eight-week period. The screening survey allowed me to gain an overview of understanding of how African-American women in the University of Denver community were experiencing and thinking about the built educational environment. I continued to look for these seven themes in my research activities with the nine women and as a result found four themes arose to the surface, thus, capturing the essence of their experiences. As a result, in the

following chapters I will intertwine their stories with greater depth and conversation amongst one another as well as myself as the portraitist in an effort to discover how we experience, interact, and perceive our built educational environment through four primary themes that surfaced that include: reverence for campus aesthetics, visibility and invisibility, care and neglect, and reclaiming of space. This will lead to our collaborative suggestions of how the built educational environment might be adjusted and refined to truly reflect our identities as African-American women. I will conclude the portrait by reflecting back to the primary research questions and how these nine women's stories, thoughts, reflections, and emotions have enriched and informed the conceptual model. Finally, I will make suggestions for further research and areas of consideration to explore the dynamics and relationships that exist between communities of color and their educational environments.

### **The Recruitment Process**

The nine women who participated in the portrait elected to do so through a self-selection, first-come basis. Once they completed the online screening survey, they received a follow-up email to thank them for their participation and also inviting them to continue their participation through more in-depth research activities (interviews, self-reflection, and photo documentation). Each woman contacted me through email to express their interests which would then solicit my communication of each in-depth research activity with a preliminary timeline of each activity.

## **The Construction of the Narratives**

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2005) and Patton (2002) emphasize the importance of capturing the authentic voice of our research subjects. This includes the decision to leave their moments of silence and extended expression. As a result, you will notice I have left each participants' pauses, uses of words such as "um" or "like" with the hope to capture the essence of their identities as unique individuals and as a diverse group of African-American women. In this way, by leaving their own words as they spoke them to me, it allows for the emancipation process of the portraiture methodology to truly be felt. A second component in the construction of the narratives you will read further in this chapter and those that follow is the use of photographs of the built educational environment that were captured by each research participant. Placed alongside their authentic narratives, the photographs provide a visual representation of their perceptions of the environment. In addition, while each woman participated in the study individually, I have placed their narratives and photographs together in an effort to present the African-American woman experience as a group portrait.

### **Our First Meeting: The Portraitist Meets Her Participants**

I began to meet with each of the nine women in early January 2009. The weather during this period in Colorado was extremely cold and in an interesting way allowed us to explore the landscapes and buildings in a revealing way. During this time the campus was just ending its six-week winter break therefore a majority of the students were just beginning to attend classes and the buildings were still virtually quiet. The landscape of the campus lie dormant, the Koi ponds of the Harpers Humanities Garden were drained

and dry, while the vegetation was yellowed and crisp as well as the grass that surrounded it. The trees have no leaves and the only sign of life is the evergreen shrubs the line the red brick path. The campus was in a naked state, allowing us to explore it at its most vulnerable stage.

When coordinating all of the initial cognitive interview tours, I asked each woman to choose a place on campus they would like to begin our journey. To my surprise all of the women asked me to select a place for us to meet. I interpreted this as both a courtesy, but also a sign of un-sureness of what the study would entail and what my expectations were as the portraitist. Reflecting on the various spaces of campus and given that the campus was ending its official winter break; I selected the Penrose library as a centrally located space and as a one that would be open during this period. Beyond the function of its availability and central location, I discovered that several of the women felt the space of the library allowed them to focus and gain their concentration as students. While they commented on its outdated color scheme, worn flooring, funky chairs, tables, and desks, they found comfort in its walls surrounding by the smell of books exuding history and tradition. Some of them commented on their knowledge of the library's history, serving as a structure to stop and deter the student protests that occurred on the green space that it now lies upon in the 1960s. Depending on whom you ask this could be a mixed interpretation of fact and fiction. Yet, in a relevant way, this was the perfect space for us to begin our journey of their authentic experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the built educational environment of the DU campus based upon their identities as African-American women.

Table 6. Overview of the Nine Women Centered in the Portrait

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>DU Affiliation</b>	<b>Time at DU (Years)</b>	<b>Racial Identity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Class</b>
<b>Rachel</b>	UG	2.5	African American/ White	20	Middle
<b>Abbie</b>	UG	0.33	African American	18	Lower Middle
<b>Natalie</b>	GR and ST	7.5	Biracial - Half black, Half White	25	Middle
<b>Marilyn</b>	UG	0.33	African-American and German	19	Middle
<b>Poppy</b>	UG	3	African American	20	Middle
<b>Nicole</b>	GR	1.5	Black	25	Middle
<b>JJ</b>	UG	4	African	22	Middle
<b>Nykol</b>	GR and ST	4	African American	40	Middle
<b>Nova</b>	GR	1	Black	49	Working

(UG = Undergraduate Student, GR = Graduate Student, ST = Staff)

### **Rachel - Navigating Visibility and Invisibility**

Rachel has known of DU since she was a child. She expresses that her mother “has worked here pretty much forever.” So when it came time for Rachel to make a choice about where she would attend college, she knew DU would most likely be the place she would end up. She shared that she and her mother visited Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington during her senior year of high school. While she felt Gonzaga was the place she could envision herself, she chose to attend DU to take advantage of the tuition benefits her mother received. She also mentioned that her mother made her fully aware of what life could be like as a biracial woman with White and Black cultural heritage attending a school in the Pacific Northwest. Rachel recalls when she first applied to Gonzaga her mother stated, “... okay, well, you know, these schools up in the northwest they don’t have any black students...” As a biracial woman, Rachel was very aware that she would not see other faces like hers in the DU community. Her mother brought this awareness to light when Rachel decided to accept admission to DU. She shared, “Um, my mom kind of primed me a little bit. She’s like, okay, just so you know like, they’re all kind of, they’re all white and they’re all pretty rich.” This feeling of being different continues to translate into her experience as an undergraduate student. She expresses finding comfort and safety in her major department space located in Sturm Hall. She stated, “Um, I guess because I’m a problem child in this department, just because I need like a lot of exceptions, um, just too like do everything I want to do.” Rachel has high academic and career ambitions to become a health social worker after graduating from DU. Her journey as an undergraduate, has been one of discomfort in her

visibility as a biracial woman on campus. During our cognitive interview she took me to the Driscoll Green to share her feelings of visibility and being seen as different.

Um, I don't know, it's like, that's kind of when I feel like I least fit in just because, um, like there's usually a lot of advertisements for Greek life which aren't very diverse, um, like ... rich, white kid at DU, and, um, and I don't know, it just like, I feel like whenever I'm like in the area like during that time of day like I just want to like hurry by as fast as I can just because it's like a time when I feel like I don't like fit in, you know, that's like, I just physically feel so like out of place on campus and like I just want to like get to class, you know, where it's like my comfort zone and safety zone.



Image 6. *Driscoll Green*. (Photo taken by Rachel, January/February 2010)

As Rachel and I continued our exploration together during the study she will reveal how she navigates the visibility and invisibility of her biracial identity by utilizing the spaces of the campus and places beyond campus. As a biracial African-American woman, she revealed that she was still also navigating her connection and positive affiliation to her own cultural heritage.

## Abbie - Caring for What is Hidden

Abbie first visited the DU campus during a week-long summer workshop sponsored by the African-American Policy Studies department for African-American high school students. She also visited New York University and had full intentions to attend; however, when it came down to financial support, she opted to attend DU. When I asked her about her recollections of coming to DU and living on campus, she shared that

Image 7. *View from Abbie's window in Centennial Halls.* (Photo taken by Abbie, January/February 2010)



she was “worried about living on the floor, it was an all girls floor and I realized that I would probably be the only minority.” Abbie just began her second quarter of study at the University of Denver as a freshman. She reflected on her time at DU as, “It’s been interesting, it’s been fun.” Abbie lives in Centennial Halls, a first year residence hall on campus.

Of course where I live, Centennial Halls dorm has influenced my time here a lot. I am not a fan of my floor, feeling left out of a group of blond sorority girls but honestly I don’t want to be included. So the dorms and the Ritchie Center (easily visible from my dorm window) have the strongest intimidators for me here. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

During an informal conversation with the current Director of Residence Life, he indicated the shared spaces of on-campus residences try to create opportunities for discovering students’ differences and becoming more aware of the diverse world we live

in. Abbie's concern of being identified as different by her roommate and residential community is relevant example to this goal. When I asked her more about her experience of living on campus and being a student within its built environment she shared that she spends most of her time on the 'minority floor', a living space within her residence hall that is sponsored by the Center for Multicultural Excellence. She shared that most of her friends live on this floor and that it is a place she can go to see other faces like hers. Abbie expresses that her family's cultural heritage is Ethiopian. She reconnected with her culture by attending church with her family on Sundays at an Ethiopian church located in the Denver community. When I inquired what the church looked like, Abbie indicated the church used to be Greek Orthodox.

...it is just an old, it's little, it takes up like a corner of a city block, and it's, um, let's see, it's, it doesn't have a dome, it just like, a couple like little turrets, and you can tell it's a church. Um, it's very easily seen through the neighborhood, which is just a bunch of houses and that little church. Um, and it's, it looks a little but run down I supposed, compared to the really nice houses. Um, but it's run by old priests, so I guess they don't have time to do much grass ... and things like that. Um, yeah, it's really comfortable. It's got a couple flags hanging out. It has an Ethiopian flag and then an American flag outside. It's really comfortable. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

As Abbie and I continued to explore her experiences of finding comfort in the hidden spaces of the DU campus, she described her recognition of two sides of DU. The side that is cared for and the side that is neglected. This in turn reveals her own sense of being invisible and neglected within a community that is not reflective of whom she is. It is within these hidden and neglected spaces that she finds herself.

### **Natalie - The Pineapple in Me**

When searching for colleges Natalie came across the graduate program in Forensic Psychology at the University of Denver. She grew up in Hawaii and revealed, “I just wanted to come to the mainland and honestly I really didn’t care where.” Natalie was born in Denver, but her family moved when she was seven. So the fact that she still had family in Colorado provided her comfort in making the transition back to Denver to experience a new place and a new culture. While the amount of scholarship support Natalie received from the institution made her decision easy, she reveals that her initial experience at DU was not welcoming. As a biracial African-American woman, she was questioned by students and later co-workers about her cultural heritage. When sharing that she was biracial, but grew up in Hawaii before coming to DU people often reacted confused. Natalie shared her reflections of culture shock when first arriving.

Um, it was just so different, you know, for a wide variety of reasons, obviously weather, you know. I remember when it’s like that really weird slushy snow we get sometimes and it was that September I went into class and I came out and it was this slushy snow thing and I was like what is going on here...I was like, I don’t like this. Um, the food was a big difference. Um, and then the people, too. I mean, growing up in Hawaii I was very used to being surrounded by, some, I mean all my friends were something of everything, you know. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie expressed that while her initial experience on the campus felt confusing, but over time she began to see herself reflected in the campus. Specifically, she began to see her values aligning with the mission and vision of the institution in its realm of serving the public good. During our exploration Natalie shared many experiences and memories she



Image 8. *Pineapple above door of the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management.* (Photo taken by Natalie, January/February 2010)

has experienced on the DU campus in various spaces. She feels she “grew up at DU”. As a current graduate student and professional staff member, she has spent a decade of her life being part of the campus community. While she revealed that DU has a lot of room for growth and areas to improve upon, she feels a great sense of pride in the institution. While Natalie was documenting the campus through photography as part of one of our data collection activities, she stated, “If there’s any place on campus that I feel is a physical representation of me – this is it! The pineapple is the international symbol of hospitality but it reminds me of home (Hawaii).” Therefore, while Natalie thinks of DU as the place she grew into an adult, Hawaii will always be home to her and she takes joy in discovering that DU has a specific architectural detail that reminds her of home.

### **Marilyn - A Higher Standard**

Originally from Colorado Springs, Colorado, Marilyn always aspired to attend the University of Denver. She admits DU was her first choice in colleges. Going out of state was not an option for her as she reveals, “I wasn’t ready for that...so I thought that

Denver would be like a nice way to get away from home but still be in the state.” Marilyn fell in love with the campus at first sight. She and her father made a visit to the campus when she was a senior in high school. As soon as she walked across the Driscoll Center Bridge that stretches above Evans Avenue with the cherry blossom trees in full bloom and the Rocky Mountains in the distance to the west, she knew this was the place for her. Above the campus’ aesthetic appeal, Marilyn expressed, “I really liked DU’s prestige, I guess, and, um, and I remember how nervous I was opening the letter... It said that I was accepted and, yeah, we framed that.” She felt DU values higher standards within its academic expectations and its campus design. In this way, Marilyn felt because DU selected her as a student that she too is seen as a person who embodies higher standards. She went on to reflect that while she has not had entirely positive experiences during her first year on campus, she feels that the institution will do its best to transform everyone into ‘higher standard’ individuals. She felt the institution truly embodies higher standards through its curriculum, academic rigor, quality of teaching, and physical space design. In her reflective journal, she shared a moment from the campus visit that speaks to her and her father’s impression of DU as a higher standard institution.

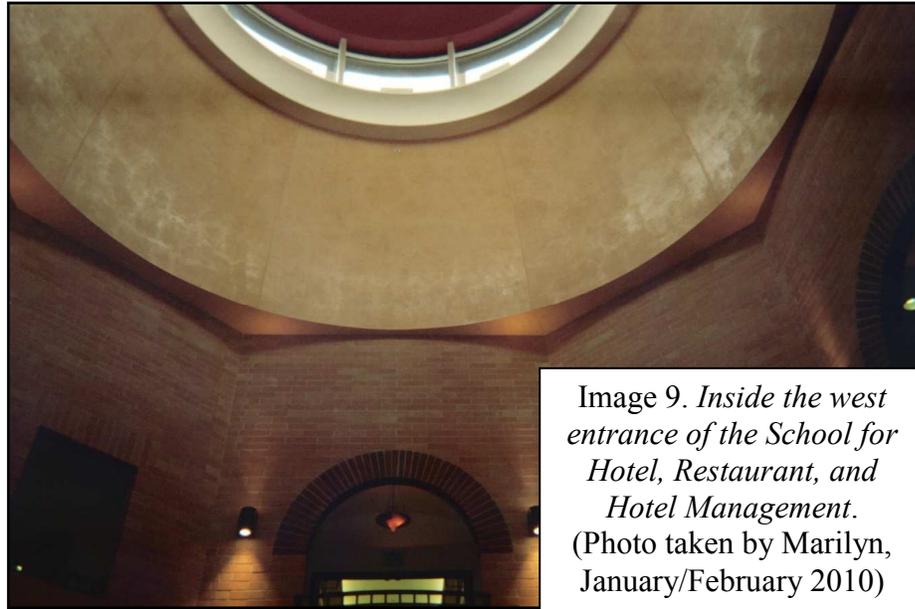


Image 9. *Inside the west entrance of the School for Hotel, Restaurant, and Hotel Management.* (Photo taken by Marilyn, January/February 2010)

I first saw the inside of the HRTM building on a campus tour with my Dad. Both I and my Dad agreed – while looking at that room, at that ceiling – that DU maintained a standard of living that we knew I wanted to live up to. At this point in our cognitive tour, I realized that being African-American skews my perception in that I strive for campuses like DU, beautiful campuses that give me a sense of identity and belonging in a world that once said that as African-American woman I would never earn the right to attend such a regal school. (January/February 2010)

During our exploration together in the study, Marilyn will further reveal how she has experienced the campus design in a very real ethereal manner. She reflected on specific spaces that remind her of how far she has come as an African-American and dually how much the institution cares for her and will ensure her success. She equated this with the higher standards of a prestigious and aesthetically pleasing campus community.

### **Poppy - First I Must Trust**

Poppy has been in Colorado her entire life. She grew up in Fort Collins and knew she wanted to stay in Colorado when pursuing her college education. In high school Poppy was part of an International Baccalaureate program and enjoyed the small class sizes. She knew she wanted to find a smaller learning environment for her college experience and decided to forgo attending her home town institution of Colorado State

University to pursue Colorado College. However, after a campus visit initiated by her mother, she felt her decision was made. Initially she didn't want to live in Denver, but after her visit she felt the campus was "pretty" and decided to apply. After being accepted and starting her journey at DU she reveals, "Um, I feel like DU has kind of, like they publicize themselves one way, but they kind of, you kind of get something else when you come here." She shared that she does not participate in activities outside the classroom and when she is in the classroom, she feels she doesn't fit in socially or economically as a middle class woman. As biracial woman she confided that not many people can visibly see that she is biracial. She has fair skin, blue eyes, and blondish brown hair. In addition, as a woman from a middle class divorced family, she doesn't feel she can participate in outside activities like her peers. Poppy also revealed that beyond her racial and socio-economic identities she has a learning disability. Poppy's multiple identities are not visible; they are hidden from the common observer. She shared that she must build trust with someone in order to share her multiple identities. However, this trust does not come easily. She reflects on her experience as a child, when she would tell her friends that she was biracial they would not believe her. In addition, she revealed that she has been in conflicting social situations where jokes and ill remarks about her African-American culture are being made that have caused her to physically remove herself from the space. In an effort to seek out safe space, Poppy spoke about her experience attending a welcome event hosted by the Center for Multicultural Excellence during the summer before she first began her studies at DU.



Image 10. *Western view from the Driscoll Center Bridge with the Penrose Library reflected.*

(Photo taken by Poppy, January/February 2010)

Um, I, well, obviously, I don't look African-American, um, so I am biracial. My mother's side of the family is Native American, Irish and, um, African-American. My father's side is, um, Western European. I think it was the summer before my freshman year I attended, um, the Multicultural Center, they have like a, a like seminar or something for like incoming students. And I attended that and it was great, like it was nice. And then I kind of didn't feel any inclusion after that. Um, I applied for, you know, some financial aid scholarships and I just never felt like I was very like included in that, um. And so I don't know if it was because I didn't pursue it enough, or if it was just, you know, I don't know. But I didn't really necessarily feel included in that. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Poppy continued to share her inner challenges with having to prove herself and ultimately, to build trust with others in the campus. She has not found a sense of community with those who racially identify with her, nor in the predominantly white community who do not identify with her socio-economically. She feels in order to

become a part of the community; she is required to navigate a myriad of facades. Her experience as a biracial woman continues to impact her experiences at DU, but even more so her class identity and learning abilities also add to the façade of her feeling of comfortable on campus.

### **Nicole – I Want to be Visible**

Nicole grew up in the diverse culture of California and is an alumna of the University of Southern California (USC). She smiles when she reflects on her experience at USC, one that involved a sense of community and activity. When I asked her about her initial impression of the DU campus and why she choose to attend the institution to obtain her graduate education, she stated,

... I think that the recruiters and, um, all of the faculty and even staff members that I met from, um, the ... College of Education really did present, um, a place that is very supportive and, um, does, has a deep sense of running to promote diversity and social justice and all these things, and I found that's very prevalent within the program, but the struggle for me is when you go outside of the program that I don't tend to see that in the larger DU campus. And so that to me was a bit, um, disheartening to see... (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nicole revealed her first impression of DU was formulated in an almost “fated” way as she continued to see recruiters from DU at three recruitment fairs during her work in admissions for USC post-graduation. She continued to share that her on-campus admissions interview “sealed the deal” for her. While she made her decision to attend, she struggled with her perception of the lack of compositional diversity within the community and its commitment to issues of social justice was a problem. As a graduate student and a professional staff member for the institution, Nicole expressed her desire to

be seen and heard as an African-American woman on a predominantly white campus with this revelation from her reflective journal.

As an African-American woman, spaces which provide a source of strength provide a support for me that other areas do not. It makes me feel that I can be myself not live up to that of the dominant culture. It is hard to be black in Denver I find. When you don't see people who look like you, it can be somewhat depressing especially if the environment doesn't help either. It is my hope that the longer I am here in Denver and at DU I will begin to see changes to the environment. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

As Nicole and I continued to explore her journey to be seen she utilizes her work space as an example of an inclusive environment for African-American woman. However, she also reveals even within the larger inclusive environment of her work place, her immediate office area does not allow students to see her. The physical design of her work space places a column and a cubicle wall in between her visitors' lines of sight. While she did not feel it was an intentional reflection of the values of the leaders in the building, she felt that a level of consciousness must be brought to the situation in order to truly make her space inclusive.

### **JJ – Seeking History and Serenity**

JJ visited the University of Denver campus at the age of 8. She was participating in a swim camp. As she reflects back to that first moment she expresses, "...the moment I walked on campus I told my Dad I want to come here to college." She indicated later as a high school student as she began to apply to colleges, DU was the only one she wanted to attend. She stated, "So when



Image 11. *Buchtel Tower.*  
(Photo taken by JJ,  
January/February 2010)

I finally graduated and everything...and I applied and got accepted, it was like, that's the only college I really wanted to go to, ever." JJ shared that although she didn't know what she was going to study initially after being accepted to DU, simply walking on the campus was enough for her.

You know, living in Colorado everybody's been to Boulder and it's this huge school and you feel like it's a huge school, but I walked into DU's campus and it was just really pretty and it was really calm, and it wasn't too many people. And I really, I liked that feel. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

JJ shared that she was "swayed" by all the trees, flowers and overall beauty of the campus when making her decision to attend. She also reflects on her first day as a student, one that she describes as being "different than what I expected". She notes that there were a larger amount of people on campus engaged in socializing and activity. The serenity she had initially felt was now changed and motivated her to find other spaces on campus that could provide a sense of serenity and historical connection. JJ stated she feels like a student most within the traditional collegial styled buildings of campus such as, the Mary Reed building and University Hall. She especially was drawn to the Buchtel tower that survived a fire in the late 1800s because of its strength and resiliency and the choice to save and preserve the tower as a historical marker of its history. When I ask JJ where she feels most relaxed on campus, she speaks about her experiences in the university pub with her friends. She describes the pub as a place where they can be themselves, not students just themselves. The pub provides a safe boundary away from the heart or rather stage of the campus, something outside of the classroom and the public green spaces. The pub provides privacy and the ability to socially interact without

having to be aware of how others are seeing you. As JJ and I continue to explore her experiences on campus I learn that there are other hidden spaces that she has found in order to achieve serenity. These spaces make her feel most in tune with her true self, one that is intently studious and drawn to the history of the academy and her place within it.

### **Nykol – My Tours of Duty**

Nykol began her journey as a graduate student in the early 1990s and returned in 2008 to obtain her doctorate degree. With over two decades of experience as a DU community member and alumnae, Nykol reflects on what she refers to as her ‘tours of duty’.

Whether I like to acknowledge it or not, DU has had a profound effect on my life. When I left DU in 1995, I remember there was talk about bringing the music and law schools to the main campus and the Ritchie Center was just a mere thought. Over the last few years, it has been amazing to watch the campus grow, and I think because of its growth on the outside, it somehow drew me back in. I seriously doubt that if the growth had happened that I would be half-way through my 2<sup>nd</sup> tour of duty at DU. In some ways, maybe it is a true duty – not in the sense of combat or war – but in the sense that I need it (DU) to serve my community. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nykol’s first college experience occurred within a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) at Fisk University. As an African-American woman she shared that she became comfortable in her skin and knowing who she was. While her experience at DU as a graduate student resulted in initial culture shock, she found herself being drawn back to the campus.

Nykol shared how she had to work to fit into the educational cultures of both of her graduate programs. She reflects on initially being on academic probation during her master’s degree, but taking her dean’s words of advice to work harder than she ever had

and feeling accomplished and that she was truly a part of the DU community during her graduation. This is not to say that Nykol did not work hard in her academics during her undergraduate experience at the HBCU, it was the transition of being in the majority to becoming the minority that impacted her learning experience. Like many of the women who participated in the study, the option for financial support played a role in Nykol's decision making to attend DU. She worked as a resident director while pursuing her master's degree. She jokes by stating, "I was valued by the residence life community, and I can recall having at least ten numbers while I was here". She is alluding to the fact that she was moved around from several residence halls during her initial time here because of her skill and reputation for being a good RA. However, she shared the hardest experience she had as a residence director was in a co-ed hall.

Um, I hadn't ever really experienced that because I went to a historical black college, I went to Fisk University. So we were definitely single sex, no men on the floor and if you did there were consequences, or so they tried to have anyway. So, um, having the coed world was different for me. Um, most of the time I was on single sex floors. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Now as a doctoral student Nykol reflects on her experience as a commuter student. She works as a professional staff member at a higher education institution in downtown Denver. She notes the differences in the campus design of both institutions and notes that while she has a longer history with DU, she reflects on the transformation she must go through in order to take off her professional hat and become a

Image 12. *View of Sturm Hall from the car.*  
(Photo taken by Nykol,



student. She also speaks to her limited view of the institution as a whole as most of her time is spent solely within her doctoral area of study and its learning environment. During my journey with Nykol, she will reveal to me that she feels conflicted of whether the built educational environment should be reflective of multiple identities and additionally whether the institution should be held responsible. A further revelation is related to the questioning of whether the institution truly knows itself. In other words, she speaks to her experience of attending Fisk University and how that experience allowed her to understand her culture and the history of the African-Americans who laid the bricks for the buildings within which she was learning. Consequently she questions whether we know who originally laid the red bricks of the buildings of the University of Denver.

**Nova – Here We Go Again!**

Nova grew up in Brooklyn, New York and had parents who always encouraged her to pursue her higher education. She describes a typical conversation at the family dinner table was founded in what was read in books and newspapers. “It wasn’t enough to just read something, you had to question what you were reading and discuss it, let your voice be heard!” When I asked Nova what



Image 13. *Interior of classroom in Johnson-MacFarlane Hall. (Photo taken by Nova, January January/February 2010)*

brought her to DU, she explains she wanted to get a degree for her. She reveals that she pursued a degree for her parents in business and now was her time to get a degree for herself. Nova reflects on her experience attending an informational session at DU.

I was excited about that. That was an exciting feeling for me. Um, because it meant, okay, I can get these skills that I need...I was like, the second thing was, where are the black people and this Hispanic people? They're talking about diversity, because I went back and I read it, so where are they? (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010).

Nova's desire to see diversity on the DU campus continued into her on-campus admissions interview experience. She stated that she noticed a handful of faces of color and that she purposely acknowledged and placed herself by another African-American woman during the initial orientation portion of the day. This is just one of the many ways that she has been able to navigate and cope with the lack of compositional diversity within the higher educational environments that she has experienced. When she was accepted to the program she expressed excitement at the prospect of pursuing her master's degree, but also a sense of hesitancy.

I felt sad at the same time because I'm thinking, here we go again. Uh, I'll probably have to deal with the same kind of weirdness where people are concerned. And weirdness being that, um, age, who I am as an individual, um, because like I said it takes me a little while to get comfortable around people because I'm very much a, an observer, a watcher. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

As a watcher and observer, Nova revealed that she has developed strategies to cope with being a minority within the learning environment. One method she practices is showing up to class early to select a seating position that will allow her to observe the class, to keep her eye on everyone.

Nova continues to speak about her family's upbringing that instilled the necessity to pursue a higher education to keep up with the majority population. This upbringing built her strength and resiliency but also has come with a price. This price has been feeling like a minority in a sea of faces who do not look like hers. She also reflected on how in addition to her racial and gender identity, her age and sexual orientation have made her the target of suspicion, harassment, and microaggressions. She also described the built spaces of higher educational institutions as symbols representative of stereotypes and prejudices of the dominant culture. Nova brings hope and sincere thoughts on how predominantly white institutions must become aware of all experiences of their students, especially institutions who strive to build an inclusively excellent environment. She shared innovative ideas to bring the identities of communities of color into the campus design and even questions whether the brick and mortar of colleges and universities are still necessary in a global and technological world.

**Chapter Six: Intertwining the Physical and Psychological: the Manifestation of the African-American Female Identity within the Built Educational Environment**

**I See Me in Thee, Reverence for Campus Aesthetics**

For many women who participated in the study, the University of Denver campus represents hope, accomplishment, care, and future. The goal of becoming a student within its walls began during their childhood through an initial exposure to the campus environment initiated by their parents. While for others, their first steps on the red brick path was to make a journey to attend a summer camp or during a campus visit in their high school years when they were searching for a place they could envision themselves attending college. If you recall in my own story as the portraitist, my parents provided me my very first exposure and impression of what a college campus should look and feel like. Further, like the women who are featured in this chapter, I realized my own dream to pursue a higher education was formed by my exposure to a campus environment at a young age. Therefore, for the women in this study as well as me, our journey to walk on the red brick path was not a matter of “if” we would walk on it, but rather “when” we would walk on it.

Many American campuses are designed to become physical embodiments of the values the institution hold in regard as to what education should be comprised of. In its establishment in 1864, the University of Denver had the goal to educate the young men and women who had pioneered to the West from their East coast roots. Embedded in this goal was the aspiration to become the ‘Harvard’ of the West and to serve as a refuge away from the debauchery of the city of Denver itself. To serve as a place to educate the youth of the community the institution placed its values both within it’s based upon proper curriculum and physical spaces. The built educational environment was designed to become worthy of its inspiration, the ancient civilization of Athens. Therefore the design of the university campus had a multiple layered purpose, to serve the local population, to illicit a reputation of an elite Western institution, and to represent the notions of Greek educational philosophies (University of Denver, 2008).

For three specific women, the campus of the University of Denver has reflected a beacon of accomplishment, success, and personal growth. In this chapter I will illuminate the stories of Marilyn, JJ, and Natalie; women who see themselves as African-American women, reflected in the red brick that comprises the pathways and walls of the buildings they learn, live, and work in. The beauty of the campus environment itself reflects their interpretation of how the institution sees them as a beautiful and intelligent woman. The many towers of the campus environment symbolizes the higher perspective and standards the institution expects of its community and thereby, represents the institution’s reflection of them as women who embody great academic potential and future success. The tower adorned at the Ritchie Center for Sport and Wellness in particular represents a beacon of

higher standards, standing as an illuminated golden light that can be seen from campus and from the surrounding communities. It serves as a reflection of the institution's goal to serve the public good. The use of red brick and gold to symbolize the institutional colors along with materials that have the ability to stand the test of time and mother-nature reflect the strength, sturdiness, and resiliency of these women. Therefore, every time they take a step on the red brick path, they gain a sense of purpose and ability while thinking of the other African-American women who have made their journey on it in the past, present, and future. In this way, the red brick pathway functions as a materialized connection that African-American women in the university community share with one another. While those of us who walk on the pathway in this current time may not see each other on a daily basis, we can rejoice in the fact that we may have taken the same steps on the same red brick pathway and thereby we walk together in this journey.

### **Creating the First Impression**

John Evans, former governor of Colorado and founder of the University of Denver envisioned building an institution, "which is to rise upon this foundation, will be like a City set upon a hill that shall be known and seen to all men" (University of Denver, 2008, p. 10). Built in a Richardson Romanesque architectural style, the university's first structure was University Hall. The style emphasized the use of grand scale elements such as "stone exteriors, low Roman archways, and grand staircases" (p.10). The stone that created the exterior of the building was mined from a local quarry in the Castle Rock area. In this way, the building embodied the ancient Roman notions of educational values that were brought to life through the use of native materials. This symmetry that exists

within the foundation of the first and oldest structure on the University of Denver campus can be seen in the experiences of Marilyn, JJ, and Natalie.

### **Higher Standards and Perspectives**

The first moment Marilyn stepped on campus, her desire to become a student at the institution became clear. Throughout the study she revealed that she “fell in love” with the campus, immediately. As she took in the view of the Rocky Mountains looking west from the Driscoll Student Center Bridge, the same view the John Evans took in when envisioning the campus, she felt this was the place for her. Standing from atop the bridge and looking out over Evans Avenue, “I reminisced on the day I first saw those fire-blazing red-leafed trees in the fall before I started at DU.” With the snow capped mountains in the distance, she felt she was standing on higher ground in a place that was built upon higher standards.

It was not a question if I was going... just because, um, like, well, just because my family has held a certain standard of living for me and I want to...you know, live up to that as well. Um, but, and also like being African-American and going to DU like, like I've never really like thought about it...but now that I do think about it, it's really like, like for my race saying that, you know, I can, I can to a school like this too, you know. I mean, just because of all the stuff in our country's history that's happened with race, it's really, um, very, it makes me take a lot of pride in myself knowing that I am African-American and going to a very prestigious school. Um, you know, when everybody, you know, in the past said that we couldn't and it's just like, well, look where we are now, so. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

It was a slightly overcast and chilly December day when Marilyn led me around the campus to show me the places that made her feel most welcomed. As we left the main entrance of the Penrose library after the first part of our interview, she directed us south on the red brick path that aligns the Driscoll Green with University Hall in the distance.

She expressed how beautiful she thinks the campus is and points in the direction of University Hall. She stated, “I had a class last quarter in that building... That’s the building where like the financial aid office is...it’s still a very beautiful building, but now it has different connotations of being the financial aid building.” As we continue to make our way around the campus, Marilyn reflects that the beauty of the campus was one of the first things that attracted her to the institution. She brushed her hair from her face and smiled to reveal that it was a shame she hadn’t made the time to slow down and enjoy its beauty.

As a freshman, Marilyn keeps a busy schedule. As an on-campus resident in Johnson-MacFarlane Hall she has many spaces she shared with others. In order to find peace and quiet she seeks out the environment of the Harper Humanities Garden. During her first quarter at DU she reflects on this space as a place she could study, relax, and hear her thoughts.

I used to take this pathway... from, um, my speech class when the water was going and stuff just to like calm my nerves for a minute. I really love that about this part of campus, just when the water goes and there’s the Koi fish in the ponds...and it’s just so Zen and relaxing. And in the summertime and the fall people will sit here and do their studies and, um, just relax. It’s a very nice place to, um, clear your head. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Marilyn expressed that being a first year student is not easy, balancing your classes, keeping up social engagements, and finding your sense of place within a new environment. Yet the pride she feels in being a student of such a beautiful place with high academic standards makes it worthwhile. When I asked her to bring me back to the first day she visited the campus and made her decision to apply, she stated, “I remember thinking just how lucky I would be to get to go here because the inside of that building

just looks so, um, rich and like, it just, um, it really kind of higher standard of living.”

Marilyn also expresses her experience of being invited to the Chancellor’s Dinner as a new student. During the dinner students were invited to meet Chancellor Coombe and to climb up into the Ritchie Center tower to learn how to play the carillon.

During the chancellor’s dinner, um, you get to ring the bells...they actually teach you how to sing or like the bell like certain songs like Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. So, I thought it was special. Yeah, and just the fact that the chancellor takes time to meet every freshman... like that’s why I say I think that DU really wants its students to succeed. And the, somehow the grandeur of this place really translates to that, like saying, you know, if you go here you have to uphold a certain life criteria, I’d say. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

JJ also shared Marilyn’s sense of feeling on top of the world in the Ritchie Center tower and reflects proudly on her time as a first year student in the carillon. “So, I got to go up there and walk around the tower and when I was up there it just felt like I was, I don’t know, on top of the world.” JJ and Marilyn share an affinity for the Ritchie Center tower from their shared memory of meeting the Chancellor and learning how to play the carillon and even further, for its representation of the history and high standards the institution holds. JJ reflected on her affinity for all the prominent towers in the campus environment.



Image 14. *View from Driscoll Student Center Bridge above Evans Avenue, looking West.*



Image 15. *On the Red Brick Path looking towards the Mary Reed Building, University Hall in the distance and Harpers Humanities Garden in the forefront.*  
(Photos taken by Marilyn, January/February 2010)

There's actually four towers on campus. One's the big gold one that everybody knows [Ritchie Tower]. But because when I was doing this I told my mom about the project and she was like, well, why, what do you think of when you think of DU. And I thought the towers because that's kind of the symbol of DU to me because they actually have a reason for putting the towers in each building, because the first building they built on campus had a tower so they try to keep that going and that's a historical thing. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

In the University of Denver's recently published book on the architectural history of the campus, *Built for Learning*, we learn that the carillon is an old world tower of bells that "toiled a warning or signaled the start of a market day or a holiday" (p. 85). A carillon is made out of at least 23 bells and if it is of concert quality it must have a minimum of 48. The university's carillon is made of 65 bells that are played by a professional carillonneur and by a few carillon students from the Lamont School of Music. The sound of the carillon can be heard on the hour across the campus. During an informal conversation with DU architect, Mark Rodgers, he noted that it reminded him of "the sound of the bell to call workers in from the fields". The students, faculty, and staff represent the "workers" and the "fields" are the built and landscape environments of the campus.



Image 16. *Buchtel tower.*



Image 17. *Stur姆 College of Law – Ricketson Law Building.*  
(Photos taken by JJ, January/February 2010)

The university's carillon is positioned inside the Ritchie Center tower. The tower was inspired by Chancellor Daniel L. Ritchie's admiration of the Cathedral of our Lady of Chartres in France. The tower was added to the original blue print of the building in order to serve as an illuminated icon to denote when the Pioneers won a hockey game. If one explores the base of the Ritchie tower at the west side entrance into the Ritchie Center you will note specifically placed engraved stone work with donors who contributed to the construction of the Daniel L. Ritchie Center for Sports and Wellness. In addition quotes of inspiration adorn the stone wall above the entry doors.

Health is the first of all liberties. ~ Henri Amile

A strong body makes the mind strong. ~ Thomas Jefferson

Academics, Athletics, Attitude, Achievement. ~ Murray Armstrong

The engraved quotes on the Ritchie Center tower's base echo both JJ and

Marilyn's sense of higher perspectives and standards. While the carillon within the tower represents a higher standard that can be seen and heard across the campus and from afar.

### **Prestige of Place and Materials**

JJ and Marilyn both expressed feeling a sense of being in a higher place on the DU campus and their ability to see the many towers is a reminder of the values of the institution. For Marilyn the use of specific building materials to create the built spaces and towers of the campus reflects her own interpretation of the value of her higher education as well as her own self worth to the institution. During our cognitive interview tour, Marilyn led me into the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management. She began to tell me about how she and her father were impressed by the building during their campus tour.

My family actually recently built a house and we were talking about how nothing is ever built in brick anymore because it's so expensive... And just seeing this building that's completely a brick building is just like, oh. And like the, the marble ceiling is like sort of dome thing going on... vaulted ceilings just like, it really makes you feel special like as if, like because the architecture is rich and grand and luxurious, well, I must be those things too. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Marilyn felt the institution's values of high standards are reflected in its use of architectural style and materials. When I asked her to qualify what she means by high standards, she compares DU to be higher quality than any other school in the state and just beneath the elite institutions of the east such as Yale and Harvard. The quality of her academic experience is paralleled by her aesthetic experience with the campus and even further it reflects her interpretation of what the institution thinks of her as a higher standard student. Coupled by the fact Marilyn recognized her ability to freely access the institution physically as an African-American woman allows her the ability to access what the institution means to her psychologically. There is an element of prestige in attending a campus like DU. During our cognitive interview tour she refers to DU as luxury type of school.

That I think, and just looking around, I really think that it is a luxury type of school, you know, as far as you have, just to give a metaphor, you know, you have your standard cars and then your luxury cars...and I think that DU kind of ... to that Cadillac of the schools. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

She used terms like "glamorous" and "fashion-forward" to describe the institution's aesthetic and the students who attend. Therefore, the architectural elements of the campus itself reflect high quality and relevance to Marilyn's educational expectations and ultimately, its reflection of her as a student. In this way, she sees her identity as an

African-American woman reflected within the red brick of the institutional architecture and she also feels the value of her education will be assessed at a higher level.

### **Finding Strength and Resiliency in the Historic**

JJ also finds a sense of history and resiliency in one of the oldest towers on the DU campus, the Buchtel tower. She pointed out the tower during our cognitive interview tour and documents it during her personal journaling and photo documentation activity. She found a personal connection to the history of DU through the Buchtel tower. Perhaps this is because it is one of the university's oldest structures and because it is a physical representation of the institution's ability to go through tough times and survive. This seems reflective of JJ's own personal journey as an African-American woman in the campus community. She is extremely involved as a student. She is a member of the DU Navigators, a Christian study group, the Black Student Alliance, Brown Sugar, and the DU Alpine club. While she feels that she made the right choice to attend the institution, she shared that she wants to develop her own niches without having someone else define them for her. In this way, she is shaping her own history within the DU community in an effort to make her own steps on the red brick, but she also seeks to make a connection with the institution's history. One physical representation of this connection for her is the Buchtel tower.

This is actually my fave structure on campus, because it actually has history and meaning behind it. At one point it burned down (it used to be made of wood) but they rebuilt it – and I think it's really significant that they thought enough of the bell tower to rebuild it (only this time it was brick).

When the school was built they used to ring the bell in order to alert students that classes were starting – when I stand next to that bell tower I feel like I've stepped back in time to the early days of DU. I feel in touch with the original university as

it was built in 1864. It was the center of the city of Denver and this bell tower was the center of campus. If there is an essence as DU, that bell tower is it. (Reflective journal, February 2010)

The visual symbol of the Buechel tower is one that the university uses within its marketing collateral on its website and printed materials. It stands as a physical representation of its appreciation for history and preservation. Through its preservation it allows future generations to form a connection its history and physical structures. JJ expressed that the use of red brick, gold, and copper elements within the built environment did not initially seem to reflect her identity as an African-American female student. She noted that the built structures of red brick pathways and golden and bronze laden towers come across as sign of affluence and physical embodiments of the male leaders and donors who are now immortalized in time. While she does not see herself reflected in these built elements, she does connect to the history embedded within the red brick.

Even though I think DU reflects Colorado citizens in general, I don't think it reflects DU students, specifically women students. The buildings are named after men, funded by men and designed mostly by men.

The entire campus is structured with red bricks, bronze and towering spikes. It feels like the planned out meticulously plotting of university staff and major financial contributors, not a reflection of the school community. It doesn't represent the thousands of students that pass through – except in one way.

When I walk over the red brick roads of campus I can't help but think of all the hundreds of thousands of feet that have traversed it before me and will still traverse it long after me. And when I think about that, I realize that maybe DU wasn't designed to always please the eye or artistic ideas of the students, maybe it was built and continues to be built simply to be there. It's a sturdy strong campus, those bricks will last a long time. It's nice to know that the campus structure is strong enough to survive, it makes me think that maybe I am strong enough to. (Reflective journal, February 2010)

JJ's ability to persevere in her educational journey has been formed by time and reflection. She noted that hearing the sound of the carillon reminds her of where she is and who she is, and further, that the ability of one sound to reach an entire campus community makes her feel more part of it. In addition, she revealed that she did not expect to be able to see her identity as an African-American woman reflected within the built educational environment and that after journaling and taking photos of the campus, she started to realize she has actually become the campus instead.

Regardless of the buildings all named after Alumni men, or the male egotistical towers all over campus, the randomly placed statues and sculptures with no name or significance when I walk through campus I see myself everywhere because it's a small, quiet campus and anywhere I go I can find solitude and my serenity. (Reflective journal, February 2010)

### **I Will Survive: Finding Serenity in the Green Spaces**

JJ recalled being engaged by the campus and its beauty at the age of eight during a summer swim camp at the Ritchie Center for Sports and Wellness. She stated, "from the moment I stepped on campus as a young girl" she knew this was where she wanted to attend college. She reminisced on the green spaces and trees that adorned the campus and the sense of serenity it exuded. As we make our way along the red brick pathway during our cognitive interview tour, she reflects on the differences between the CU-Boulder campus and the University of Denver campus.



Image 18. *Harpers Humanities Garden*. (Photo taken by JJ, January/February 2010)

You know, living in Colorado everybody's been to Boulder and it's this huge school and you feel like it's a huge school, but I walked into DU's campus and it was just really pretty and it was really calm, and it wasn't too many people. And I really, I liked that feel. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Marilyn also has a deeper level of emotional association to the green spaces of campus. Specifically to the Harpers Humanities Garden that faces the western side of the Mary Reed building. During her personal reflections in her journal, she recalled a moment of anxiety and stress during her first quarter. While she was adjusting to living in a shared community, she needed to find a space where she could relax and reconnect with herself.

One of the most impactful elements on campus, for me, is the chain of fountains and ponds just behind the Mary-Reed building. When I first came to DU, I started an ambitious course load of 18 credit hours. It was hard, not just because of the course load but also because of the difficulty and culture shock of adapting to a new environment. First quarter, I was overstressed and sleep deprived, but on the warm days in the fall when I would get out or go to my speech class in the Mary-

Reed building, I would sometimes take a stroll by the pathway that ran parallel to the mini waterfalls and fountains and Koi ponds behind the building. Being in that tranquil setting, it was as if the campus felt the hard time I was having, and in that hard time it offered a sort of embrace to me, allowing me to unwind and just breathe, almost like a deep hug from a mother to her child. It was those days, when I stopped and looked at the campus in all its beauty that helped me get through and survive my first quarter on campus. (Reflective Journal, February 2010)

This is an example of how deeply connected to the built educational environment Marilyn is, she felt the campus can sense her moods, needs, and dreams, just like a mother. When the garden was dedicated on September 10, 1965, the first lady of the United States, Lady Bird Johnson expressed, “I’m glad to know the American student of tomorrow will not be doomed by cement campuses, but will always have this jewel of greenery, flowing water, and fountains” (University of Denver, 2008, p. 193). The garden serves as a representation for her views on the importance of green spaces to the American landscape as well as Chancellor Chester M. Alter’s beliefs in creating beautiful environments for the learning process to occur.



Image 19. *Evans Chapel, south side of the Harpers Humanities Garden.*



Image 20. *Harpers Humanities Garden.*

(Photo taken by Marilyn, January/February 2010)

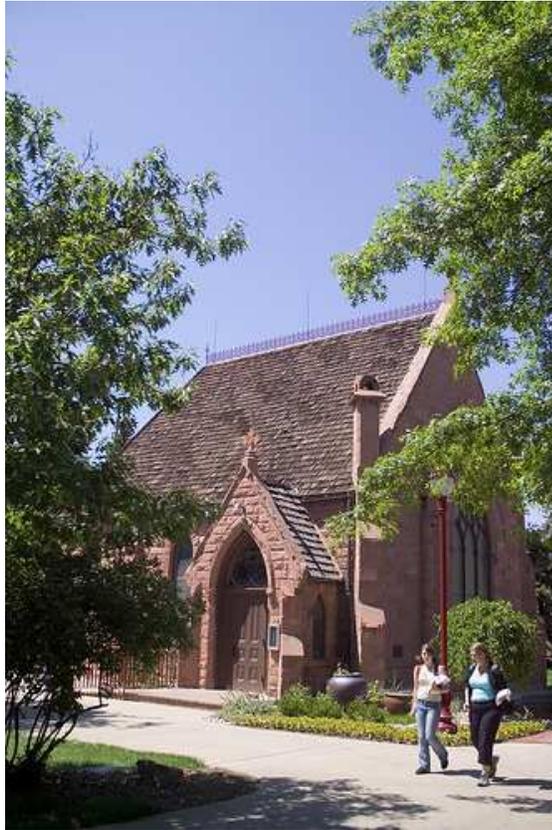


Image 21. *Evans Chapel.*  
(Photo taken by the University of Denver, 2010)

Interestingly the original land owner, Rufus “Potato” Clark, who donated the land that the university now sits upon, insisted that the institution plant 1,000 trees to beautify the campus upon his donation. This appreciation for green space and landscapes is inherent in the university’s history. Utilizing a balance between brick, mortar, and greenery is embedded within the campus landscape that serves as an arboretum with carefully labeled plant, tree, and shrubbery designations. Marilyn senses the intentions behind the original landowner and architects of the Harpers Humanities Garden and in this way, the space serves as a place for her to reconnect with herself. In addition, simply being in the space

connects her with those who have come before her, thus connecting her to the spirit and history of DU, one that she is now a part of.

JJ and Marilyn share in their ability to find comfort and serenity in the green spaces of campus, especially the Harpers Humanities Garden. In addition, they both express a connection between the life of the green spaces and their own emotions and senses. JJ notices that in the winter when the campus community is on its winter break, the green spaces of the campus hibernate. There is a semblance that is developed between the landscape and the campus community. Likewise when spring arrives the campus comes to life with students, faculty, and staff walking and engaging in social activity throughout its landscape. JJ noted that this connection between the campus environment and human behavior is restricted to the landscape only.

I admit that I feel in love with the beauty of DU, it's small waterfalls and lily pads surrounded by bushes with big beautiful flowers only adds to the idea of serenity for me. It reflects Colorado lifestyle – as soon as the last snow melts and the sun comes out, Colorado residents like to be outside at any time possible. It's the same with [the] DU campus – snow melts, sky clears and it's alive. It's not always filled with people but the greenery is just as alive as the people.  
(Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

In this way, JJ and Marilyn both have developed a deep emotional connection to the green spaces and built spaces such as the towers of the built educational environment. They have found hope, inspiration, challenge, and care reflected within them. This connection has allowed them to see themselves reflected within the very walls they live and learn within and the green spaces and red bricked pathways they sit, walk, and reflect upon.

The relationship that exists between the campus aesthetic and the African-American identity is one that has been generated from their initial introduction to each other and is one that can take time and care. As we will learn in the next story from Natalie, DU has become her home and a physical embodiment of how she sees herself as a graduate student and a professional, but this relationship took some time that was beyond love at first sight.

### **Bookmarks of Time: Developing a Sense of Self on the Red Brick Path**

Natalie has spent the last eight years of her life engaged in the DU community as an undergraduate student, a graduate student, and professional staff member. Originally born in Denver, her family moved to Hawaii when she was seven years old and for her the experience of moving back to the Denver area was quite a culture shock. While she feels DU has been her second home, it took some time for her to adjust to it. When Natalie reflects on her first day as a freshman moving into Johnson-MacFarlane Hall (JMAC), she recalled her father pointing out that she was one of the only few faces of color.

At first it was just kind of self-consciousness. I was afraid that people were gonna kind of judge me because I'm in a very interesting situation because I'm multiracial, so I'm half black, half white, but I don't really look it, or most people don't necessarily associate that with me, so they'll hear like you're from Hawaii and they'll assume that I'm Hawaiian or some kind of Polynesian. And so at first, um, you know, people are always like, oh, so you speak Hawaiian and I'm like, no, I don't, I'm not actually ethnically Hawaiian. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie lived in a themed community in JMAC, the Pioneer Leadership program. The program allowed her to interact with other newcomers who shared interests in leadership

and community engagement. As we walked along the outside of the building, during our cognitive interview tour, she smiled and expressed how she recognized how old the building looks, especially compared to the new residence hall of Nelson and Nagel. However, the fact that she had good memories within its walls made her feel a sense of love for the building. When I asked her what she would do if the university decided to tear the building down it down and rebuild it, she stated that she would have a hard time supporting it. In this way Natalie associates the built structure with the memories she shared within the space. Thereby, the building represents a physical manifestation of her memories and to dismantle the physical structure would dismantle her memories.

Marilyn also lives in JMAC and is part of the Pioneer Leadership Program. She too notes the oldness of the building but finds appreciation for the small scale of the community within it.

I live in Johnson MacFarlane Hall, it's kind of old. It's like from the '70s I think it was built. It looks very retro and it's interesting. Um, but I, like I said, I like it because it's smaller than the other freshman dorm, Centennial Halls, because like there's just more of a sense of community and stuff because there's only three floors, so (Cognitive interview tour, January/February 2010)

Natalie and Marilyn have both found a sense of community within the walls of JMAC specifically due to their involvement in the Pioneer Leadership Program. Finding social interactions with others who hold higher values of leadership and community service have made their transition into the community easier. Natalie began her higher educational journey in JMAC as a freshman and then transitioned to Nelson Hall as a sophomore. She explained that when she moved to Nelson Hall she felt "all grown up". She noted that in JMAC everyone keeps their door open; whereas in Nelson Hall

everyone keeps their doors shut, like in a hotel. She felt that by transitioning to a different residence hall she herself began to transition in her own personal development and growth. She recalled a specific memory within Nelson when her race became more visible in the residential community.

I lived here in my sophomore year at DU. This was a time where I really felt like I had found my place at DU but also a time where my race/ethnicity became more of a central focus. This was when we started discussing race and culture in the classroom so I really became more aware of my status of being a “minority”. I remember over hearing one student talking about how hard it was for minorities on campus and when I turned to look at her, I was surprised to see that she was white. She went on to say that it was hard to be Jewish on campus sometimes but the experience made her stronger. I don’t want to belittle her experiences but at the time I just wanted to give her an earful! If she hadn’t disclosed that she was Jewish, I would never have known. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

Living in a residential community allowed Natalie to develop in her own sense of racial and ethnic identity while pursuing her academic goals. During the first part of her junior year she studied abroad in Australia and returned to campus to live in Towers, but admitted that if Nagel Hall would have been completed she would have preferred to live there.

... [it’s] a really gorgeous building. Had it been here I probably would have wanted to live there. Because the northwest corner you have views of downtown Denver and the mountains. It’s really nice... , yes... dormitory or residence hall envy. ...here when I was here. Well, just, I mean the brick. ...copper and just the stone work. I just think it’s very beautiful architecture, but I, when I look at art or any of that in the very, I think of it in a very traditional manner. Um, I’m not one who likes, what is it, like, what’s his name, Picasso. That kind of art does not appeal to me. I think it’s ugly. I can appreciate it as a different view, but I like impressionism, I like the very, it’s really pretty. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie like Marilyn appreciated the beauty of the materials of red brick, copper, and gold the institution has incorporated into its new built structures. She resonated with the

traditional nature of the architectural design and style. However, she also found a sense of whimsy and appreciation for the Penrose library, a building she feels sticks out in the traditional architectural landscape of the campus. Within this space, she found the ability to discover her student identity.

As a graduate student I spend a little bit more time there, mostly when I'm struggling to write a paper because writing is my Achilles' heel, so if I'm not at my house I can't like use cleaning as an excuse and the quicker I get done, the quicker I get to leave the library, so. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

JJ also shared an appreciation for the Penrose library, to get her homework completed and to engage with other students during final exams.

This is the spot where my friends and I hang out during mid-terms and finals week when we are pulling all-nighters. We would use the sculpture to climb, sit and lean on. We used it mostly because it's located conveniently in the middle of campus so it's an equal walking distance from all corners of campus, so it's centrally located. Also the sculpture itself is very unique – it doesn't fit with the rest of the campus design, it has no particular function or meaning or significance, it's simply randomly placed next to the library which is also unique to the campus design. A large beige building with large windows. Both of these structures on campus are oddities in the fact that they don't represent the rest of the campus; there are no other sculptures on campus, or beige buildings. It's almost like no thought went into the library or the placement of the sculpture. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

The Penrose library was built in 1972 in an architectural style that was purposely “devoid of decoration” (University of Denver, 2008, p. 22). Its purpose was to serve as a building purely for learning and also as a means to “overwhelm the buildings from earlier eras”.

Natalie notes that when she reflects on the various architectural styles represented in the built educational environment of DU, she sees bookmarks in time. She felt that each building is like a historical document in the institutional history.



Image 22. *Nagel Hall*. (Photo taken by Marilyn, January/February 2010)



Image 23. *Penrose Library*. (Photos taken by Marilyn, January/February 2010)

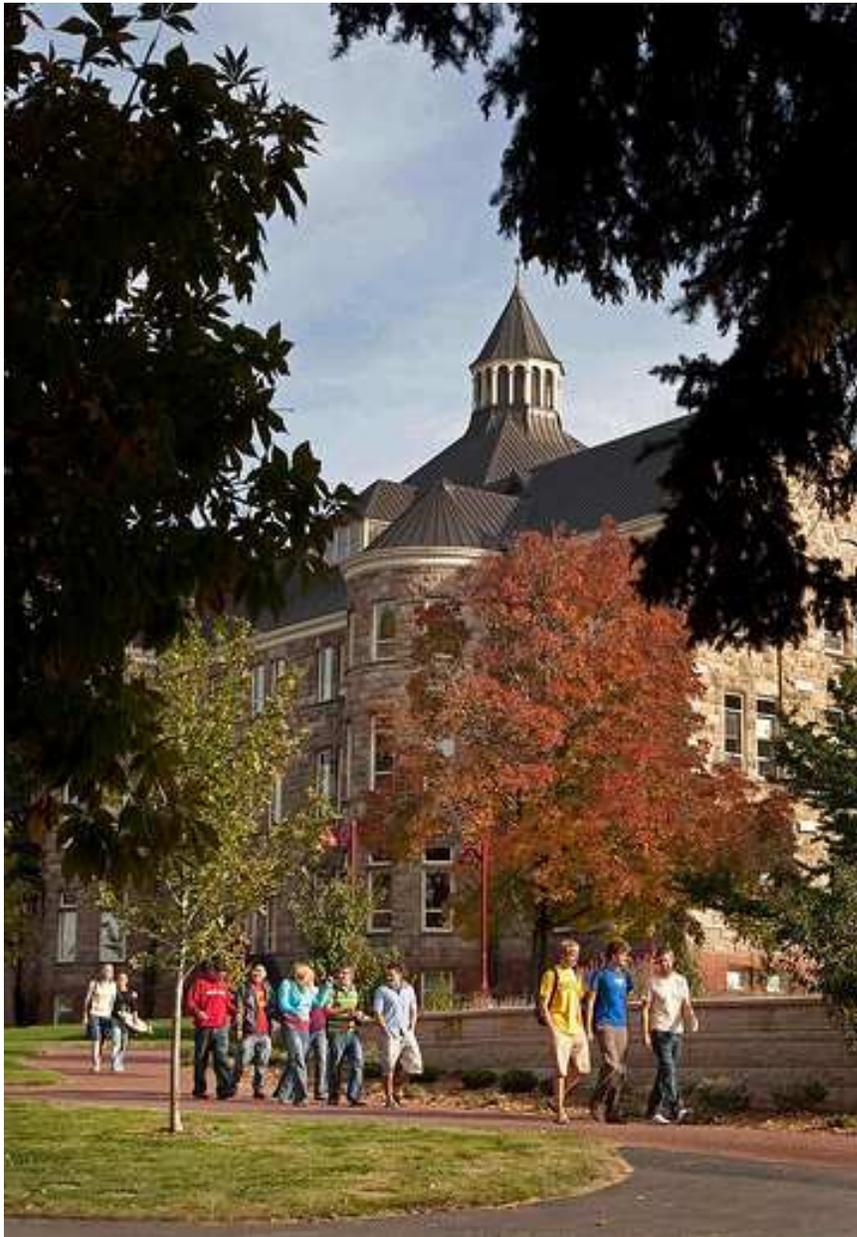


Image 24. *University Hall*. (Photo taken by the University of Denver, 2010)

Natalie felt that while there are noticeable differences in the original architecture of the 1860s to modern day, it would be dishonest for the institution to tear down the older buildings to create more of a consistent architectural look. Rather she felt each building should be preserved.

My personal preference... would everything be this pretty brick, but then I think that would be dishonest to the university's, well, the university's identity itself, because, well, and life in general. Life is not this one continuous stream of everything being the same and perfect. Um, so, yes, I think it would be great if everything looks the same, especially since I have, I like organization and everything works seamlessly. But I, I can still really appreciate it because you know that something momentous happened here. Like this is the school for international studies and at some point whether it was in, I think this was built in the '50s, '60s or '70s, but this became a need on this campus. That there was a value and recognition that we need international studies and it needs its own building, and here is that building and it kind of just was like a bookmark in time. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

JJ and Marilyn also shared Natalie's appreciation for preserving the architectural history of the institution by preserving the original craftsmanship and materials. In fact, they found a deeper sense of connection to their student identities reflected in the older buildings of the campus. Marilyn shared her first experience seeing the winding staircases inside of University Hall, "I remember when I first saw those stairs, I like imagined what it would be like if I had a class there". JJ also expressed her connection to the stairwells of the older buildings on campus.

I love stairwells and I think DU, the one thing they really do well is the stairwells. I think it's, it's the idea of kind of uplifting yourself. That, um, you know, it's hard to put into words, but, um, it's the idea that you're kind of, you have an opportunity to lift yourself up, and I know that's kind of, I know stairwells don't really symbolize that, or they're not supposed to, but that's what I feel about all the stairwells and all the towers on campus, kind of, um, symbolize that there's a higher, you know, you're trying to reach a higher level through your learning and everything so that's why I kind of focus on those. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

The buildings serve as historical reminders of the institutional history and specific architectural features like the stairwells within them represent uplift and hope.

University Hall has a particular sense of history for Natalie. As a staff member since 2003, she has worked inside its walls on a daily basis. She appreciated the significance of her place within the space, a building that was the origin of the campus. During our cognitive interview tour she reflected on her appreciation for the building.

I like to think of it as a starting point...and then when you across campus you look at it and you're thinking, wow, we've expanded quite a bit and it's been, you know, a century and a half, but it's still a lot and it's an amazing accomplishment. Just thinking about how many students come here, whether it's undergrads, graduates, and have their life somehow impacted. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

As I reflect on the footprints of Grace Mabelle Andrews inside University Hall, as one of the first African-American women to access its walls, I can see the connection Natalie has experienced in her reflection on those who have walked through the hallways and stairwells of this space. The significance that this physical structure has been preserved, allows us to connect with those who came before us, to feel the same curved wood of the stairwells, to hear the same creeks of the stairs as we place our weight upon them, moving upward and downward, and to take in the view of the city of Denver and the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains in the distance.

Natalie, Marilyn, and JJ have found a connection to the historical past of the institution and see themselves as sharing in the traditions of the institution, while creating a future for them. In this dynamic, they have identified specific architectural structures that they feel reflect who they are. Marilyn and JJ find reflection in the towers and green

spaces of the campus, serving as symbols of higher perspectives and serenity. While Natalie shared that if there was one architectural feature that reflected her personally it would be pineapple relief at the entrance of the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management building. Growing up in Hawaii, she reminisces in the symbolism behind the international symbol meaning ‘hospitality’. DU has become a hospitable environment that has allowed her to grow and develop into the woman she is, one with a multicultural cultural heritage and perspective on the world. For her the symbol of the pineapple also represents DU’s mission to serve the public good. She has found growth in working with the Office of Community Engagement and Service Learning. This experience has served to open her mind and heart to the world outside of DU, a world she recognized had life lessons to give her as well.

This is the sign for the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning. I volunteered in middle schools during my sophomore, junior, and senior years. One of the best experiences of my college career (tied only with study abroad). These experiences made me realize and understand my privileges – middle class, supportive parents, ability to go to and afford college. Also, I began to realize that service wasn’t about me helping “them”. I am no better than anyone else. My privilege should be that I have the time, resources, etc. to strive towards a better community. My community. There is no “them only “us”. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

The university campus provides a structure for its community to engage in the relationship of teaching and learning. Marilyn, JJ, and Natalie felt that the campus represented a place of higher aspirations, connection to those who have come before them, and a place for personal growth and self reflection. While some may say their experiences have been purely formed through their social interactions and engagements with fellow classmates, professors, and community members, I would argue that their

experiences were guided by their interactions with others within the physical spaces of the campus. These spaces were purposely designed to inspire learning and cater to the ideals of the institution since its establishment in 1864. In the next section, I will discuss how some of the women who participated in the study felt the campus is a space that provides both visibility and invisibility of their racial and gender identities as African-American women. In this way, they perceive the campus as a stage, a place they must perform in certain roles where they cannot be entirely themselves. In addition, they perceive this stage to have back entrances that they can navigate to avoid being on the center stage. Even further, within the classroom environment they use strategies to place themselves on center stage to feel safe within the learning environment.

### **The Campus Stage: Navigating the Façades and Boundaries of Visibility and Invisibility**

The first impression American campuses can make on their students is through their architectural style and the grandeur of its built structures as denoting its presence within the community and on the landscape. The University of Denver's architectural style is defined by its use of brick, stone, copper, and gold. The use of architectural style and building materials serves as a physical embodiment of the institution's values of education, one that starts from a higher place. However, the impression the buildings leave upon every student is not the same or rather the one to which the institution may aspire. The experience each student has within the walls of the built structures shapes their impression of what the institution places value upon. This interplay between the exteriors of buildings used to promote the educational value and the promise of what a

student will gain from their educational experience is not always in balance. For many women in the study, the University of Denver campus feels and looks like what a college campus should, but behind its exteriors lays an interior narrative of experiences and interactions that have shaped their perceptions of what the campus means to them and vice versa of what they mean to it.

The façades of the built educational environment is not the only place where the first impression may not always appear to be what it seems, one's racial identity also has a place within the educational environment. Some of the women featured in this chapter discuss their experiences of having to prove their racial identities to the dominant culture. In addition, their racial identities have placed them in awkward social situations where they have become victims of microaggressions and macroaggressions due to the dominant group's misunderstanding or lack of understanding of their racial identity (Sue et al., 2008). In these situations, the women have made conscientious choices to navigate the boundaries of visibility and invisibility within the walls of the academy.

The lack of compositional racial diversity on campus has created the visibility of these women in a sea of faces who do not look like them. Their body images have been called into question by those from other racial identities. Comments have been made on their hair care practices, their curves, and simply their skin color that have placed their racial and gender identities onto center stage. The physical spaces on the campus, such as its green spaces, that were designed to inspire and promote student learning and social engagement, have become a stage that places them in the spotlight to be looked at, judged, and harassed. The lines of visibility and invisibility go deeper on the campus

stage to include one's socio-economic identity. All the women in this study have noted their choice to attend DU was significantly due to the financial support they received. This support certainly allows them to afford their private education, but what is not considered by the institution is their ability to 'fit in' or rather to 'blend into' the predominant culture of the campus community. For some of the women, the classroom spaces serve as a fashion stage, allowing those from affluent backgrounds to show off their latest material goods, vogue hairstyles, and publically discuss their trips to the mountains and abroad.

The women featured in this next section, also reflect on their perceptions of physical boundaries of visibility and invisibility within the manner in which the campus is divided by a north and south side. The women speak to their recognition of the placement of residence hall based upon class rank and socio-economic identities as well as the location of specific classroom buildings by discipline which translates into their understanding of their importance in the larger context of the campus stage.

### **Center Stage: The Exteriors and the Interiors of Buildings and Identity**

The Mary Reed building was dedicated in 1933 as the Mary Reed library, serving as the institution's second library due to the overgrowth of its original Carnegie library. Mrs. Verner Z. Reed, a trustee, was the buildings sole donor and insisted that her contribution be recognized by naming the building after her. The building's collegial gothic architectural style was inspired by previous buildings on the campus like the Margery Reed building, located just northeast of its location. The building serves as one of the major, if not, the primary image of the University of Denver, featured on its

website and all marketing and promotional materials for prospective students and donors. Its notable bell tower is a physical structure that symbolizes its modern day goal of providing an education starting from a higher place, as its position on campus allows for a panoramic view of the Rocky Mountains. The reflection of the area's natural mountain region serves to reflect its characteristics of strength and magnificence to the University of Denver through this physical structure. However, another impression can be perceived. For some of the women, the notable tower of Mary Reed Hall, connotes a perception as a haunted space and for others, the entire building itself is seen as "spooky" place, as Natalie reflected on during our cognitive interview tour.

This is Mary Reed. Um, which I think is probably one the creepiest buildings on campus but really pretty...I don't know, I just, when you look at it, it kind of reminds me of one of those mental asylums...that you see in movies... But really pretty. You can still appreciate the beauty even if it kind of makes you kind of think of, you know, haunted, a haunted building or scary stories (January 2010).



Image 25. *Mary Reed building sign.* (Photo taken by the University of Denver, 2010)

Natalie's perception of Mary Reed based upon its exterior appearance and recognition as one of the most notable spaces on campus is echoed in her exploration her biracial identity in the campus community over the years. The notion of stepping onto the campus stage as a biracial woman has placed her and others into awkward, frustrating, and conflicting social interactions. In essence their biracial identity requires them to perform in a certain manner as to avoid misconceptions and interpretations of their racial identity and to avoid becoming victims of discrimination and objectification. Specifically, they have adapted their appearances by straightening their hair to blend into the dominant culture and even have gone so far as to physically remove themselves from social situations where derogatory remarks are being made about their African-American racial heritage. However, like the strength and magnificence of the region's mountains, they have found an ability to persist despite the harsh environment of the campus community. I will share the stories of women who have had to negotiate and navigate their visible and invisible identities as African-American women in the built educational environment of a predominantly white institution.

### **Pushed onto Center Stage: Feeling Exposed in the Green**

Rachel walked on the University of Denver campus starting at a young age. Her mother has worked in the community since she can remember. As a biracial woman, Rachel's mother and father educated her about her identity and how it would be perceived by others including immediate family members who were not always accepting. Rachel's parents play a strong role in her life and racial identity development, especially in order to prepare her for her experience at the University of Denver, within a

predominant white community. When I asked Rachel whether she feels comfortable in the campus environment, she brings me to a space on campus that evokes feelings of discomfort, the Driscoll Green. This space, in front of Sturm Hall, makes her feel that she sticks out, that she does not fit in. She does not perceive this just in relation to her racial identity, but to her beliefs in diversity and social justice. To Rachel, this space represents the majority culture and its values and beliefs in activities like Greek Life as evidenced by the three fraternity houses that sit on the east side parameter. In addition, she felt that simply walking through the crowd of people who don't look like her both in skin color, hair, and clothing that her socio-identity is also out of place. Rachel revealed that she could never afford a school like DU unless her mother worked here. As an employee of the institution, Rachel's mother is given a tuition discount. She struggled with the feeling of being so visible in this space and shared later, during our final reflective interview, that it is a general feeling she has on campus overall.

Yeah, I think I had a hard time identifying it early on, just because I was like new, lost freshman who like felt out of place everywhere. But I think like, especially like last year, like my sophomore year it got like worse, you know. I started...you know, even though I was like a student and I knew where I was and like knew my way around and, you know, had like connections on campus, like I worked in the office, and, you know, my mom's really important on campus... and even with that, you know, I still felt like in this one spot, you know, like more so than any other, like I just...felt like I don't belong her.(Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Rachel explained that in order to avoid the Driscoll Green she uses the back entrance to Sturm Hall where a majority of her classes are held. When she enters Sturm Hall to make her way to class, she reflected that after she began participating in this study, her recognition of how visible she felt within the interior spaces of campus became clear.

I am currently sitting on a bench on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Sturm Hall. A class of 50 or 60 students just left their classroom, usually I try to ignore it but I am astounded by the amount of whites the same. I am astounded by the amount of white females flooding out of this classroom. Maybe that class just attracts more females than males... It's so awful to make generalizations, but watching people empty out of the classroom makes all the students look the same. There is literally no diversity that is visible – every girl looks and dresses and talks the same. Even though I look visibly different from the sea of blond hair, I'm sure I'd blend in to an outsider too. I dress and probably speak like most other students here, I suppose that can happen after 2 ½ years of living here. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

During our final reflective interview, Rachel shared that while she knows she is biracial, she identifies mostly with the Latino/Latina culture. She expressed her excitement to study abroad in Brazil during the winter quarter. She felt this culture would be more multicultural, one that does not have such extremes of black and white within its structure.

I've traveled a lot in Latin American countries...and love the culture so much and, um, I think it's because I've had this like identity issue within, between African and the white world, I'm almost like, forget both, like I just want to be Latina. Uh, that's... (46:02)... I don't want... like I understand that, you know, like I understand their culture, I love it; I want to be a part of it... (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Natalie also shared Rachel's sense of being visible, during our cognitive interview tour she expressed that her visibility has been met with non-welcoming behavior when she is making her way across campus and that through this visibility comes her acknowledgement of invisibility that silences her voice as an African-American woman.

I think I feel very visible on campus from the fact that I am black and I am a female, that you do sort of stand out. And I had some, um, negative experiences with that. Where people have, uh, certain looks or certain feelings and, um, you can see it written in their faces that are like why are you here, and that to me is a bit disheartening. Or I've even had people make comments and that's a little, um, it makes you feel both visible and invisible because you realize that, um, you're visible because you're different, because you're the other, but also you're

invisible in that they don't really want to acknowledge that you're even here. And so, um, or you're seen as a very, um, minute aspect of the campus where it's almost as if your opinion doesn't really matter because you're just a minority, is how some things tend to make you feel. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova also shared in Rachel and Natalie's experiences of being fully visible within the campus environment, one that has led to question whether she belonged here. She felt her identity as a graduate student within the community is either quickly dismissed or not even considered when she has experienced negative stares that project a sense of fear from students from the dominant culture in the campus environment. While she recognized the genuine nature of kindness she receives from a select few, she felt by in large the majority of the community questions her very presence.

Some people are really nice, they'll speak, they'll smile, then there's others who are like, are you a criminal, should I be, like they look annoyed, they get the look on their face, they're kind of like trying to Figure out what's what. It's like, no, I'm not here to grab your purse. No, I'm here to go to school. And then, you know, it's a difference. You can watch the different degrees of shifting of their eyes and face because I'm a people watcher. So, I just watch. I just take it in. It amuses me actually. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010).



Image 26.  
*Students sitting  
and studying on  
the Driscoll  
Green and patio  
of Sturm Hall.*  
(Photo taken by  
the University of  
Denver, 2010)

Poppy shared in Rachel, Natalie, and Nova's sense of being visible, but what she also held was a sense of invisibility for her biracial identity. Her physical appearance has made her victim to microaggressions, sometimes unknowingly to those making them.

### **What You See is Not What You Get**

When I first met Poppy she thanked me for treating her so nicely. When I asked why, she shared that most people don't believe that she's African-American. In fact she revealed that she has been in social situations on campus where she has directly witnessed White classmates making derogatory remarks about African-Americans. In those moments she has physically removed herself from the situation. I asked her about her own reflections on her biracial identity and her need to navigate the built educational environment.

Um, I, well, obviously, I don't look African-American, um, so I am biracial. My mother's side of the family is Native American, Irish and, um, African-American. My father's side is, um, Western European. So, um, it's been unique I guess, because I did attend, I think it was the summer before my freshman year I attended, um, the Multicultural Center, they have like a, a like seminar or something for like incoming students. And I attended that and it was great, like it was nice. And then I kind of didn't feel any inclusion after that. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

As a biracial woman on campus, Poppy's navigation of the campus environment and social interactions with those within it is not new to her. She shared that she's been proving her biracial identity since her childhood. Along with proving comes her decision of who to trust with the knowledge of her biracial identity. When she is in a situation where the issue of race is being discussed, she determines when to trust and when to simply avoid confrontation, questioning, and disbelief.

As we continue through our first interview, Poppy reveals with relief and excitement in her voice that she is currently enrolled in a class titled, *The Multiracial Racial American*. She shared that she feels that she can be her true self within this classroom space.

I love it, and it's really given me a chance to kind of express myself, um, and kind of who I am without any like confusion or judgment because a lot of people don't understand if they're not of mixed race, especially if you don't look like one race or the other.

Yeah, and so that's been really nice. And we have a lot of students, we have Asian students, Asian-American students, Latino students, um, African-American students and then just, you know, European-American students, and stuff, so it's been nice, and everyone's really open and stuff so that's great. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)



Image 27. *Harpers Humanities Garden*. (Photo taken by Poppy, January/February 2010)

This image reflects a dormant space. We see the curves of the concrete lined ponds and dormant grass and trees. Its unknown vibrancy remains hidden until the spring and summer seasons arrive. In some ways this image reflects the dormancy

of Poppy's biracial identity. One that does not become known and alive until trust is established. (Portraitist's journal, March 2010)

When I inquired about the actual physical space of the classroom she told me that the class is being held in the Daniels School of Business. She revealed that before this class she never thought to walk into the building, but now as she uses the shared study spaces within the building. In this way, her positive social interactions with her professor and classmates have inspired a sense of comfort to explore other areas of the building outside of her classroom.

As a biracial African-American woman, Natalie shared in the journey of navigating the spaces of a predominantly white campus with Rachel and Poppy. Natalie reflected back on her first year on campus when others began to question her racial identity. "What are you?" she shared with shock and frustration on her face, Natalie recalls being asked this question several times as a freshman student.

Um, at first it was just kind of, um, self-consciousness. I was afraid that people were gonna kind of judge me, um, because I'm in a very interesting situation because I'm multiracial, so I'm half black, half white, but I don't really look it, or most people don't necessarily associate that with me, so they'll hear like you're from Hawaii and they'll assume that I'm Hawaiian or some kind of Polynesian. And so at first, um, you know, people are always like, oh, so you speak Hawaiian and I'm like, no, I don't, I'm not actually ethnically Hawaiian. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie experienced culture shock coming from Hawaii to Denver, Colorado where the word 'diversity' did not have the same context. She recalled feeling lost and down most of her first year in the lack of compositional diversity within the community. She even noticed a cultural difference in the type of food that was advertised as 'diverse food' in the residence hall cafeteria.

I was very used to having sushi or you'd have Korean barbeque and then I got up here and I was like, I mean I like burgers but it wasn't just my, you know, everyday thing so it was burgers and pizza and then you'd have the one, what is it called, the, um, international cuisine and it was like beef broccoli and rice, I'm like, okay. Breakfast in Hawaii is very much like we eat scrambled eggs and you have rice for breakfast and four cheese sausage or spam, you know, spam at home, people are like, yes, spam, you can. People are like you eat spam. Um, so it's just not cuisine that I preferred. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010).

She like Poppy avoided as much as she could having to prove her racial identity based on other's misunderstanding and confusion. Then towards the end of her first year she began to seek out others on campus that could culturally identify with her as Hawaiian.

I was convinced I was the only person from Hawaii at this entire school. But actually, um, there was a group of older students who were from Hawaii and they put on like this little luau thing at Nelson dining hall and I went and, um, the food was horrible. And, but I saw them and I was like, oh, there are people from Hawaii here. And so I started hanging out with them. And they understood. We would make the local food from home and we would go to some of the concerts for the bands that were from home but they'd come up here to perform. So my freshman year they were kind of a saving grace, because I was so unhappy and I didn't feel like, um, I just didn't feel like there was people who truly understood me, and I think it was just because I hadn't found that group of friends, regardless. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie also felt her visibility as a biracial woman when she first moved into Johnson-MacFarlane Hall. Her father was the one who brought to her attention and provided guidance of how she could survive.

I think I was just so excited to move in, and my Dad was looking around and he was like, well, your neighbor is a little Indian kid so you just stick with him, you watch out for each other. And I'm like, okay, first of all, there's just so many things wrong with your statement right there. I'm not quite sure we need to look out for each other. But then when, just the fact that he was looking at..... wow, there's only one other person of color on your floor... be friends with him, I was kind of looking around and I was like, oh, wow, yes, I do kind of stick out here. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie also shared her recognition of being the only one in her classroom environments during her sophomore year and how she continued to notice throughout her undergraduate experience when the issues of race or multiculturalism were brought up, all eyes would turn to her, including the eyes of her professor. In these moments she felt uncomfortably visibly, but by her senior year she started to feel more comfortable sharing that she was biracial with others and ready to prove it.

### **Is this a Fashion Show or a Classroom? Socio-Economic Identity**

When Marilyn first visited the University of Denver campus during a campus tour she reflects on how impressed she was by the appearance of its students and its faculty. She describes them as “fashion forward”. She indicated she expected students to be dressed in their pajamas and going to class, fitting the typical college stereotype, but instead she recognized how much effort went into their appearance. During one of her first classes, Marilyn noticed that many of the female students are dressed up in brand named high heeled shoes and the latest fashion attire. She shared that she felt out of place in a sweatshirt, jeans, and tennis shoes. The ability of her female classmates to ensure they are dressed in the latest designer clothing with accompanying high fashion hairstyles draws attention to them from the men in the classroom. While Marilyn appreciated the academic abilities of her classmates, noting that she felt everyone was at the same intellectual level, her ability to compete or rather keep up with their criteria for appearances in class was not the same. Marilyn’s experience in the classroom and her recognition of other’s higher level socio-economic abilities is not unique.

Poppy expressed that she felt the real issue at hand on the University of Denver campus is the issue of class.

Because I come from middle class, um, and right before I came here my parents got divorced and so my mom is now the sole provider for me... and so she is the one who helps me pay for school. Um, so I don't necessarily like fit in economically because there's a lot of people here whose grandparents or parents pay for their school, so that's been kind of rough because they have a different concept of money and goods than I do. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

She expressed her concern of fitting in as a middle class student. She described her concern of not engaging in specific social activities by those from the upper class such as partying and skiing in the mountains. Marilyn also shared a story of noticing many of her fellow residents often use shopping as a form of stress release from their studies and her recognition of their different perspectives of being a student.

Yeah, I was, actually talking about this with some people from the Springs the other day, how, you know, coming here was, to DU, was kind of a culture shock, you know... because the people here aren't from, you know, more upper class or, yeah, upper class income families and the, the culture and the attitudes are actually pretty different than what I'm used to. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Abbie also shared in Marilyn and Poppy's recognition of the 'upper class' socio-economic environment of the DU campus through the dynamics of its workers and its students. During our cognitive interview tour she also reflects on the newly constructed Lacrosse field on the west side of the Ritchie Center. She shared that as an African-American woman she does not identify with this sport, rather it is a sport for "rich white kids".

The pathways are always open with the snow and stuff, but it made me really uncomfortable because the people are shoveling the snow or the little Latino women are cleaning the bathrooms, and I was like, they have machines to plow

the sports fields, they can use machines to clean the sidewalks instead of making these little men... and I realize they're getting paid and stuff for that, but I, ... it's sort of degrading to them, like, to expect them to do that.

This is not even DU, this is... Like this is nothing to be... I came here for a basketball game, which was fun to watch a basketball game... but like we have a giant lacrosse ... so much money went to lacrosse. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Marilyn, Poppy, and Abbie recognition of class differences within the built educational environment is based upon how their fellow students in the community dress, recreate, and access certain spaces. Although the institution reports a majority of its students receive some form of financial aid support, the manner in which they utilize their financial resources may be prioritized in different ways (University of Denver, 2009).

The women in the study express the importance of receiving financial support to pay for their tuition, books, and living expenses. As a result, they must place their priorities on being a student and gaining their education rather than living up to the social standards of a community that has a reputation for being a 'rich white school'. However, their need to prioritize where their financial resources go come with a price, one that places their physical appearance and characteristics of being an African-American woman front and center.

### **Our Hair and Curves: Experiences in the Classroom, Residence hall, and Athletic Facilities**

As African-American women our bodies have been depicted as exotic and animal like (Woollacott, 2006). The American media portrays our curved hips, full lips, and thick curly hair as something wild and other like. The built educational environment of the University of Denver community is no different, creating a stage of public and private

environments that our physical characteristics are objectified and called into question. The environment of the classroom provides chairs and desks that have been designed using a 'white standard'. This standard does not reflect or allow for variation in size of one's hips or thighs. In addition, the private spaces of on-campus housing for incoming first year students requires students to share bathroom space as a community, that in turn takes the realm of privacy onto the public stage. The act of maintaining one's hair and the exposure of one's shape and curves makes us objects by our female students that are not African-American. Additionally, while trying to maintain our physical health through athletic recreation, our size and shape are noticeably different from the white women who are mostly present within the gym and exercise class settings. This negotiation of being visible in public spaces while being engaged in private acts has called the African-American female identity into question. Inquiries may come in the form of a verbal interaction or through non-verbalized acts of questioning or disapproving looks and non-direct remarks. Most importantly, many of the women in this study call their physical appearance and characteristics into question internally, comparing themselves to their white female counterparts and striving to simply fit in. As a result, the recognition that we cannot fit in nor change who we are, is the essence of our recognition that the built educational environment does not accommodate or allow for our identities to blend in, rather it is placed on the campus stage front and center.

### **One Size Doesn't Fit All**

As Nykol reflected on her experiences in the built educational environment, she shared her recognition and disconcert with the manner in which the classrooms in Sturm

Hall are designed. When reflecting on the desk and chair combination seating arrangement of a majority of her classes, she shared her discomfort with trying to fit into the desk as a woman with curves.

I don't like the seats. Those little desks. I need to spread out, I need paper, to just spread out. I want to move my seat, you know, I want to sit up close, I want to sit back, and I can't, you can't do that in those dinky, dinky chairs that they have in there. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Similar to Nykol, Natalie shared her experience of recognizing her curves stand out in the environment of the campus gym. She has been an athlete all her life and has a goal of completing a half marathon in the San Juan Islands with friends in the summer of 2010.

Working out here and having conversations with friends about why we work-out always made cultural differences apparent. Growing up in Hawaii and being black the people/women around me valued "curves". At DU – primarily white – not so much. It became about being thin. I have definitely felt self-conscious at times. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Marilyn, Abbie, and Natalie share their experiences and concerns about her hair living on campus in residence hall with shared rooms and community bathrooms. To them the experience of living with others who are not African-American women presents concerns and issues of having to explain the differences of caring for their hair including washing, blow drying, and flat ironing. Even the aspect of time of care is different for African-American women; the act of washing our hair is not something we conduct on a daily basis. The oil production in our hair is a slower process not to mention the dryness of the climate in Colorado requires us to ensure moisture is maintained. Therefore, the hair care routines of our white counterparts has built a perception that we do not care for ourselves, that we are in some way dirty or soiled in line with the negative derogatory stereotypes of African-American people. However, Natalie, Marilyn, and Abbie have found a sense of

community with their fellow white female counterparts simply by addressing their concerns and sharing knowledge about their differences while living on campus. In this way, through their own strength and ability to be on stage in an uncomfortable position they have educated their roommates with knowledge of how African-American women care for themselves.

Marilyn reflected on her experience in the shared community bathroom of JMAC during her first week. She described her fear and hesitancy in allowing other women to see her without her hair done and make-up on. The standards of beauty that are placed on women created a competition and the standard itself is based upon the white notion of beauty. Therefore, not only do African-American women in a predominantly white institution have the struggle of competing academically as students, but also to compete in how they present and are perceived by others in the realm of beauty and appearance.

Yeah, doing my hair and, oh, yeah, especially being an African-American woman where our hair is quite different than the Caucasian hair. Um, I was, I was actually terrified to let the other girls see me with my hair not pressed, not perfect, you know, when it's like straight from the shower and puffy and just, just wild. It, I, it was really hard the first week because I'm a pretty shy person and, and especially for women, you know, it's, it's hard letting other women see you without your makeup and the first thing in the morning I think that, just being a woman that's just hard in and of itself. Because we have to live up to these standards. But, and that's another reason why I say that we're like a family now because once those barriers are down, like, you know, it's, well, this is me. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Abbie, like Marilyn, also shared how she informed her roommate right away about the differences in her hair care routine. Her fears turned into action to build awareness with her roommate turned into creating a comfortable environment for both of them.

I couldn't let that just hang in the air. One thing I was worried about was my hair. I'm a black woman so I worry about my hair a lot. And I was like wondering how they would, people would like look at me, like I treat my hair differently than they would. And so I like sat down with my roommate and I explained, like, this is my hair regimen and I'm different... ..like things I do are different than you. And she was really open to it and it was fine, so that made it a lot more. Comfortable. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie reflected on how lucky she was that her roommate never called their racial differences into question rather her roommate was very open to learning about their differences. As a result, they have developed a great friendship that continues to this day.

I mean I don't think there were ever any kind of cultural misunderstandings between us or anything like that. You know, not, like some of the students I talk to today who's roommates will ask, why don't you wash your hair everyday or something like that. Why do you wrap it up and, she never, I never had any of those, you know. Um, so our, our relationship as roommates was great. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Each woman was very aware of their differences in appearance and physical characteristics within a predominantly white community. The built environments of the campus whether it be a classroom, the gym, a shared residence room, or community bathroom placed their differences in the spotlight on the campus stage. However, their strength and ability to face questioning glances and anticipated inquiries allowed them to build comfortable environments and relationships with their white counterparts. Yet the built environment itself does not allow for them to exchange or adapt their positions within the environment. For example, in Nykol's experience of trying to fit into desk and chairs that are small and uncomfortable, the option to select from other seating types is not offered. Instead, it is Nykol who must adapt to the environment instead of the environment adapting to her. In the case of residence hall living, the spaces of shared rooms and community bathrooms do not provide privacy. While the overall mission of

the Office of Residence Life calls for building inclusive excellence by structuring the built environment into a communal space, one that requires and in theory cultivates sharing amongst students in regard to their cultural differences with the hope they will build greater understanding, appreciation, and respect for one another. In the case of Natalie, Marilyn and Abbie this was a direct result of them taking the initiative to address their cultural differences with their fellow roommates.

### **Navigating Back Stage: Does Invisibility Come with the Price of Safety?**

In her effort to avoid being visible within the sea of white faces in the green spaces of campus, Rachel shows me how she navigates the back entrances to gain access to her classes in Sturm Hall. As she points out the red brick pathway that leads to the west side of the building, I notice this part of the building is not as well lit. It is a cold winter night in January as Rachel and I explore the areas that she seeks invisibility for her sense of comfort and safety. Just beyond Sturm Hall is an alley way that parallels the Women's College. This alley way is a main thorough fare for a majority of students who live in either in the residence hall of Centennial Halls or Towers. Abbie shared her concern of walking on campus at night and how she finds safety in the open green spaces unlike Rachel. For Abbie, being visible in the open spaces where there are other people is a price she is willing to pay to find her own sense of safety. JJ also expressed her concern in taking the alley way at night as she has awareness that some female students have been harassed and assaulted in this area. She noted that she wonders why the university does not get more involved in providing a safe passage way for their students; she wonders

why students are being neglected outside of the main campus spaces where classes are held.

As JJ and I flipped through the photos she took of specific campus spaces, her first photo documents the alley way that runs along the east side of the Women's College just off of Asbury Avenue. She pointed to the photos and shared the following thoughts on the space from her journal.

This is a problem spot on campus and one of my least favorite places on campus because at night it is poorly lit and unsafe to walk down by yourself, if you are female. Campus security never patrols this area and it is very creepy. It's lined with houses on one side and a gate on the other side – so it is very secluded from the rest of campus. However it is a short cut to the dorms so people use it all the time. I personally have had 2 negative experiences in the alley way where some men were hanging in the alley and harassing female students verbally as we passed by. It was so unpleasant that I never walked in the alley again. Also there are mice living in the leaves beneath the gate – gross! (Reflective journal, February 2010)

JJ admitted that she purposely chose to start to document spaces that felt unsafe to her on campus in her photo taking process. Abbie shared in JJ's concern about this same alleyway on campus. As a freshman student she lives in Centennial Halls on the north side of the alleyway. When I asked her why she takes this pathway, she explained that she wants to avoid the Lacrosse Stadium as much as possible as the stadium feels less safe than the alleyway.

At night, especially walking through alleyways which is weird. Um, well, like I'm someone that is always advocating like if you're, especially if you're a young female, do not walk alone at night. That is common sense. But I have a little safety ... on my keys. Um, yeah, but I, I feel safe in bigger spaces. Not like really close to a building. Which doesn't make sense because I feel a building would probably be safer, but, um, yeah, I like being more out in the open where there's light and stuff and I can see who's coming towards me.

Or like I can like check who's coming, who's like walking behind me and things like that. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

The concept of safety in relation to the built educational environment brings up the question of whether the institution perceives that learning only occurs during the day when all areas including the open green spaces and the alley way are well lit. It also brings into question the awareness and presence of campus safety during the evening when these women are engaged in studying at the library, working out in the gym or having dinner with friends in the pub. JJ went so far as to insist that safety should not just be a concern for campus administrators but for faculty as well. She also placed responsibility on students, especially African-American women to speak up for themselves to express their needs to the institution in the realm of safety.

Um, well, between faculty and administration it's kind of, it's hard for students especially to draw a distinction because we see anybody, like faculty as being part of the administration. But, um, I think it's really, it's their job almost, I'd say, to, uh, to make sure that things like this don't happen or that, um, students don't feel unsafe anywhere on campus. Because, you know, as students we have a voice, we pay to come here but it's only to a certain extent. And so at that, at one point somebody has to take up for us. And the administration is so far above students, they never, we never come into contact with administration unless you're graduating. So the faculty is the one who kind of speaks for us, and notices things like that. Because right here there's this, there's a building, the women's, I forget what it's called, the women's building. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Therefore, the safety of African-American women should be a concern not only while they are in the classroom environment, but while they are navigating their way across campus to their car in the parking lot or to their room in a residence hall. These women are part of the campus community as students and residents. Along with their dual roles comes the consideration of their safety during the day and evening while they are utilizing the various pathways and built structures of the campus environment. As an

underrepresented group, they feel their voices are not heard and therefore, the issue of safety should be a concern of those who are well represented, the faculty and administrators of the campus.

Image 28. *Alley next to the Women's College looking toward Centennial Halls.*  
(Photo taken by JJ, January/February 2010)



Image 29. *Alley next to the Women's College looking toward Centennial Halls.*  
(Photo taken by Abbie, January/February 2010)



### **The Boundaries of the Campus Stage: The North Side and the South Side**

While the element of safety has been expressed as an important aspect of consideration for African-American women to consider in how they navigate the built educational environment, they also recognize distinct boundaries of the campus. The boundaries represent differences in the location of classroom spaces, social activity spaces, and in the care and treatment of certain educational discipline spaces over others. Many women in the study refer to the boundaries as the “north and south side” of campus. Within the north and south side are subsections of importance. To these women, the north side boundary begins with Buchtel Avenue and continues to Evans Avenue, the heart of the campus begins at Evans Avenue and continues to Illiff Avenue, while the south side begins at Illiff Avenue and continues to Vine Street. The perception of the north and south sides depict those areas that have been forgotten, especially the south side as being perceived as a ‘no-man’s land’. The heart of the campus represents a physical manifestation of high class architecturally designed and equipped facilities. The boundaries not only represent differences in aesthetics but also dictate and control patterns of movement around the campus. For many students who live or attend class on the north side of campus they may never find a reason to go any further than the Penrose Library.

During our final reflective interview, Abbie shared a photo of John Greene Hall. The photo reflects her position on the north side of Illiff Avenue and John Greene to the south in the distance. When I express that I notice some type of distance between her and the building looking across the street she explained, “Oh, you got it, good. I was trying

to put it in between really nice buildings as like a contrast. I think like, oh, that's like the rejected part." Upon further inquiry Abbie shared that the buildings the institution promotes on its website and in its marketing material are buildings that most students never get to use on a regular basis. In this way what is projected is not the reality.

JJ shared in Abbie's perception of a north and south side boundary of campus.

During her time living on campus she recognized a difference in who occupied each side.

Because the dorms are situated on far ends of the campus instead of clustered together – there tends to be a north/south divide of students and even some faculty. The North side students have lived or are living in Towers or Hall dormitories and [so] are athletes (hence the close proximity to [the] Ritchie Center and the soccer and lacrosse fields). These students also tend to be business, arts and humanities students.

On the South side of campus near the science and music buildings are the J-Mac and Nelson dormitories, they are mostly/usually science and music students or International student majors. Students mostly form groups and friendships with people on their side of the campus and form loyalties to their sides. It's an interesting separation that didn't occur to me until I had classes on the South side of campus and felt like I was entering a whole new world with people I'd never met or even seen. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

Poppy also shared her perception of the 'different sides' of campus as she makes her way from the north side to the south side.

Um, well, this might sound negative, but I definitely feel a shift moving from one end of the campus to the other. And, um, I now park in the parking lot by Hall and I, every time I walk from there to class I feel that, how I felt like I was a freshman. You know, I see, I see DU in a different light because you walk by the Ritchie Center, you walk by the soccer field, you walk by the little Russian man who sells hotdogs, you know, and so that's a different way of viewing campus. And then you come into what I call the main campus with Sturm and Driscoll and the library and this kind of area around Evans and that has definitely a different feel. I feel kind of more relaxed, even though I don't have a lot of classes over here. Um, and just kind of like, oh, this is the real DU campus because this is what it looks like on the flyers and, you know, there's lots of trees and stuff. And then as you move farther and as you cross Illiff, you move towards the science and soon as you pass there you're in no man's land and no one really cares about

you over there. But I definitely feel a shift from one side of the campus to the other. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

The boundaries perceived within the campus are not only specific to the geographic location of specific campus buildings, but also by one's socio-economic ability. Abbie shared photos she took of the residence hall located in the central part of campus. She began to share her thoughts on who she thought lived there based on the use of materials and type of architectural design elements.

Uh, these are very different dorms as you can see. I think kind of, I understand that it's good, this is on campus, but I think it's kind of unfair because there's one type of student that lives here, and another type of student that lives here. Yeah, this is very expensive. It has a turret. I don't know what it needs a turret for, but it has one. And you can even see it behind here. I'm not sure... but this is smaller, much cheaper and it's for like students that, or maybe are more sensible with their money, I don't know if they can afford it or not, are more sensible with money, or people that can't. I do know a couple people that live in both of these buildings and, um, but even just looking at it you can sort of tell which one is a bit more expensive, which one isn't. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Many women in the study also noted that the location of culturally related spaces such as the Center for Multicultural Excellence, the International House, and the Hillel House being on the perceived 'outskirts' of the central campus boundary. In fact, the locations of these spaces were not perceived as being located 'on' campus. This leads to their understanding of how the institution values culturally related spaces compared to spaces such as Fraternity Row that is perceived as being located in the central part of campus, at its institutional heart. When I asked the women what they would think about the cultural spaces exchanging physical space with the fraternities they all expressed that this would communicate a message that the institution truly cared for inclusive excellence and for them as African-American women. The importance of geographic location and

the use of architectural materials are recognized by these women as the importance the institution places on the spaces they have readily access to. Many of the women felt that their use of space does not include the buildings the institution has placed most time, attention, and financial resources towards. Arguably one may ask whether it is a choice by these women not to major in areas such as business and law. I would answer that the University of Denver has built the newest and most expensive spaces on campus for these disciplines in comparison to other disciplines such as education or social science. I would argue that the person who asks this should look at the enrollment history of each of these disciplines in comparison to the amount of money spent by institution on new construction for specific disciplines. You will find that more women of color are majoring in fields of education, arts, humanities, and social sciences. Therefore, this brings up the question if institutions are trying to create and build inclusive environments why do they not allocate more effort, energy, and resources into the built spaces that communities of color are gravitating towards.

In addition, we must ask why the culturally related spaces of the University of Denver are located outside of the perceived heart of the campus and why these structures house male students who belong to the Greek life system. This system does not allow for female students to join nor does the Greek life system at the University of Denver or at least those located within these three existing structures represent any communities of color. If we look even further at the specific location of our institution's Frat Row, we must ask why one of our preeminent graduate schools, the Sturm College of Law, is placed in its perceived back yard. Is there some connection between the men who live in

the fraternity homes and those who attend our School of Law? In this way, does Fraternity Row act as a physical gate of granting access to those who are allowed to engage in the study of law and if so, what values do those from Greek life bring to their perspectives on the law? In answer to my questions, what if the institution allowed our culturally spaces and organizations to take occupancy in the fraternity homes? What kind of message would this send to students of color in the community? Would this ability to be centrally located on campus and to truly become visible within the heart of the community signify the institutions true commitment to inclusive excellence? Would their presence in the historical space of Frat Row symbolize their lifelong commitment to the tenets of inclusive excellence? The power of the built educational environment enables institutions of higher learning to physically embody their values. The experiences and perceptions of the women in the study reflect their recognition of their importance to the institution one that translates to one of low priority when considering their own personally safety, comfort, and care. We will explore this very notion of care and neglect that exists between the institution's built spaces and African-American women in the next chapter.



Image 30. *North side of campus looking towards the Ritchie Center tower.*



Image 31. *South side of campus looking towards John Greene Hall.*  
(Photos taken by Abbie, January/February 2010)



Image 32. *Driscoll Green. Sturm College of Law, and Fraternity Row.*

(Photo taken by Abbie, January/February 2010)

**Chapter Seven: Nurturing the Relationship between the Physical and the  
Psychological: Unearthing the African-American Female Identity within the Built  
Educational Environment**

**These Walls are Cared for, but I am Not: Concepts of Care and Neglect**

The learning process from the traditional notion involves creating a built space that allows the teacher and the learner to engage in the act of knowledge sharing (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008). From an inclusive excellence perspective, the learning process and the environment in which it is performed should be one that builds one's sense of self awareness, respect, and understanding. In this way, the learning process becomes concerned with the well-being of both the teacher and the learner. In this next chapter, I will present the stories of Nova, Nicole, and Nykol, three graduate students who discuss this concept of care and additionally the other side of the spectrum the concept of neglect. Within the built environment of the University of Denver campus they have had experiences that have impacted their perceptions of the built spaces being well cared for and themselves being neglected. As we continue to explore the dynamic between the built educational environment and African-American women, we will learn that the women

feel that the institution places greater importance on building and maintaining the environment itself more so than caring for their communities of color.

I will begin their stories by sharing their experiences in a space they spend the most time within, the classroom. The classroom environment is one that has been around since the one room school house and one that has reached far beyond the realms of the physical environment into a virtual space (Burke & Grosvenor, 2008). The design and the intended use of this space are controlled by the institution in its power to build and furnish the space in accordance with their notions of what learning should look and feel like. However, as students, the women in this study have felt neglected in the learning by the learning environment itself. This neglect stems from their recognition that the institution has provided built environments of grandeur with the most up to date technological advances to its graduate schools of business and law; whereas, for these women who are pursuing degrees in education, their built classroom environments are sorely lacking in function and aesthetic, and ultimately are in need of care.

In the second portion of this chapter, I will discuss the perceptions of the women regarding the lack of spaces for socializing within the built educational environment. The limited amounts of spaces designed for students to interact and engage with one another are dictated once again by the institution's concept of what student socialization should be. Another layer of perception by these women is the lack of spaces for students of color to gather and connect. The spaces that have been officially designated to communities of color are perceived to be located on the fringes of the institution's boundaries, thus reflecting the lack of importance and care it places upon cultivating and creating spaces

for them to be healthy. The women's ability to persist in finding other spaces to engage in a welcoming learning environment and to find connection with others who share their cultural identities will be made apparent in their actions beyond the institution. Many of the women engage in the learning process within the safety and comfort of their home environments. Additionally, these women have intentionally sought out others from outside of their areas of study to find a sense of community and to get the care they need.

### **Where Do I Learn?**

Nova's first began her graduate studies at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She recalled asking the admissions counselor whether there were any other students of color on campus during her first campus visit. The counselor responded, "It will be you and me". This set the tone for Nova's experience at a small predominantly white institution, she recalls thinking about whether this was the right place for her to begin her graduate school journey. She reflected on her interest in living in the Santa Fe area and most importantly being motivated to learn from the great books of western civilization. Nova experienced isolation and loneliness during her first semester at St. John's, being the only person of color within the classroom. She also brought the wisdom of life experience and was also the only non-traditional student within the space. After staying in the learning environment of St. John's for three semesters, Nova decided to look for another institution to fulfill her goal to obtain a master's degree, but online this time.

After obtaining her master's degree online through TCU, Nova decided that she wanted to get a degree for her, one that she felt she could make a difference with in the

community. The University of Denver is the only school west of the Mississippi river to offer a master's degree in Nova's field of study. She was well prepared for making the journey into another predominantly white institution with the thought in mind that she would ask for what she needed to accomplish her goal. In an effort to get a sense for the



Image 33. *Classroom inside Sturm Hall.* (Photo taken by Nova, January/February 2010)

community she attended an informational session and learned that while the institution was predominantly white, the specific college and program she was interested in was committed to the tenets of inclusive excellence. Nova also noticed upon making her first step onto campus that the environment “rang of ...status, money. Those things ring clearly to me. Um, the only thing missing are fences...to keep people out, um hmm. “Nova decided to put her first impression that included concerns of feeling yet again like an outsider aside to make her dream come true, but this did not come without a price to

her. Nova shared that her experience of feeling different began during her admissions interview.

We sat in a little arena room, you know, they had people around, and I walked in and I didn't see anybody of color at first. So, and then when I walked in I was watching other people's reactions and feeling other people's reactions. No, no problem. It was like, it was the weirdest feeling. It was like, and I got at St. John's too. It was like, oh, you're here kind of a feel. You know, and then people like kind of already sectioned themselves off among themselves so I was like fine, I'm usually an observer, so I just sat back and watched, you know. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova began to notice that there were indeed few students of color in the initial interview process and even fewer when she began her studies within the program. Nova is an observer one who likes to position her within the learning environment to enable her to keep an eye on everyone. She explained that she tries to get to class before everyone else when she can so she can strategically place herself in a space that she can see everyone. She divulged that she does this because she "needs to trust others before letting them into her thoughts". She describes that being an environment where many of the faces don't look like hers that trusting can be even harder.

There are few people that chatted and I talked with them, but ...it takes me a while to get comfortable with people. Especially with people not of the same hue. Because I'm not always that trusting. I'm of an age where I'm just not that trusting. I admire younger black folks who are very trusting and very giving of themselves with everybody. But I'm of an age where I sit back and watch and wait. So, you know, one of the black folks, one other black woman walked in and she looked at the room and went, oh, here we go. And she sat down... because I heard I went, oh, here we go. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

This element of trust also translates to the built environment itself for Nova. As we sat in the Penrose library and looked out over the campus towards Evans Avenue and the Sturm College of Law, she expresses her perception of the campus.

But when I look at this campus, it's like, it's aesthetically beautiful, but, no, it just speaks to other folks who like this kind of enclosures. You know, even though there's windows to look out...you really can't see in. That's kind of spooky to me. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)



Image 34.  
*Hallway corridor inside  
Sturm Hall.*  
(Photo taken by Nova,  
January/February 2010)

Nova's impression of the campus being 'enclosed' and 'spooky' relate to Nicole's experience within her office space. As a graduate student and staff member of the institution, Nicole explained that while she felt the building she works in reflects the student population, her specific office area makes her feel invisible as a woman of color.

Well, what kind of inspired me to take a photo of my office space, part of it was, um, in this picture, I know you can't entirely see it, but there's this wall which now behind me, that sort of acts like, um, almost a barricade so... we were talking about environments and space and for me it's kind of, not an area of contention but it makes me feel kind of like I'm the hidden, um, I'm the hidden advisor. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Along with the sense of invisibility comes a sense of being neglected which is ironic given the fact that the role Nicole has within the institution requires her to provide care to her students. While Nicole is not the only advisor within her office space, as a woman of

color she feels she is hidden. While she inherited the space, the physical barriers of its configuration and accessibility to her students project a sense of neglect.

Well, I think it definitely flows into, um, culture just of being, um, as being African-American or being on the DU campus as a whole that I often feel that we aren't very visible and that people of color are kind of like these random strangers that you sort of meet crossing campus, not really the majority so you already feel like you're invisible. And then if you're in an office where you're behind the wall, it kind of makes you feel even more invisible. Even though I think that my, my colleagues have taken great efforts to, um, to make me feel included in everything, it is kind of off-putting that the wall is there. I think even to them and a lot of times, um, with, um, Bonnie it's just that like it's nice to, to be able to know that you can talk to someone without having to get up and walk around something, or having to take the extra effort to make yourself visible. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nicole's moved from southern California to begin her graduate studies and role as a staff member at the institution. When I asked her about her first experience on campus she shared that the campus is much smaller than her alma mater at the University of Southern California, but had its own distinct style.

I would say as far the physical space here, it's very, um, it's a very different type of campus, although some of the buildings are the same, um, just too sort of give a description. The USC campus is very much shaped in a, um, a lot of the buildings are New England looking type of buildings, which is really odd because it sits in the center of the city and so, um, for it to be such a large, it almost did, when you stepped on campus you did sort of feel that you were in a different world. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

As Nicole continued to share her first impressions of the built environment of the campus she also reflects on her perceptions of the different classroom spaces she has experienced. The classroom space of Sturm Hall strikes a chord for both Nicole and Nova. They both express feeling confusion in trying to find classrooms in the building. As we discuss the photos Nova took of different spaces on campus she describes the building as being dark, spooky, and confusing.

This is Sturm Hall at night. This is at night when I got out, when I got out of school. Now, is this people, and I did this with a flash. Yeah. Is this not frightening? And then every time I go out the building I go out a different way. And my partner's like, where did you come from. I go, she goes didn't you come out from, I go no, I can't Figure out how to get out of this building. She goes but there's no lights back there. I go, tell me about it. And you're lucky if you see a cleaning person. Sometimes you will...people up on the second floor. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nicole shared Nova's concern of not only the building itself but of the classroom spaces that promote an exclusive space for learning.

The vast majority of my classes now are in Sturm Hall, which I pretty much dislike. Almost with a passion. Because I just feel it very much so has a, I wouldn't even describe it as an undergraduate feel, but more a return to high school. The desks are very small, even for people who are 18, 19, 20, they can barely fit in the desks, and, um, the classrooms are set up where originally all of the desks are facing forward at the instructor, and I don't like that style of learning. Especially when you get into classes where you're discussing a lot, I don't want to discuss things staring at the back of your head. That doesn't really help. But the rearranging the room takes a lot of time. And, um, it's just, it's not a really inviting building. I would say the wall colors are very bland inside the classrooms so I find that it's almost, um, to me it almost invites you not to participate and not to, I guess the element of it was made to make you feel calm and things like that. But to me it almost gets you to the point of disengagement. And so I think it actually makes the job of an instructor harder in that they have to constantly keep you engaged for you to not be completely destroyed by what's going on around you, that your desk is uncomfortable, the walls are ugly, you know, the lighting is terrible. All of these things that are not helping, um, contribute to your learning or for you to be an active learner. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nykol agreed with Nova and Nicole's experiences and perceptions of the learning environment of Sturm Hall by sharing her frustration with its lack of resources as a commuter student.

I wonder what the campus' perception is about commuter students. Are we appreciated? Could the campus make any other accommodations for us? One thing that would be great is a computer lab in Sturm. It's frustrating to be on that part of campus and have no access to a printer or computer. Sometimes I am able to come to campus early, and I may need to print out something quickly. If my



Image 35. *West side of Sturm Hall, photo taken from inside Nykol's car.*

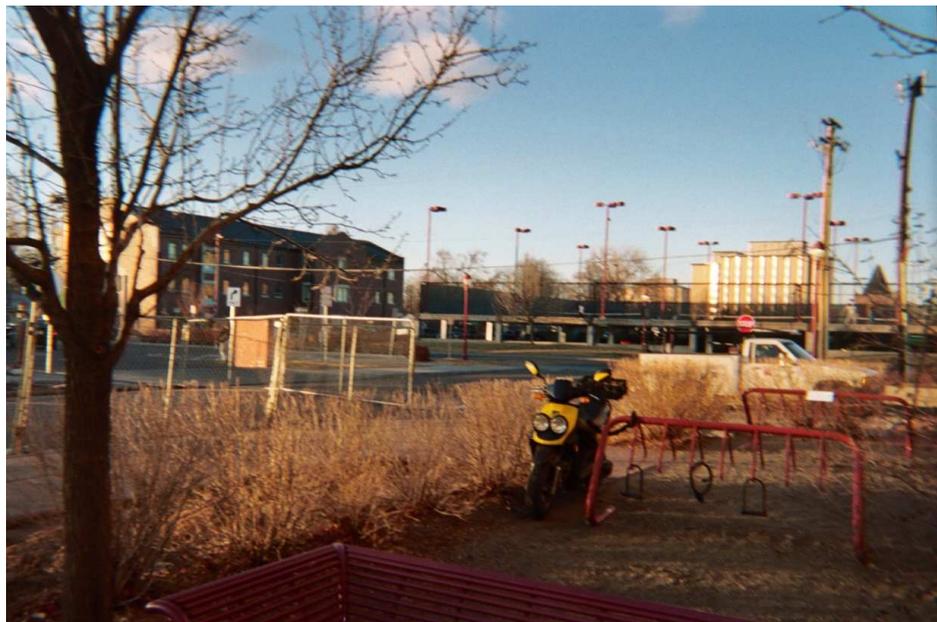


Image 36. *Bike Rack outside of Sturm Hall.*  
(Photos taken by Nykol, January/February 2010)



Image 37. *West side entrance of Sturm Hall.*



Image 38. *Street view of Metro State College of Denver.*  
(Photos taken by Nykol, January/February 2010)

class is in Sturm then I have to go to Ammi Hyde or to the library. There may be a closer alternative, but I don't know of it. What other tips could or should be made available to commuter students? (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

As a graduate student, Nykol commutes to and from campus during the week to attend classes in the evenings. She shared that while her commute does not take her much time, the lack of accessible and convenient parking makes her experience on-campus one of concern. Nykol completed her master's degree at the institution in the 1990s and now as a doctoral student is seeing the campus as an entirely reconstructed space. She recalls that when she first began attending the institution the pathways were concrete or grass laden. Many of the new classroom buildings and residence hall did not exist. She has recognized and is proud of transformation Chancellor Daniel Ritchie created during his tenure at the institution; however, as an alumna Nykol shared that while there are certain buildings that have remained, the new red brick pathways that lead to the new built spaces make the old DU campus hard to recognize. During Nykol's master's studies she lived on campus in the residence hall and now as a doctoral student she spends only enough time to attend classes. This change in the amount of time she spends on campus has made her feel more connected with the institution she works at in downtown Denver. Her recognition of the care her work institution has put into its built space has evoked feelings of neglect as a student. During our final reflective interview, Nykol shared many photos she took of her work environment and pointed out specific architectural elements that make her feel welcomed and connected there. When I asked her to contrast her work environment with her learning environment at DU, she called out specific elements that

she does not see present to make the environment inclusive. For example, she pointed out an architectural detail that her work environment installed in its concrete sidewalks for its community members who are blind. She explained that other than recognizing the disabled door openers on the DU campus, she was not aware of any other elements the institution has in place to be inclusive of all abilities and identities. In this way, I felt Nykol's connection to her work environment and disappointment with her learning environment.

As Rachel began to reflect on the impact of the built environment to her educational experience as an African-American woman she noted that "This is a really interesting study, I don't often pay attention to my "built environment" and even if I do, I consider it as a student, not as a biracial woman" (Reflective journal, January/February 2010) With this lens of her student identity she began to review and reconsider the learning environment of her classroom building, one that seems to lack spaces for its students to engage outside of the classroom.

I am currently sitting on a bench on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Sturm Hall. There are 4 benches and a few armchairs on the entire floor for students to use, and it is the same setup on the other floors as well. There are 3 paintings of paintbrushes in the large hallway, besides that, there walls are completely bare. There is no sign of student life anywhere – if some unknowing person stumbled in they could very well mistake the space as an office building. This makes me really sad – that I don't feel connected to the actual place where I spend the majority of my time. I was asked on the cognitive tour what I would say to the Chancellor if I was talking to him – I wish I could bring him here and show him the space. I used to work in the Mary Reed building and it is really beautiful. Maybe he has no idea how ugly Sturm and the Penrose library (where I spend most of my time as a commuter) really are.

Nova, Nicole, Nykol, and Rachel reflected on their sense of importance as students within the built educational environment based upon issues of care, trust, and

neglect. All of the women reflected on the learning environment of Sturm Hall, a space that was built in 1968 in the International style of architecture. The style was a departure from the traditional collegial-gothic style of the university's original building. Its use of "innovative use of space and planning, [included a] precast concrete façade and modern look" (University of Denver, 2008, p. 22). The style was utilized in the Boettcher Center for the Sciences, Engineering, and Research as well as Centennial Halls and Towers, Cherrington Hall that houses the Josef Korbel School of International Studies and the Penrose Library. University architect, Cab Childress stated, "Our job is to bring light into dim places. It's not a matter of tearing things down" (p. 111). Originally known as the General Classroom Building, Sturm Hall underwent a multimillion dollar renovation during Chancellor Ritchie's tenure. The renovations included, "smart-to-the-seat classrooms, enhanced technology, and plenty of spaces designed to foster interaction among students and professors" (p. 123). What is interesting about the university's intentions to create a modern building during its original construction in the late 1960s and renovations in the late 1980s is that the space was perceived as unwelcoming and nonconductive to building an inclusive learning environment for Nova, Nicole, Nykol, and Rachel. Perhaps it is time once again for the university to consider how they can bring more 'light into this dim space' or to ask African-American women what the 'light' looks like for them within an inclusive learning environment.



Image 39. *Driscoll Green and North entrance of the Driscoll Student Center.*



Image 40. *Inside the Driscoll Student Center Bridge.*

(Photos taken by Marilyn, January/February 2010)

## **Where Do I Socialize?**

As we walked towards the Driscoll Student Center, Nicole expressed her intrigue over the fact that the building is supposed to be a student space, but that it lacks any clear areas for students to congregate in large groups. She pointed out that it offers a few small spaces near the coffee shop and in the pub only. She explained that she feels the campus is sending a message that implies students should stay in the dorms or leave campus to socialize. During our time together she also points out that she finds it odd that we have a fraternity row on campus placed in the heart of the environment. She felt in this way the institution is sending a message that it respects and will preserve the history of Greek Life, but under a watchful eye.

Um, since fraternity houses aren't controlled by universities, but they're not, um, it's a little odd. I think it makes it, not harder for the students to be who they are, but in a way it does because it doesn't allow you that separation of, you're constantly being looked at when you're directly on campus. And, um, not that things should happen when you're not being looked at, but I think it gives you a separate set of responsibility when you know that you're in control and that you're the ones who are required for maintaining sort of this order, um, of your building without the constant scrutiny of where everyone can see you all the time. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Marilyn pointed to this area of campus in recollection to her consideration to join a sorority. She explained her hesitation is due to her not wanting to be singled out as different and having to explain her culture to those who do not look like her. In addition, she explained that one's socio-economic status can also play a role of who gets picked and who does not.

I hear about them [fraternities] all the time and they're always like playing their music and stuff. And that's kind of like a web, like its own subculture of sororities and fraternities that I'm not quite sure I want to be involved in quite yet. But, and actually one of the things that stops me is that most of those girls are, are very, or

very few of them are of color. And that's, and it just, and it's not that I think that I'm gonna be persecuted or anything like that, but it's just, again, getting to know people and letting them into your culture. As a minority. Is difficult because you're not sure of how they're gonna, like, what they're gonna think of it because it is so different than theirs. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

The lack of compositional diversity at the institution is also recognized by Nicole and as we continue to discuss her experiences and perceptions of the built educational environment she connects the lack of communities of color with the lack of importance placed on the location of a space that was built for communities of color, the Center for Multicultural Excellence.

I think it's just, it must be terrifying for someone who's only 18 to encounter that type of experience where you really don't feel that you have the support and although I know that there are places that, you know, the Center for Multicultural Excellence is really there to try to help people. But, again, it's in a part of campus that seems way off the beaten path, that it's hard for students to get to, um, but I understand there's a certain level of things that you have to do to, to go after that. But it's, it's really hard to do that when you don't feel supported by people. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nicole's perception of the Center's location being on the periphery of the campus boundary is not unique. Nova shared that she never knew where the Center was located until she happened to accidentally drive by.

Of, of people. I just, it's like, look where the Center for Multicultural Excellence is. I didn't even know where we were until one day we were driving by there and I was like, oh, there they are. They're all the way out there. That speaks volumes to me. It's like, over there. Could you get any further away from campus? Oh, my god. Okay. I told them maybe they like it out there, nobody will mess with them. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

While Natalie knew where the Center is located, she reflected on her thought process of determining whether or not to take those steps across Asbury Avenue. By doing so, she could find a space that housed others who would support and care for her.

Even though I didn't spend a lot of time in CME as an undergrad, I really appreciate it now! When I first came to DU, I felt like being involved with CME would "label" me as different...a minority and all I wanted was to fit in. However, I have come to realize that like it or not, whether I am involved in CME or not my experiences at DU will be influenced by my race, identity and culture. It affects how I interact with this place and how others interact with me. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

Abbie also reflected on the aspects of invisibility and visibility in relation to communities of color's presence within the built educational environment and how this translates to the importance the institution places on its communities of color ultimately reflecting its projected care and neglect.

The cognitive tour also forced me to ponder on the question you (Ms. Stephanie) asked concerning a feeling of invisibility vs. visibility on campus. I honestly just think that unless minorities are gathered together in a physically large group, like BSA going to a basketball game or some international students walking to class together, I am invisible to the DU community. I of course feel that minorities are very visible to me, because I have grown to notice those in a position like me, but in the eyes of the majority of the DU community, I do not believe I am noticed as an individual. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

Abbie felt the institution does not pay attention to her as an individual unless she is part of a larger group that is physically present. She shared that she is involved in the Black Student Alliance and by being part of this community she can support and advocate for other black students in social spaces such as the Ritchie Center during basketball games.

I would say definitely like maybe branching out more to minorities for athletics, especially because like at the games it's usually, like at the basketball game I was at last night, it's usually the students of color that like, that's a place for them to like gather together. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

While Poppy pointed out that her only knowledge of a specific space assigned to one specific cultural group on campus is the Hillel House for community members who identify with the Jewish faith. However, she reflected that even though there is a space

for Jewish faith on campus, it is located on the periphery of campus and that other cultural groups who do not have an allocated space to meet must learn to find space, space that is hidden.

So I think that that's kind of an area, um, and then Hillel, which technically like, which is on campus but it's like past, um, its past Boettcher and Olin and all those places, so it's like not really visible. You know, like most kids don't go there. But other than that I don't really think that there's like a space that's like specifically dedicated for, um, like students of like, there's a, like there's an international hall but like there's not necessarily like an international like area. Or like a, an ethnic area, because I know that like BSA and Asian Student Alliance they meet in the underground, under, like in Driscoll, Driscoll north. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nicole, Nova, Natalie, Abbie, and Poppy expressed their concerns, challenges and strategies to find spaces where they can socialize with other people of color within the built educational environment. However, their strength and persistence comes with a negotiation and danger of making themselves visible. It also has a price of time and willingness to navigate outside of the perceived campus boundary to find a space for communities of color. Marilyn's decision to socialize with student of color organizations is one that weighs on her mind and her willingness to be recognized collectively as different from the majority culture on campus.

Yeah, and there's always, um, there's like all the student alliances like, um, there's the Black Student Alliance and the Asian Student Alliance and there's like every type of student alliance at DU, which is really good, but I, and I'm actually a part of BSA, technically, it's hard to fit into my schedule a lot of times. But, um, and I was actually very, um, um, wary of joining BSA because I didn't want to be like only for African-American people. Because I think that that, that doesn't help anything. You know, like, you know, that's just another form of saying, yeah, we are different, you know, but it wasn't like that at all. I attended my first meeting, um, the first week of school and they openly said, "we value diversity, bring your friends of different colors, bring everybody", and the same is true for ASA and every kind of SA, so that was, that was really good. So, and

you can tell by, you know, things like that that DU values diversity and its students know that. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

These women have found a sense of community not by the institution creating physical spaces in the heart of the campus, but through their willingness to walk beyond the boundary of the red bricked path. In the next section, we will hear stories of how the places these women live in on-campus has further perpetuated their sense of feeling neglected based upon their racial, socio-economic status, and role as either an undergraduate or graduate student.

### **Where Do I Live?**

The women in this study are both on-campus residents and commuters. They spend an average of 76 hours a week on campus. We will experience their interactions within the built environments of the campus as well as their perceptions of who is cared for and who is neglected based upon the use of materials and placement of buildings within the campus environment. In addition, the concept of socio-economic ability plays a role in who can access specific built spaces and who cannot.

During Nicole's first year as a dual degree graduate student she worked as a staff member for the Office of Residence Life. In her role as a resident director she began to notice differences in the spaces built for undergraduate and graduate students and captured them within her journal.

I think DU sort of fancies itself on these really fanciful buildings like, um, like Nagel which, um, sort of show one way their priorities. And I don't think the other picture came out, but I had a picture, um, that was also, I don't know if it came out or not, probably not, no. Um, it was a picture of, um, Hilltop, and I talked about it, um, in my journal about how the dorms for the freshman and for undergraduates are in much better repair than those for, um, graduate students that the university maintains and it really sort of made me feel as a graduate student in

particular like we're the red-headed stepchild of the university.

That we're really not cared about because we have really old buildings and some of the buildings are, were done right after the GI bill, you know, so that tells you how old they are.

And just to see like how much money was put into buildings for freshman that are just massive and really don't create that sense of community. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

Nicole's perception of the built spaces that have been designated for undergraduate students is not unique. Further, the location of where students are placed presents a separation based upon one's socio-economic status. If we consider the average unfurnished one-bedroom apartment near campus costs a monthly average of \$575 and compared to the average unfurnished one-bedroom apartment on-campus costs of \$900 a month, we can arguably conclude that those who have the ability to truly engage in the campus community are those that come from a higher socio-economic status. In addition, when comparing the cost of on-campus graduate housing of \$1,000 per month, to the average off-campus apartment in the Denver area \$800 a month, we can see this trend replicated. So this begs the question who is living on campus and where?

As a freshman student Abbie pointed out the aesthetic differences of her residence in Centennial Halls (built in 1964) to Nagel Hall (built in 2008). She compared Nagel Hall with the Daniels School of Business and the Ritchie Center, indicating that all of these buildings are aligned with comfort that comes with an expensive price, one that she cannot afford even though she aspires to become a resident advisor next year.

I think everyone just, they, they would much rather be more comfortable for their four years. They want like, Daniels is comfy, it's nice. It's very, it's very, um, nice and kept up and Ritchie is gorgeous, like ridiculous. Um, so I think they are much more cared for if you can pay for them. Like Nagel. But these are cheaper.

These are cheaper places to live. Um, I kind of understand that it's because like the freshman dorms, but, um, things like, I'm saying I'm becoming an RA next year, why is my main reason for doing that, besides like wanting to help out on campus, is like I need the money. But like I need to stay, you know, in a dorm like this. Cheaper dorm, so I guess that's kind of...just like because Towers and Hall they're like cheaper for, Nagel and Nelson are like in the middle and they're much more expensive. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Abbie also pointed out specific architectural elements that Nagel Hall shared with the Ritchie Center. "Like Nagel, it's got turret for a dorm, that's ridiculous...and Ritchie outside it's just so excessive." To Abbie, the use of copper, turrets, and gold for spaces of living and physical activity seem excessive to her. She also notes that the cost of admission to these 'excessive' spaces is not accessible to everyone.

Nykol experienced many residence hall living environments as a resident advisor during her master's studies. She reflects back on the experience as the part of her life that she enjoyed the most. While she experienced struggle in her graduate classroom environments but found community in her role as an RA. Along with this experience she recounts that "they moved me around a lot...I think I counted up my phone numbers at DU once upon I had like ten phone numbers in the time that I was here."

As a graduate student Nykol reflects on feeling luck to have held a position that allowed her to afford a private school education.

That was fun and I enjoyed it and so I knew, you know, coming here, the private school education and the price tag I had to help myself to offset some of those costs. And at that time they had tuition waivers for some of the positions. And was like a student, so I got tuition waivers and free room and board so that was, that helped a great deal, and paying for the tuition and I had to pay my bill here, I need to do that. So, the bursar keeps sending me emails like don't forget. Um, and so I started in Hall, did I? I think. I don't remember. So, I lived in Hall and J Mac. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

While they have enjoyed their experience for the most part living on campus, Abbie and Nykol have been restricted to specific spaces due to their financial ability. Abbie will be restricted to Centennial Halls, while Nykol was able to live on-campus due to her staff position. In this way the built environments of on-campus housing creates an environment that limits who can access the institution's high standards of aesthetics comprised of copper, turrets, and gold.

### **How Can I Survive? Seeking Out Others as Sources of Support**

In between and outside of the walls that are perceived to be more cared for than the women featured in this chapter they have found a way to find care from others within the community. These communities occupy spaces within the built educational environment that go unseen by most. The environments that are physically located in are within the private spaces of the campus and beyond its boundaries within their home environments. For many women in the study, they desire spaces where they can be their authentic selves, where their racial and gender identities are celebrated and reflected in the faces of those around them. They seek refuge in spaces that embrace them for who they are without judgment of their appearances and socio-economic abilities. In their ability to seek out others, they have found those who can empathize being a person of color or who are strong allies to communities of color. They have found a way to survive and most importantly to find nurturing environments to promote their own personal and intellectual growth. In this way, they have been motivated by their courage, strength, and resiliency in non-welcoming environments and through their neglect they have found those who will care for their well-being.



Image 41. *Centennial Halls.*



Image 42. *Nagel Hall.*

(Photos taken by Abbie, January/February 2010)

As a graduate student who commutes to campus, Nova explains that she doesn't come to campus other than to attend class. She notes there are three primary reasons why she chooses not to use the spaces of campus to study.

One reason is, by the time I'm done with work and school, I'm done. That's one big reason. The second reason is that I don't, I don't like it enough to be on here. Isn't that terrible? I don't feel at home here. Um, I don't feel at home here because I don't even feel at home coming in this neighborhood. Yeah, when Christina drives us here...because we don't drive an expensive car. She has a Geo that runs beautifully but the outside needs work. And, um, you should see the way people like, who have expensive cars, move their car really quickly, they're afraid she's gonna hit them. Christina doesn't have accidents with her car, she's been driving it for about a year. But they'll move their car or they'll look. They get this look of constipation on their face like, "you're here kind of a look". Because Christina says to me, she said, "what's wrong with these people?" I go to school with these folks, I don't know. Yeah, and, um, it's the weirdest thing. You don't feel comfortable around here. You just don't. I don't. I mean, I could be wrong, but I'm in tune with I just don't feel comfortable around here. It doesn't feel comfortable for me. And it goes back, the third reason is, unless there's a function I really want to attend...then I would come on campus, but there's far and few functions that peak my interest, that make me want to come here. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova's experience with the built educational environment and those who comprise its community have impacted her enough to limit her time engaging within the environment strictly to attend class. Additionally, her partner Christina also felt excluded and judged by the perceived dominant campus culture. Nykol shared in Nova's experience as a commuter and a graduate student of color when she shared her photos of driving on to the streets near the campus. In this specific photo Nykol explains that she is trying to illustrate the perceived privilege that is held by the dominant culture.

Oh, I did take this one, because these students, and I thought this was just an interesting kind of privilege thing. They just stopped. They're right outside, um, Hall, because this is, this is High Street. They just stop. (*In the middle of the road?*) Exactly. We'll just stop and have a conversation. Okay. (*Tell me about that, the privilege, tell me a little bit more about that.*)

You know, it's our campus, we own it, and we're gonna do whatever we want, you all can go around. Our students, I wouldn't necessarily classify it as, you know... or anything like that, but just they, you know, "act like we own it". (Final reflective interview, February 2010)



Image 43. *Heading south on High Street.* (Photo taken by Nykol, January/February 2010)

Nova and Nykol reflected on feeling unwelcomed by the dominant campus community and thus, have chosen to limit the amount of time and their activities simply attending classes as students. Nicole shared in Nova's choice to avoid the Penrose library as a space to study in. She shared that she finds the space distracting and loud. Instead she finds the Women's College to be a space that is conducive to studying because she feels there is a sense of respect that is not present within the library. She stated, "Because it, you know, everyone's in that mindset of we're trying to gain knowledge and we're trying to be respectful to one another and give each other the quiet that we need to get

some work done.” Nicole revealed further that she prefers her home environment more so than any other space to study in.

Um, well, since I live alone I find that, again, I don’t have to worry about the noise of another person. Um, generally my neighbors are pretty quiet, too, so I don’t have that as a distraction. Um, honestly I like to have creature comforts, I like to be able to get up and get a glass of water or something in the middle of my studying or take a break, or, um, you know, be comfortable while I’m typing my paper. I don’t have to sit in a chair in a proper way at a desk, at a table in order to write. I can use my laptop in any space that I want to. I can listen to the type of music that I need to, either really loud or really soft depending on what I’m, if I’m writing a paper or not to sort of help keep me motivated in that stream of thought. So, to me, um, it allows you that variance that you don’t necessarily get in the library. Or if I need to talk out loud because I’m trying to work out how I’m going to do an assignment verbally then I can do it that way. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Abbie expressed her desire to connect with her Ethiopian heritage and that unless she is at home visiting her parents and grandmother she gets no connection within the built educational environment. Abbie’s parents and grandmother are all from Ethiopia, although Abbie shared her parents have never had the opportunity to take her there to visit. She explained that during her high school experience there were a few students who were Ethiopian and that when she visits home her grandmother speaks in the language. In this way, the only connection to her cultural heritage is when she steps outside the boundaries of campus and visits her community in Denver.

So, um, yeah, it’s definitely something different going home. And then, I went to a high school where there was a lot of other students from Ethiopia so we spoke the same language, which was awesome. But then coming here, I have nobody to speak it to, so I’m like aw, I miss it. I miss speaking the language. Yeah. I definitely feel more at home. Like I can eat food that I like and hang out with my brothers and I love that. And I can just, um, I can go back and forth between languages and that’d be fine, and I don’t have to limit myself to English or things like that.

Or, yeah, it's just like, well, the Ethiopian community in Denver is really like close knit so that, it's really awesome that I can go to like an Ethiopian church and like have it all Ethiopian, which is really fun. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie shared in Abbie's longing for connection to her cultural heritage. During her freshman year she experienced culture shock and feelings of isolation, being the only one. She recalls finding others from Hawaii within the campus community and how this community literally saved her and gave her the support and hope she needed to persist in the campus environment.

I was convinced I was the only person from Hawaii at this entire school. But actually, um, there was a group of older students who were from Hawaii and they put on like this little luau thing at Nelson dining hall and I went and, um, the food was horrible. And, but I saw them and I was like, oh, there are people from Hawaii here. And so I started hanging out with them. And they understood and, uh, it was, well, we'd always go over to one of the guy's apartments. There was like a couple of them living together and we would make the local food from home and we would go to some of the concerts for the bands that were from home but they'd come up here to perform. So my freshman year they were kind of a saving grace, because I was so unhappy and I didn't feel like, um, I just didn't feel like there was people who truly understood me, and I think it was just because I hadn't found that group of friends, regardless. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova, Nykol, Nicole, Abbie, and Natalie share in their recognition of the lack of community and spaces that provide support for their identities as students and their cultures as African-American women represents their desire to be cared for and the built educational environment's neglect of them. This is reflective of their courage and ambition to survive within an environment that through their experiences does not cater nor aspire to nurture their multiple identities and sense of overall well-being. Their experiences reflect an environment that caters to those who do not commute, have socio-economic ability and privilege, and whose cultural needs are addressed by the dominant

white majority of its community members. This sense of neglect and their search for care and support is reflected more deeply within the next chapter that speaks to their ability to find spaces within the campus environment that fill their sense of place.

### **Seeking out the Soulful, Hidden, and Quirky Spaces**

The walk African-American women make along the red brick path of the University of Denver campus has led us to spaces that have made our visibility pronounced. As a result, this has motivated us to seek comfort in the spaces that we deem to be soulful, hidden, and quirky. In this section, I will share all nine women's experiences of seeking out spaces that have provided unspoken messages of creativity, serenity, care, intellectual stimulation, and freedom. These spaces have provided liberties that include their social interactions and personas, as well as their ability to reach out to the community beyond the campus to find support in learning and lifelong friendships. The spaces featured in this chapter have given these women safety, comfort, and belief in themselves and the institution, in this way the dynamic between these environments and the women reflects the unspoken dynamic of a source of support that can be found. In other words, the spaces have become a key element of their entire educational experience. As we have learned from prior chapters, while space may be seen as an unspoken and inanimate element of one's educational experience, through these women's experiences, interactions, and perceptions, space becomes alive as an active partner in their experience. This active component of space has led to many women purposely to avoid certain areas on campus, while other spaces have become beacons of hope, comfort, and healing. The spaces featured in this section include both buildings and green

spaces within the University of Denver campus. You may find it interesting that some of the spaces the women have sought out were originally designed for the functional and symbolic meaning they are utilizing them for today, while others are being reclaimed by them to serve in another capacity other than the institution's original intentions.

### **Spaces that Speak to the Soul: The Newman Center for the Performing Arts and the Harper Humanities Garden**

During this study, all nine-women identified the Newman Center for the Performing Arts as a space within the built educational environment that spoke to them. Many of them expressed that even if they didn't know what the building was by its granite stone name plate identifier on its east side just off of University boulevard, they would still hear the building speak to them. The \$67 million dollar facility was dedicated in 2002 by Robert and Judi Newman, long time local arts patrons in the Denver community (University of Denver, 2008). The building provided a true home for the Lamont School of Music within the campus community, a welcome foundation from its many moves from the institution's original Park Hill campus and other various spots on and near the main campus location. The school's partnership began with the university in 1941 and continues to flourish within the music, voice, dance, and theatrical sounds of its new space.

Chief architect, Cab Childress, envisioned an organic structure that lived and breathed through constant sound and movement. He stated, "It wasn't just the building's size, shape, and footprint that mattered, but instead it was what happened on the

inside...as if the building was inhaling and exhaling” (University of Denver, 2008, p. 94).

Finding inspiration from the world-famous music and theatre venues of Vienna he began

Images 44 – 47.  
*The Newman Center for the  
Performing Arts.*  
Photos taken by JJ,  
January/February 2010)



to dream of a space that would house music students and harkens world-class performers from around the world. Originally Childress' approach to selecting the building's site location was to "hide and shelter" the space allowing students and members of the community to discover and come upon its presence, but Chancellor Ritchie envisioned a building that would serve to welcome the Denver community to engage within the space and therefore, elected to locate the building in a prominent location just off of University boulevard between Illiff and Wesley avenues (University of Denver, 2008).

The building began to take shape under the artistic direction of Childress, the visionary businessman and institutional leader Chancellor Ritchie, and the heart and soul of Joe Docksey, the school's executive director. Docksey was noted as spending more time in the facility during its construction than the general contractor. Attention to creative detail was embedding in building a space that created an artistic stage within its dedicated performance spaces as well as its rehearsal and practice areas. Docksey stated, "There is a vibrating aspect to hardwood floors that you don't get with tile. It's that feeling that you're always on stage" (University of Denver, 2008, p. 95). The overall goal of creating a space worthy of all its creative talent was for new students to react in a visceral fashion, "to hear their footsteps echo when they enter and be in awe and think, 'I can't believe I just made it into this music school'" (p. 94). Ultimately, the building evokes a sense of movement, just like a "living organism", which was a characteristic of Childress' approach to designing built spaces (p. 94). In this way, it makes sense and really is no wonder why all the women in this study heard the building speak to them. As an added layer of introspection the creative arts themselves have served as a soulful

medium for the African-American community and other communities of color to overcome oppressive treatment of their cultures within the historical American context. Therefore, the Newman Performing Center for the Arts also serves as a symbolic space that these women can find a connection to their soul, the parts of their being that can be visible through an unspoken conversation with the space itself. It is almost as if the building can speak all languages, those of music, theatre, and dance as well as those of the soul. The space becomes reclaimed to function in a way perhaps Childress, Chancellor Ritchie, and Docksey never considered, the space has become a harbor for these women, to find solace and hope in between the microaggressions and navigation of visibility and invisibility of simply being an African-American woman in a predominantly white community.

The most beautiful building on campus which also reflects the activities that happen is the...it's the music and theatre building on campus...and it feels like it on the outside there are brilliant carvings of actors in Shakespearean dress and quotes about music and its importance in life. The inside is decorated and setup like an old time theatre. It has gorgeous high ceilings and nice carved staircases with carpeted floors and colorful banners on the walls. You can tell from being inside, that there was a lot of thought and care that went into the planning of the outside and inside of the building. It makes me wish I was a music student.  
(JJ, Final reflective interview, February 2010)

As JJ and I thumbed through the photos she captured of the campus, her demeanor lit up and she began to smile as she told me about the Newman Performing Arts Center. She described the various sights and sounds she notices when walking through the space. "Great tapestries...people playing the piano...people acting on stage...banners." She went on further to state that to her, the building reflects the artistic disciplines it houses.

So I feel like this is one, they did this one right when they built this place because it really symbolizes what the school is about. It's about theater and it's about art and it's about music and instruments and so I kind of, I liked that idea a lot.  
(Final reflective interview, February 2010)

When I asked JJ if there is something specific about music that draws her to this space she shared that she has played the piano for most of her life and the majority of her friends also play musical instruments. She expressed that she can understand from her creative side why the creators wanted the building to look the way it does and why it exudes comfort to all those who enter.

Nova expressed her frustration that the building her college occupies on campus does not resonate what it is about. She points to the Newman Center as a space on campus that clearly reflects what the students and faculty are learning and engaged in.

I mean, that's why I like the music building. When I'm on foot and I go by and I see the silhouettes. You know, I mean, yes, it kind of, um, resonates as classical music because they put it there, and that's fine, because I like classical music too, but it's sad, it screams, we're about music, and I like that. It's pride about what we are, you know. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Abbie, like JJ and Nova, shared that when she needs to reconnect with herself outside of class, she attends events within the Newman Center. She also expressed that she respects the school itself because its students have to be talented to get in, that one's socio-economic ability will not. In this way, she finds a genuineness and authenticity to the building and what it represents within the university community. Therefore, she felt comfortable entering and engaging within the space itself and the activities that occur within it.

If I wanted to go to an event, I do, I do, I can go to Newman, which is great. I can go listen, I can go to, I go to the same places because there are only a couple places that are for those events. Newman is exciting. It's a cool place.

It's modern, it's sensible. Uh, if you walk through it it's so organized. It's so, there's like a whole floor and you look in like the elevator and it tells what you floor and it's like guitar has a floor and you're like, wow. And it's very sensible and, um, it's very comfortable for the students there, I can tell. Like they like it there, they like going into the basement and using like a small studio and just jamming on some, on their instruments.

It's newer... put a lot of money into it, but like money went into it consciously and like wisely and not excessively. Um, when you walk in, it is very like open and lofty and it's got like a big hall in the front. Um, but when you turn a corner it is just back to sensible like classrooms...they're definitely learning, you definitely feel like they're learning in there. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

The Newman Center is a space JJ, Nova, and Abbie have been able to connect to their inner being. It serves as a place that reflects what it is truly about, with no facades or boundaries to whom is able to access it and ultimately, to feel welcomed. In this way, these women have reclaimed the space in a way that may have not been initially imagined by its creators. It has become a space of creative expression and development as well as a refuge for the souls of African-American women. As I reminisce on my experience exploring the campus as a new graduate student, I realized that I too had been drawn to the Newman Center. The sound of violins and the imagery of students dressed up in costumes and the overall sights and sounds of creativity energy floating in the air are apparent to me. Some of my most soulful experiences during my graduate journey had been attending a dance performance by the African Bush Women in the spring of 2009 and the annual Spirituals Gala in the fall of 2007 and 2008.

The chief architect, Cab Childress had a muse during the creation of the space, the violin (University of Denver, 2008). Recognizing that a professional violinist can pay up to one million dollars for an instrument they may only play for a year's time, the

experience in and of itself was worth every dollar even if it left them penniless. For me and the women in the study, the efforts and energy that went into designing a space for artistic expression and to welcome the Denver community to engage in the arts has been exceeded in the space's ability to reach out to us in a way that makes our journey on the red brick path worthwhile. To find a place of refuge and rejuvenation of our very souls is extraordinary and certainly fulfills the building's ability to "create a sense of wonder" (p. 94).

### **The Harper Humanities Garden**

The *Alma Mater* sculpture features two bronze cast women holding a book in partnership with their arms and hands intertwined. Their gazes focus on the book as their heads and necks align in agreement. This sculpture is positioned on the north side of the Harper Humanities Garden, serving as a "poetic accent" to the green space that serves as its stage (University of Denver, 2008, p. 178). Like the two women captured in an embrace of intellectual study, Marilyn and JJ have refer to this space as a place of serenity, Zen, and care. Chancellor Dan Ritchie envisioned creating a green space not to beautify the campus, but a space that would impress upon one's first impression, those of greatest importance were "prospective students and potential donors" (p. 196). As an entertainment executive in Hollywood, Ritchie learned the art of balancing the aesthetics, using his own personal experience of remodeling a home owned by actress Elizabeth Taylor (University of Denver, 2008). He envisioned a space positioned at the heart of the campus that would provide a balance to the built spaces with the outdoor environments. The garden features aquatic gardens and greenery including Japanese Koi fish, trees,

shrubs, and a palette of lush green grass. Strategically placed bricked walls and hidden concrete benches frame the garden, but most prominent is the red brick pathway. Just as Ritchie had done to his own home in Hollywood, he replaced the majority of concrete pathways to red brick. He felt the aesthetics of the red brick would “enhance the campus and prove a sound investment” (p. 197).

Marilyn expressed deep comfort and reprieve in her voice as we walk along the red brick path of the garden during our cognitive interview tour on a chilly, but blue skied sunny day in January, 2010. She explained that she comes to the garden to find her Zen. As a first year student living in a residence hall, she finds that the space of her room can be confining and simply “too noisy” sometimes. She joked and laughed while stating that she thought her “neighbors down the hall must have purchased a new stereo”. As we continued to walk along the curved red brick pathway from its east side path that parallel’s the west side of the Mary Reed building and onto a path that takes us west she shared that for her, this is the place where she feels embraced. During our final reflective interview as we flipped through the photos, Marilyn captured of the campus environment, she shared the following reflection from her journal to describe what the space means to her.

Um, so this is one is just like, actually I just discovered that as I was taking the pictures, like that little bench and... I just thought that, um, and there’s actually a lot of these little benches around the Mary Reed building. And around campus, and I thought that was, that was nice and like, you know, it’s a nice place to sit and study and kind of unwind. And just the fact that, you know, it’s surrounded by trees. It’s almost like a park, like, because it’s like, because of the bench with the trees and stuff it’s like, it’s what you would see in a park to like kind of unwind and so it’s interesting that the campus choose to do that because it’s hard to ...saying, we understand what you’re going through and you might need a place to unwind, so here you go.

And it just, it's so relaxing because of the water and there's like waterfalls and like rocks that make the water babble and stuff. So, I would sit there and kind of Zen. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)



Image 48. *Harpers Humanities Garden*. (Photo taken by JJ, January/February 2010)

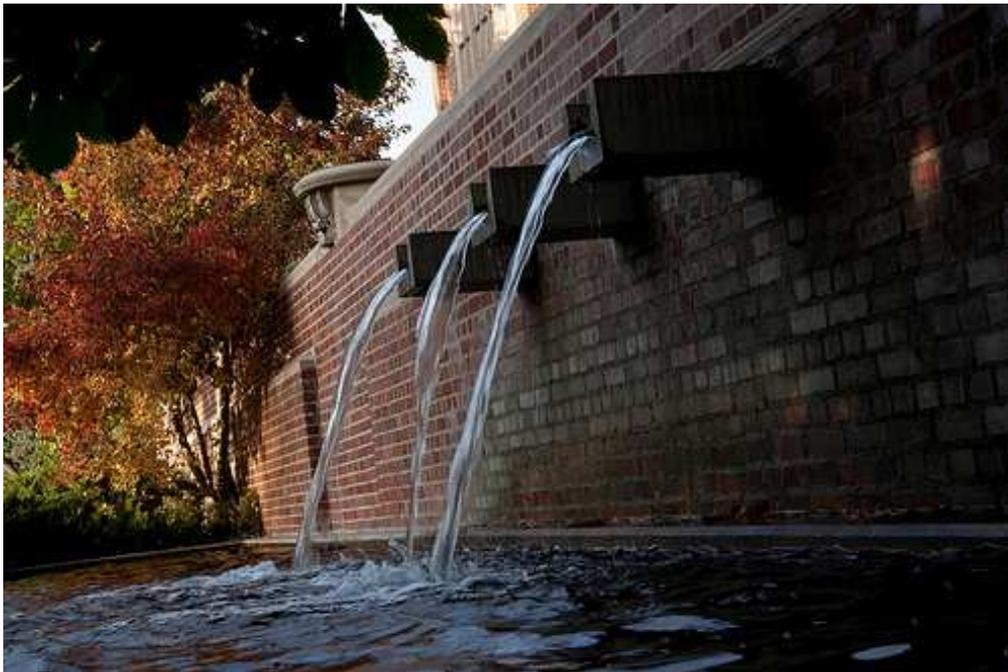


Image 49. *Harpers Humanities Garden*. (Photo taken by University of Denver, 2010)

Poppy, like Marilyn, has also found that the garden has been space for her to find her inner serenity. During our final reflective interview, she shared that this space, more so than any other, allowed her to disconnect from the rest of the campus. In this way, she felt it was a separate world.

So, it's like, just to like orient yourself. Um, and I just really like this space on campus. Um, you get kind of like a disconnect from like everything else on campus. Um, there's not a lot of like institutional stuff involved. There's no like departments there of sports or clubs or activities, like people can just go and hang out. And I really like the water, so it's always kind of, I mean there's no water now because it's winter but like, um, it's just, water is very calming and soothing to me, and so I just like that area. And then there's the big, um, green area with like trees and stuff, that kind of provides like a nice cover where you can just go and be on campus where there's not like other infiltrating campus thing. So, yeah, and I worked in Mary Reed so I got to see it every day. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

One of the primary elements that evoke a sense of peace is the use of water. The water speaks in a calming voice and its reflective qualities remind us of the natural beauty of the sky, a space that is not blocked out by the confines of a building. While its qualities provide a source of nurturing for us, it also serves as a summer home to exotic fish, the Koi. Perhaps in this way, the water provides a safe harbor to many organic beings, the fish as well as us as African-American women, strangers in an environment of others who do not reflect our identities.

### **Spaces that are Hidden: the Driscoll Student Center**

Although the physical structure of the Driscoll Student Center is highly visible on the University of Denver campus, it harbors a few hidden spaces within its interior. These spaces provide comfort and support by their location out of the general public view and off the beaten pathway of foot traffic. For JJ, the campus pub provides a space where she

feels she can truly be herself without the worry or concern of appearing studious within the less hidden spaces of the classroom, residence hall, library, or public green spaces. She shared that she feels the pub is truly a ‘student’ space. In a similar manner, Natalie and Poppy have found a greater sense of community within the campus and beyond its boundaries within the basement of the south side of the Driscoll Center in its offices of Community Engagement and Service Learning and for Learning Disabilities Program, respectively. The main areas of the center do not provide an environment where they can truly be themselves, rather it provides a space to be seen and to behave according to the culture of the DU. The institutional culture perceived within the visible public spaces of campus require them to focus solely on their studies by performing well academically. Whereas, the hidden spaces of the student center allow them to feel comfortable engaging in social activities with fellow friends, to connect to the larger public outside of the DU campus, and to be transparent about their own challenges in a highly competitive learning environment.

### **The Sidelines Pub and Sculpture: Finding a Sense of Self**

JJ reflects on the Sidelines Pub in her journal noting that the space,” feels like a cave, tucked safely back in the deepest corner of the school”. On any given afternoon during the lunch hour rush, Monday – Friday, you can find a line of students waiting to order a hamburger with fries or purchasing a salad on the go. With daily lunch and dinner specials and evening entertainment including an open mic night and karaoke, the Sidelines Pub provides a space where students can refuel and reconnect with each other during their college experience. The space also serves as a space where the public can

relax before or after a DU athletic game while getting a view of the Driscoll Green. JJ finds comfort and safety in the hidden away space whose location is on the north side of the Driscoll Student Center on its main level. JJ referred to the space as the “hottest student space on campus”. While the campus has local bar and restaurants in close proximity, the Pub provides a place where the majority of the clientele are students of the university. She reflected back to the first time she began using the space as a campus hang-out.

I came here at least once a day everyday when I was in freshman, sophomore year, probably more than that. Two or three times a day I'd be sitting here eating, um, and just hanging out with friends because it's, it's one of the few purely social places on campus. Most places are study rooms where you feel like if you talk too loud or you start laughing you're interrupting somebody who's studying. But here it's purely just when you're talking with friends or you want to watch a game or, you know, you just want to sit back and relax with your friends, this is the one place where you can do that without worrying about studying or professors or anything. Even though professors do come in here, they understand that it's a student environment so we're not gonna be on our best behavior, and a lot of students will be swearing and saying things they shouldn't say, or not being politically correct or something, but it's because it's our territory, they, you know, professors don't say anything. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

When I inquired further into JJ's sense of the space being a 'student territory', I asked her to describe why being socially engaged in the Pub instead of academically engaged in the classroom, created a boundary where students can behave without judgment from their professors.

Um, I think it's, I don't know if they designed it that way, but I think that the students kind of made it that way because when you are walking around the rest of campus you, you can see your professor anywhere because professors walk around, they park on campus everywhere, and you don't want your professor to see you, you know, acting out or not behaving on your best behavior because then that'll effect how they see you in class even. Um, and so when you're on like I said the red brick road, or you're in the classroom, or you're in the library, or



Image 50. *Driscoll Student Center.*  
(Photo taken by Abbie, January/February 2010)



Image 51. *Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning office sign.*  
(Photo taken by Natalie, January/February 2010)

you're in any study room, anywhere they can see you in that area, is fair game for them to say, well, they weren't acting very well when I saw them, they were kind of swearing and not saying good things. But in here it's almost like, it's, like I said, students' territory. Um, I can't say why that is, but I think it's because it's not run by professors or faculty or anybody who's over you academically. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

While JJ admitted that she visits the local establishments in the area like Starbucks, Brueggers Bagels, Jordan's, and Jamba Juice, that these spaces represent environments where one must conform to society's rules. She mentioned that even though these spaces are located off-campus, she still has to be on her best behavior because she may be in the company of parents of students or even prospective students. In this way, she was conscious of maintaining a certain behavior as a student of the university.

I go to Jordan's or the Starbucks or Bruegger's over, and Jamba Juice actually, too. Um, right off, it's just one block off of campus. And I do go there to, um, to study or to talk with friends. Um, but even there it doesn't feel like, it doesn't feel like you're on campus anymore so when you're, as comparison when you're at the Sidelines Pub you feel like you're on a college campus, so you're kind of cutting loose as a college student. But when you go to Starbucks or Bruegger's or Jordan's, you're another customer so it's like a different kind of behavior. You can't really cut loose again because you're, you're on, you have like society to conform to, you have to be...you know, there could be moms and Dads, there could be friend's mothers around, so you're off campus, you have to watch that. But in comparison when you're in DU Sidelines Pub there's nobody but students and faculty and sometimes professors. But there's nobody but DU students. You don't have to worry about any of that at all... So it's a different kind of cutting loose I think in the Sidelines Pub. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

The Pub provides a world where JJ and her friends have found a sense of freedom from studying as well as from the rules of the institution and the greater public. She joked and laughed while referring to a comment a friend of hers made about the Pub, that it was a place where they could put on their "invisibility cloaks" in reference to the Harry Potter books and films. This alludes to the concepts of boundaries of visibility and invisibility as

well as freedom versus institutional expectations. JJ revealed that before her participation in this study she did not consider these concepts related to the space, as she thought about even further, she realized the space provided a sense of freedom and protection, one where she could be her authentic self. In addition, she mentioned that certain architectural features within the space, like its booths, provided an added layer of invisibility.

Because it's, I guess it was something we didn't really think about but when you walk in there it is like you are, you're putting this invisibility cloak onto who you are outside of the Sidelines Pub. Which outside of we're all this perfectly behaved students who always do their homework on time and who always study but once we go inside there, we don't have to, we don't appear that way anymore. And so I think that's, that's the only connection came to mind but, yeah, it's like you're, you're hiding yourself, you're hiding the self that you project when you're outside of it, if that makes any sense.

Um, it's, that's part of the hiding because they have this, because its booths, I think that was the one booth we would always sit, we wouldn't sit anywhere else and these booths have these really high backs...and so when you sit in them nobody who's coming in, nobody can see you unless they're standing like right in front of your table because then they'd see everybody, but the high booths keep your hidden from anybody else and so it was like, we would go in and sit in these booths and all the sudden we'd be in our own little community. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Another space that JJ deemed a 'student space' on campus, was the sculpture located outside of the main entrance of the Penrose Library. The steel structure titled, *Poetry in Steel*, was designed and created by Charles O. Perry and was originally located in front of the Mary Reed Building (University of Denver, 2008). JJ and her friends have renamed the sculpture, *The Exam*. To them, the sculpture is a physical structure they can relax by, have fun, and distress from their studies in the library.

During exams the entire library is filled with students, midterms and finals, it's just, you can hardly find a table, some people are sitting on the floors. Everything is full. Um, and because the inside, it's almost like you walk inside and you can feel the stress. It almost puts more stress on you because everybody's opening

books, they're asking questions, they're on the computers, they're running around trying to print something off, the printers aren't working, something's always going on, and so it's really stressful and so it's really hard to get your work done. And so what me and my friends would do is we would go there together and we'd be working and working, and then whenever we wanted to take a break... we would come outside and it's actually, it's kind of hard, if you're looking at it, it doesn't look very comfortable, but we'd sit on it or we'd lay on it or we'd climb on it to kind of let off some of that steam and just, you know, just relax for ten minutes away from everything, away from that huge stress ball environment. And so this is kind of the place where we come to recuperate almost and all of that. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)



Image 52. *Poetry in Steel* (outside of the Penrose Library).  
(Photo taken by JJ, January/February 2010)

JJ revealed that she and her friends are not the only ones who use the sculpture as a place of reprieve. She shared that it is not uncommon during final exams to see a large crowd of students gathered around the sculpture at 1:30 am. In addition, there is an unspoken rule that while students are in this space no one talks about their homework. "Nobody's ever talking about work here. You don't talk about your work when you're around this structure." JJ has found two spaces on campus, a Pub and a sculpture, to find a sense of

her true self. While these spaces may not be hidden from the visual landscape of the built educational environment, their uses and deep sense of meaning and connection may be. In both examples JJ shared how she navigates balancing her social authentic self with her student identity both on campus and in its peripheral establishments. The importance that she places on ensuring when she is within public space to maintain the high standards of being a DU student is equalized by her ability to find spaces to relax and seek refuge amongst her friends in spaces they can simply be themselves.

### **The Basement of Driscoll Center South: Connecting with Others in the Community**

Natalie reflected on her first year at the university, a time when she was feeling a need to find her own sense of place within a predominantly white culture. While this took some time, once she found a sense of herself and who she was within the campus culture she desired a connection to the greater community in the Denver area. This was fueled by her desire to become part of the institution's mission of serving the public good. During Natalie's sophomore, junior, and senior years she volunteered in a local middle school through the university's Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning. As I inquired about two plaques on Natalie's office wall, she shared that she received one of the plaques for her senior thesis research and the other is an award to recognize her commitment to service learning. She recalled a quote one of her professors said to her, "...you should laugh a little bit each day and you should be moved to tears each day and there should be at least one person each day who says that they're better off having met you." This quote triggers a memory of her work with students in Cole Middle School.

I definitely laugh every day. Um, I cannot say that I am moved to tears every day, but I do think there will be at least one person who will genuinely think that they're better off, um, having met me. Because I can think of multiple people that I can say that about them, and so I think hopefully I am also having the impact. I mean I think it's one of those things that you kind of take for granted you own actions, you know. And this came to head my sophomore year, I had volunteered at Cole Middle School and we're really trying to do servicing with them and getting them the concept of being involved in their community and hopefully that would help them encourage or motivate them to bring that back to a school before it was changed over to a charter school, but there's this one student and, um, we went head to head. I mean he called me the meanest names, like just racially offensive, personally offensive, and he said it all in Spanish, and I don't speak Spanish and I found this out through other students. And I mean there was one day he was like well we could fight and I just wanted to, yeah, you're right, let's go, you're up to my hip, you could use a good beating, let's go. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Natalie shared that a year later she ran into a colleague she had worked with at the school. The woman showed her a picture of two students, one featuring a student named Maria and the other was a surprise to her, it was Roberto, the student with which she had such a hard time. The woman informed her that Roberto was very involved as a class leader, speaking up in class and serving as a mentor to other students. Natalie stated that she began to wonder why he wouldn't work hard for her, what was it about their personalities that didn't seem to click. Her colleague pushed her thinking by stating that maybe it was their clashing that pushed him to work harder the following year.

Poppy also shared a sense of connecting to the DU community through a space located in the basement of Driscoll, the Learning Effectiveness Program (LEP). She first began her connection to the program as a student learner and later decided to volunteer and now serves as an intern. During our final reflective interview, she shared that before the study she never thought about her connection to the physical spaces of the campus environment, she focused more on her social interactions with those within the

community. She even shared that after studying abroad in Italy during her junior year she didn't want to come back to the university. However, her involvement with the LEP convinced her to return.

Um, but I went abroad this fall, I went to Italy and I think coming back I was kind of like, whatever, I don't want go back to DU, but I started getting really involved with the LEP program, um, even though I'm not in it anymore, I'm a volunteer and I'm also their like intern now. I'm like super involved on campus which I never really thought of being as like a connector to your space, but now like being involved with like other kids that are in LEP and like with more LEP staff as a whole, not just like my counselor, um, it's kind of like brought me closer to like that space as a student. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

From the first moment I met Poppy, she has expressed that her learning disability provides a strong sense of self to her. She shared that as a child when she was first diagnosed with a visual disability her mother taught her how to advocate for herself. She revealed that she strategically places herself in the front of the classroom environment to ensure she can have a conversation with her professors about the ways that the can accommodate her in the learning environment and process. She explained that she is categorized as having a learning disability because it takes her more time to process visually.

So, like I read very slowly but then I remember everything that I read. Um, and I have a very good verbal output, not a good written output. So like if we have a presentation in class, I can just raise my hand and automatically be like, oh, I had this question about three slides ago and blah, blah, blah, and so I'm a very verbal person.

I taught myself how to be like that when I was little, um, to kind of survive in public school before they knew what was wrong with me. Um, but because of my visual disability, I have a learning disability because the processing disorder makes it difficult to do learned things. Does that make sense? (Cognitive interview tour, February 2010)

Poppy finds great pride in helping other fellow students who seek the services provided by the LEP. In this way, the space the LEP occupies in the basement of the south side of the Driscoll Student Center connects her to those in the campus community and the space itself. As a student and now as an intern for the program, she has found a continued strength and resiliency to continue to pursue her degree from the University of Denver and alas finding the school spirit she noted that she didn't have during our initial interview.

### **Finding Self within the Quirkiness**

To the outside observer the orange colored stairs and wall paint color, the white dome shaped chairs, and the oddly matched desks, tables, and chairs that occupy the Penrose Library could be categorized as dated, but to Marilyn, Abbie, JJ, and Natalie these are the qualities that make it charming and quirky. The Penrose Library opened its doors to students in 1972, considered to be “state-of-the-art” for its time the architectural style was to become “a machine for learning devoid of decoration” (University of Denver, 2008, p. 22). While the style could arguably be seen as a direct contrast to the earlier collegial gothic buildings that neighbor to its east and south sides, the library was designed to represent the institution's vision of moving into the future.

Depending on what time of the academic year one visits the Penrose Library; you can generally find groups of students allocated in various areas of its three floor structure. For Marilyn and Abbie, the northeast corner of the third floor provides a great space to study. During our cognitive interview tour Marilyn shared, “I actually chose, my number one choice was to work at the library because it'd be beneficial, you know, because then

I'd know where everything is..." She also explains that she took a lot of photos of the library because she works there and walks by it every day. She feels the environment is quieter than her prior job at a pizza parlor and that this provides a balance to the noise of her living environment in Johnson-MacFarlane Hall.

During our cognitive interview tour, Abbie shared that she finds the "outdated" look and feel of the library to provide a level of comfort, a space where she can just be a student.

It's just outdated. Um, you can't really deny that it's '70s architecture with the blocks and the squareness of everything. But I actually like it surprisingly. It doesn't fit, it's almost like a little lego castle in the middle of all this brick, but I really like it. It's a place where you can feel comfortable, you feel like you don't have to like, how would I say it, well, like the rest of the campus you feel like you have to look more collegiate, more, here you can just study. You can just actually be a student. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie referred to the Penrose Library as a "black swan or an ugly duckling" one that all students feel sorry for, but through their sympathy they find comfort in studying in the space. In this way, it is as if the difference in the architecture from the campus' older more historical red bricked buildings makes her feel that she is not on stage.

The library, I think it's the quirkiest thing ever that we still have this furniture from the '50s, '60s, '70s whenever it is, and we just have it and we keep it and we're proud of it. We're, you know, you can, the Penrose Library does not fit in whatsoever with the rest of the architecture on campus. And yet it's probably the one place where I like a lot of students are like, oh, that just touches my heart a little bit because they're just, you know, it's like the, what is it, is it the black swan or the ugly duckling, it's the ugly duckling, so you're like, oh, look at you. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

JJ also shared that while she no longer lives on campus, she stops by the library when she is here as a favorite space to study in.



Image 53. *White dome chair inside of Penrose Library lobby.*  
(Photo taken by Natalie, January/February 2010)



Image 54. *Basement of Penrose Library.*  
(Photo taken by JJ, January/February 2010)

I go on the upper floor, so this floor... um, all the way down the hall on the right side, I guess. I go all the way to there and I find one of the little cubicles...cubicles and I just like to kind of block out everybody else and just do my studying here, because it's quiet...and it's really neat atmosphere. I love the books. So it kind of helps me get to study. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010).

Natalie shared that she has a “love-hate” relationship with the library. She also reflected, in her journal that upon taking a photo of one of the white dome shaped chairs in the lobby that “just thinking about the 60s/70s décor in the library cracks me up. DU (we) are so quirky!” She goes on to share that she generally avoided the library during her undergraduate experience, but has found herself utilizing the space more and more as a graduate student. While she would rather be in another space doing something else other than homework, she finds the environment conducive to her student identity.

As a graduate student I spend a little bit more time there, mostly when I'm struggling to write a paper because writing is my Achilles' heel, so if I'm not at my house I can't like use cleaning as an excuse and the quicker I get done, the quicker I get to leave the library, so. It's a love/hate relationship. I just need to do my work. Mostly because I would just rather be someplace else. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

The Penrose Library is centrally located in the perceived ‘heart’ of the campus. While it is certainly a space that reflects the time period it was built in, Marilyn, Abbie, JJ, and Natalie found it to be a space they can be students. The atmosphere of other students engaged studying, the smell of its books, old newspaper clippings, and journals, the outlandish dome shaped chairs, and its orange walls allow these women to focus intellectually thus ensuring their continued journey along the red brick path.

### **Johnson-MacFarlane: Finding a Sense of Community**

Natalie and Marilyn both reflect on their experiences living as residents in Johnson-MacFarlane Hall in the Pioneer Leadership Program community, while Rachel shared her experience living in the Social Justice community. Johnson-MacFarlane or “JMAC” as campus community members refer to it was built in the 1950s in direct response to the increased enrollments by GIs returning from World War II (University of Denver, 2008). Costing the institution \$1.7 million at the time compared to the newest on-campus residential structure, Nagel Hall located to JMAC’s north, cost \$40 million. As Natalie stated during our cognitive interview tour, the varying periods of architectural style represent visually documentation of “what happened at this time” in essence each building serves as a “bookmark of time and history”. As Natalie and I continue walking along the east side of JMAC along the red brick path, I ask her what she would do if the university decided to tear it down and rebuild a new structure, she stated that she would not advocate for it. She expresses that JMAC holds a special place in her memories and heart, for her it was the place she began her college journey that included culture shock along with the discovery of new friends and opportunities.

Marilyn shared that while JMAC does not reflect what she would define as a ‘high aesthetic standard’ representative of the DU style, she does appreciate the opportunity to live amongst other students who hold themselves to a ‘high academic standard’. She explained that she is part of a program for students who bring a history of leadership and a commitment to community engagement.

We all have to live on the same floor and we take a class in leadership and we minor in leadership. Yeah, it just seemed very close knit, and I thought it would

be good to have that kind of network going into college. And I just noticed that they were all really close and pretty, tight knit, almost like a family and at the time I thought I'd be coming to DU like alone, because I didn't know any other people going there, so I thought I'd be really beneficial to like get my foot in the door with friends, you know, that, who like shared my same values and had a common cause I guess you could say. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie also shared finding a sense of community living in JMAC amongst fellow PLP students.

Honestly some of my best friends to this day are from PLP. The girls usually. My closet girlfriends are from PLP. So it was a great experience. You know, I got really involved in community service through them. And really kind of substantiated my value for working communities and giving back and serving others, so. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Rachel reflected on living in the Social Justice community as a place she felt was her "home" and her own "little bubble" being amongst like-minded people provided a sense of care and comfort, so much so that she chose not to go home most weekends to stay with her community on campus.

I, yeah, it was definitely home, even though I live like twenty minutes away, or my parents lived like twenty minutes away, it like, it was home. I never went home like on the weekends. Um, just because, um, I don't know, like in my department, in the Sociology Department I found a lot more, I found other students who are like aware of like social equality and who care about social justice, but in the rest of the university it's not, I haven't found that as much people who think that, or who feel strongly about social justice and, um, and also it was a very diverse, um, group of students and the social justice group it was like racially, um, diverse, like, um, lots of different like people from like different socioeconomic backgrounds and like religious backgrounds and Um, so it was really diverse and we all still like got along amazingly, so. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Natalie, Marilyn, and Rachel all shared a fondness for the sense of community and friendships they developed while living in JMAC as freshman students. As an observer, it was interesting to me that as we continued our conversations in the study; neither of them

revisited or documented JMAC in their photo documentation. Perhaps, this relays that they feel JMAC does not aesthetically speak to them, but rather it is the social interactions and activities they engaged in during that critical time of their first year on campus. This begs the question that while Natalie would not advocate for changing the physical structure and its architectural features, if the university decided to redesign or completely reconstruct a new building with more space and modern features, would it change the significance of the space to them?

### **Spaces Outside of the Built Educational Environment: The Learning Environment of Home and the Virtual**

Nova shared that in this day and age she does not see the point of universities continuing to regenerate built spaces, after all this is a globalized digital world that continues to make advances in technology to connect communities across the world without the need for physical space. As a Brooklyn, New York native Nova shared that she grew up in a community comprised of small villages. Therefore, as she looked out over the campus landscape she feels overwhelmed by the size of the buildings and the vastness of space itself. She began to question whether the size and scale of the built campus environment truly reflects the institution's mission of serving students from an individual level. She also wondered how the institution is embodying its goal to build in a green manner, one that does not make a large carbon footprint on the environment. Finally, she asked the question of where technology and online environments fit into the whole green initiative.

I'm like, they're talking about going green, everyone is talking about going green, but then they keep building and building up. Pretty soon they're not gonna be able

to see the mountains. They keep building up until you can't see that even. Make it small, make it more personal. They're talking about how we are online a lot, you know I do like being online environment. But if you really want to be, or go back to that humane or be humanic...and do all of that, make it small, have people interact on that level. Will they be able to do it? I wonder. I really do, I wonder. Then you'd be able to see whether people are really... or they're bull shitters. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nova goes on to share how she personally learns better in smaller environments that include smaller classes and group settings. She also questioned the purpose behind having tables and desks within a learning environment. She felt these elements within the classroom space restrict the way that students can interact with each other and with their instructor. She suggested that in order to build inclusive learning environments we should 'open-up' the space by only having chairs and allowing students and their instructor to sit in a circle to face one another, to see each other. She shared an experience she had during her undergraduate education at Mount Ida, in a learning environment like the one she has suggested.

But I was thinking more, um, smaller buildings, um, bare minimum of stuff. Just chairs. You know, no tables. I don't like the whole... tables. Um, chatting informally. I don't even see the point of writing on boards on basically. You want your smart classrooms and stuff where you want to interact with the world... boast now, then you can have that. Have a room for that. Have people move over into that... plan to be in those areas where they can have that.

Um, less writing, more listening. Um, and the reason why it's in a circle is that you have everybody's attention because people are on their laptops and they're not, most of them are not doing what they're supposed to be doing. I sit in the back. I watch, I can't tell you how many people are watching TV, playing cards, on Facebook, you know, doing all of that. So, how, how engaged are they? So, what I'm saying is, like, what I enjoyed most when I go back to what I enjoyed most with Dr. Chase was that, because you had to engage. You had to really think and talk and engage with each other. And look at each other. No seriously. I mean, you're sitting and there's nothing to abridge what you were doing, you were in that circle and we were all looking at each other, and facing each other so by the end of those eight weeks most of us when we saw each other

on campus we said hi and... black folks in the circle. There were like two European girls in the class, they could barely speak English but whenever they'd see us, they'd say hi too. But the thing was we all connected in those eight weeks that did that intense reading and stuff. Because we all got to talk about everything. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

In addition to creating smaller spaces to facilitate the learning process through connection instead of through tables, desks, white boards, and smart boards, Nova emphasized that her current classroom environments do not reflect what she seeks. She shared that she feels the university reflects white privilege in its built environment including the classroom environment, for her this makes her feel uncomfortable and left not wanting to be there.

So I sit and I never feel comfortable in my classroom settings. When others who have white skin privilege believe they know my world I think you have no idea. You couldn't survive in our skin for five minutes before having a breakdown. To walk on campuses that feel so empty even with people around is something out of the twilight zone. DU folks walk as if the school is part of some elite set. A school is a school. [A] place to gain and build upon knowledge. Perhaps if there were more warmth from the people perhaps the overall campus would have some appeal. Perhaps it's like most things, you focus on getting what you need and to hell with the rest. My goal 2011: get the degree, get a handle on the specialized skills and give back.

However, while I do my time, oh, take my required classes I like being invisible. I rather listen to the rhetoric digest a little but continue thoughts on how the library will ultimately become passé. The environment in which I want is not in these hallow Hall. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

Nova shared that her discomfort on campus translates to her need to find comfort in her home environment to conduct her studying.

I don't like being in the classroom setting. I really don't. And I knew that going in. But I wanted to do it, I wanted to get a library science degree. And I was thinking I could do this. Then, I don't know. And I knew when I... online that was the best place, that's the environment for me because online I'm at home. I'm in a place where I enjoy being. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)



Image 55. *Classroom in Johnson-MacFarlane Hall.*



Image 56. *Hallway corridor inside Johnson-MacFarlane Hall.*  
(Photos taken by Nova, January/February 2010)

She shared that she feels confined within the classroom environment with respect to elements of time and behavior. She shared that during breaks in her classes she often considers whether or not she wants to come back. Jokingly she says, “When I’m at home I can get up and go for a walk or go put on my slippers...but in class you are confined to looking at the walls”. During our cognitive interview tour, Nova points out the ways that children study and the learning environments designed for them in comparison to how the adult learning environment is created to exert control. She questioned whether or not universities and colleges have noticed how children learn; they are always moving, shifting, jumping, and laughing, and connecting cognitively to what they are learning within a space that allows for them to play. She questioned what happens to the learning process as adults that walk through the “hallowed Hall of academia”? Why does the learning process entail instituting control through the use of space and furniture, why can’t we play too? She then associates that there is an element of ‘play’ in the university environment, but it’s based upon who can ‘pay’. As we walked through the space of the Sturm College of Law she points out the use of what she perceives as expensive materials equates to the students socio-economic ability to pay.

Well, look at the marble floor. Everybody, it looks like marbletile. Look at the floor. Or the desk...scared to have a noise. That means they have rooms. Look at this, more tables. Very refined. Look at this. Look at the little chairs, look at this. Look at the little alcoves over here. With dim light. Look at this. Oh, they must pay a lot to go to school here. That’s what this is. I mean we pay a lot, they pay more. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova reflected on the notion of who has the ability to access the built educational environment at an institution like the University of Denver. She noticed Frat Row as we

begin to make our way along the red brick path to the law school. She expressed how the fraternity houses form what she perceives is an invisible fence, a fence to keep those out who can't 'pay to play' and a fence for them to hide from the greater community.

I'm a visual, I'm also a visual learner so, you know, but I like things like that because things like this, it's very off-putting to me. It's cold, um, I've seen them before, growing up in the big cities. Only thing, like I said, missing are fences. You know, it's only for certain people, or you pay to play basically. That's . . . , that's what academia, you know, academia is all about. But yet it wants to be about the community, only when it's on its terms. You know? Well, this is what we're gonna do, we're gonna get out and be with the community, but at the same time you can come right back in and hide behind these, these walls. It's like they, I didn't even know these things existed back here. Look at that. So people can hide. I've, um, and that's what it, this reminds me of. Its ways, little pods to hide in. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova's experiences, interactions, and perceptions revealed her sense of trying to find her way within a community that she felt does not reflect her racial, gender, and class identities. Furthermore, the built educational environment is not conducive to her way of learning; rather it forces her to navigate the boundaries of visibility and invisibility. In response, she questioned the very notion of why universities continue to 'build' physical learning structures on large scales and how it determines who can access the space. In addition, she challenged our notion of 'educational environment' to consider how the institution will utilize the online learning environment as a means to allow students to create an alternative space of learning, one that may cater to other learning styles and truly create 'green' environmentally friendly spaces. Nova's narrative provides an important connection to the next chapter that will highlight whether the women who participated in this study feel their racial and gender identities are reflected within the built educational environment. In the next chapter, we will hear their suggestions of how

the institution could refine its built environments to truly reflect their presence within the campus community.

**Chapter Eight: Making Our Presence Known, Suggestions to Make the Built Educational Environment Reflective of the African-American Female Identity**

The nine women featured in this study were initially unsure of the impact of the built educational environment had upon their racial and gender identities. After a series of interviews, self reflective journaling, and photo documentation of the University of Denver campus, they were able to put what lived in their sub-conscience into their conscience and express it through their experiences, interactions, and perceptions. These women all share a similar goal of achieving their higher education and realize that along their journey those from the dominant culture may not readily accept or understand their identities as African-American women. In this way, those from the dominant culture may pass by the green spaces of campus and dodge in and out of the walls of their classroom environments without a second glance or thought. However, for these nine women, the built educational environment has begun to speak to them through unspoken messages to the outside observer. Once the messages are interpreted and amplified through their words, behaviors, and emotions we can begin to hear the voices of the institution's past, present, and future. The institution's past was founded in creating a learning environment for the American pioneers who settled in the West. However, African-American pioneers

were not granted access to the university until over 40 years after its initial establishment. Grace Mabelle Andrews' presence in the historic record of the institution in its student yearbooks represent the pioneering efforts of a brave women amongst a student and faculty population that did not readily accept her racial and gender identities.

In present day, students of color represent just 4% of the undergraduate and graduate populations combined and African-American women represent just .02 % of the population (University of Denver, 2010). While communities of color have certainly made strides gaining access and persisting in the higher educational environment of the University of Denver, our presence is still clearly lacking within the compositional diversity of the student population. As the institution looks to its future, of becoming an inclusively excellent educational environment, it continues to find ways to attract, recruit, and successfully enroll communities of color. However, we must ask whether the institution is doing enough to reach out to African-American women in the local area and across the globe. One way in which prospective students learn about the educational community and its culture is through the marketing messages it sends (Tuitt, Choudaha, Agans, & Krusemark, 2008). If we consider the institutional website as a means to learn what the culture of the campus really is, we may be deceived. Many of the few students of color within the campus community are often selected and over utilized in their visual presence on the institution's website as well as its printed marketing materials. This creates a sense that the community is in fact diverse; however, the reality is diversity is still lacking. As a result, what the institution presents is what it is aspiring to be, rather than what it actually is.

When we consider the built space of the university, we must ask whether its initial goal of providing an educational environment that was inspired and designed to replicate the architectural styles of elite institutions in the American east, where is the African-American female identity reflected. In this chapter, the nine women in this study make recommendations of how their identities and values of higher education can be embedded within the built educational environment. These include elements that reflect history, creativity, light, scale, nature, and warmth. The suggestions they make will not cost the institution extreme amounts of financial resources, but it will cost its time and intentional effort. This time and intent should be dedicated to reflecting the diversity that does exist within the institution, not to the extent of how it has used faces of color in its marketing and promotional channels, but reflecting what actually is. In this way it, it could purport to care about those who have been courageous, brave, and strong enough to gain access to a predominantly white institution and commit themselves to the larger institutional values and mission to serve the public good. By considering the voices of those who are not as readily present within the dominant culture of the campus community, speaks to the institution's goal of truly becoming inclusive. The incorporation of architectural elements that would truly improve the learning environment would need to reflect the racial and gender identities of African-American women. This in turn would express its desire to respect and built awareness of its communities of color as a predominantly white institution. In essence, this act would bring a variety of perceptions to the surface to create a built environment that truly reflects its community, all of its community.

In their suggestions, the women speak to their ability reclaim the built educational environment for the women who came before them and who will come after them. By ‘reclaim’ I mean the process by which an individual or a group either physically or psychologically takes ownership or recreates a built space in order to create an environment of inclusion. The process by which this reclaiming can take place is through existing knowledge and use of a particular space in order to determine what elements are or are not inclusive to one’s racial and gender identities. This existing relationship of interaction and behavior with one’s environment requires time and experience in the built space to allow for one to envision how to refine it. The importance to refining the relationship and building something that is conducive to both the function of the space and what it symbolizes to those who use it requires trust. I define trust as one’s ability to understand the values embedded within the built space and to suggest the inclusion of other values to represent their beliefs and identities or to suggest a change in the values to become more representative of all beliefs and identities reflected within the community from its past, present, and future. Once trust is established the reclaiming of a built space can begin. This process requires the involvement of all three elements of the conceptual model, the cultural producers, cultural texts, and cultural audience. The cultural producers are the administration who has the power and key decision making process of how and by whom a built space will be funded and designed. The cultural texts are both the existing and future built spaces within the educational environment. Whereas, the cultural audience includes the campus community of the past, present, and future. Once the three key players are aligned under the tenets of inclusive excellence with a

relationship of trust, the reclaiming process can begin. In order to understand how the built educational environment of the University of Denver campus can become more reflective of the African-American female identity we must listen to the nine women reflected in this chapter.

### **History and Creative Whimsy Through the Use of Art**

The University of Denver sees art as a means to balance the architecture of each of its built and green spaces. In this way, there is a conversation that occurs between the art that is placed in front of a building or in the middle of a lush green way. “At its best, art can challenge assumptions, stimulate thought, and evoke powerful emotions” (University of Denver, 2008, p. 178). The institution also believes the “marriage” between art and architecture in the campus landscape allows for stories to be told or the cultivation of appreciation, affection or even a smile to be evoked to connect the campus community to its sense of place on the campus (University of Denver, 2008).

All the women in the study felt that their African-American identities were not reflected within the built educational environment. However, for some, they shared that by the institution’s commitment to diversifying its composition, that they have adapted the way they perceive the institution. I will speak to this more so in the last chapter; however, one can psychologically adapt to the space in a way that they begin to see the impact they make simply by being within the environment. Therefore, through the use of art and the intention to place more of it within the interiors and in the exteriors of the



Image 57.  
*Ceiling of Olin Hall.*



Image 58.  
*Unnamed Outdoor  
sculpture in the Harpers  
Humanities Garden.*

(Photos taken by JJ,  
January/February 2010)



Image 59. *Alma Mater*.  
(Photo taken by the University of Denver, 2010)

green spaces would make them feel their identities visibly and physically present. With a strong, confident, and defiant voice Nova shared that incorporating art with ethnic representation in the built educational environment would make a strong statement that the institution's commitment to diversity and inclusive excellence is real. She stated, "I'd love collages. Like ... Bearden. Like some of his works. I'd love collages like that". Marilyn feels that the sculptures of the campus reflect African-American identity. While JJ recommends that in an effort to recognize that Dr. Condoleezza Rice attended the Josef Korbel School of International Studies that a sculpture be erected in her honor.

I would hope it wouldn't just be a person, you know, like a bust of Condoleezza Rice. I mean, that would be interesting but it wouldn't be, I think it would be better if it was something that had to do with international relations like a huge, a globe or something like that. I know that's kind of trite and over done, but a globe, and then just have her name on a plaque or something but you get both aspects. People get that it's a globe, why is it a globe, oh, Condoleezza Rice who studied here and so they would kind of understand her importance and the importance of the international studies department. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Abbie shared that Sturm Hall is a space she uses frequently as a student and that the compositional diversity of the students and faculty within the building would lend to having more pictures of African-American women on its walls. She goes on further to state that along with more pictures she would specifically suggest that there by visual documentation of the first African-American woman who attended DU, Grace Mabelle Andrews and the most prominent African-American woman, Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

There is such a gap between, who was the first one, Grace Mabelle Andrew to Condoleezza... there wouldn't be any pictures to put up of anyone, so they couldn't do that? Have you ever seen those little flags that have people's faces on them? But none of them are women, or African-American women. Maybe they

should do that. They could put up some of those little flags of African-American women. That might be nice. Um, or, well, I don't think Newman is, this month they're doing the faculty orchestra or whatever that is, the faculty jazz ensemble is doing like a performance of African-American, um, productions, like pieces...African-American composers, so things like that. Just like, um, incorporating that culture into DU somewhere. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

JJ also shared in Abbie's suggestion for the university to represent Dr. Rice's importance to the campus community and to the world through her research and work in international policy.

Condoleezza Rice was at our school. She went to our school. And, um, she might not have had major impact in the school per se, but, you know, some of her writings could be available to students because, you know, that's an important person who was here. Some of her ideas could be available to students, even through the GSI, it's the International School of Studies, even if you go there. There's an entire café dedicated to one of the professors and there's a plaque to another one of the professors, but there's nothing to show that, you know, students who have come here...have gone on to become something. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Additionally, JJ emphasized the importance of reflecting women of color within the Ritchie Center for Wellness and Sports. She makes specific reference to the need for more art, but art that reflects a prominent woman of color who made Olympic history as well as a woman who is an artist herself, Michelle Kwan.

I would say they would need to include more art. And include more, um, student, I'd say student, prove that there's student interaction. Like, um, there's a lot of important people who have come to this school, not just important but people that, you know, celebrities that you would know. Like I had Michelle Kwan in my classes my freshman and sophomore years and, um, as reflection of that they could put something about her in the Ritchie Center which, you know, our hockey team and ice, Figure skating teams are really great. So, you know, they could have put something even, because they have an entire case dedicated to one of the founders of the Ritchie Center who played golf. But they could do something with that for Michelle Kwan who's a great Figure skater who came to our school and Figure skating is big in this school. Um, so they could put, you know, pictures or just one little picture. They don't need to have an entire shrine to her, but just a

picture. Maybe some of her art because she does art. Um, and some of her paintings were really pretty, and I think they could put those up in the Ritchie Center and that would coincide with the sport center. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)



Image 60. *Whispers*.  
(Photo taken by Natalie,  
January/February 2010)

While Natalie pointed out an existing art piece that she appreciates and feels represents the institution's commitment to hearing all voices.

I love these lips – they were an art project and when you walk by them they begin to “talk” or at least recording splay. They're supposed to represent the dialogue that goes on on-campus (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

University art history faculty member, Lawrence Argent, created *Whispers* as an interactive art installation that utilizes the voices of university faculty “to start a conversation” (University of Denver, 2008, p. 177). The lips featured in each sculptural piece were made of actual university faculty member's lips. The lip benches activate various recorded lectures once a willing participant sits on the bench. In this way, this outdoor art installation is a replication of a classroom discussion, one that exists without the boundaries of the built walls of a classroom building. In addition, the interactive

elements of the installation are not initiated unless a willing observer becomes a participant in the art piece. This also reflects the women's desire to have freedom to choose how they would like to engage in their learning. Finally, this art piece emphasizes the ability for the built educational environment to incorporate art within its outdoor landscapes as well as its indoor landscapes to stimulate and propel the conversations of learning and engagement.

Nykol expressed that she would recommend incorporating more art on campus initially, but felt she needed to explore the campus with a more focused agenda before making any concrete changes.

...there's not a whole lot of art, could art be one thing that is changed. Um, but other than that I would have to go in and out of buildings and take notes and have some kind of a scope on what is going on in and around campus. (Cognitive interview tour, February 2010)

While Nicole shared that she feels her work environment reflects the diversity of the female student population it serves. Its use of artwork, warm colors, chairs that fit the curves of women, and the building's open floor plan provide a sense that no matter what your racial background, as a woman you are respected. Her experience within this space serves to inform the recommendations she would make for other built spaces on campus as a whole.

I think it could be done by even, you know, simple things as even displaying, display artwork from African-American communities, or I know that this school has, um, a lot of different, um, I hate to call it lawn art because that's not really what it is, but landscaping, architecture and things like that, like why not draw from off some of the other cultures to then use that to embrace those spaces that, we'll feel that, um, those cultures do have an element on campus besides just the dominant culture. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nova, Marilyn, JJ, Abbie, Natalie, Nykol, and Nicole recommended incorporating art within the built space as a means to reflect their racial and gender identities. Most importantly, they emphasized a need to draw on the vast diversity of the African-American culture through the various artistic forms of sculpture, photos, and murals. A specific example would include recognition of the first African-American woman to attend DU would be reflected in the artwork.

### **Architectural Elements to Represent Other Cultures**

As Nova and I continued to discuss possibilities of making change to the built educational environment, I posed a challenging question, one that asked “if you were to wake up tomorrow to find the compositional diversity of the institution changed from being predominantly white to predominantly black, would you feel that your African-American female identity was reflected within the built environment?”

Not the buildings, no. No. The people, yes. I would stick around because the people. The buildings would have to change. The, um, they'd have to take some of that crap off of there. I mean, it's... Some of the stuff I see, I'm like, you'd never know there were other cultures in here. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Abbie shared Nova's inclination, that the built educational environment does not reflect her direct identity as a younger African-American woman. In fact, she stated that she feels the predominant age group reflected in the existing buildings is much older than her.

I think they would want it to look more not, not so much like Mary Reed in the fact that like we're like trying to pretend we're someone we're not, but I want, I think they would want it to still be like we're academic still. Like that is our priority, still to be academic students. They'd have to be very sensible in that. Um, but I think it would be much more, I don't know, I think it would be like brighter, more open. Um, yeah, I'm not very good like creative...um, brighter, more open, um, I think it would be easier to walk through. Not like small little hallways that are scary. Maybe like wider hallways. And it'd have a lot of art on

the wall, and like art that would like reflect the culture. Not like photos, but like reflect that we weren't included in the history. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

JJ made suggestions of how the Cyber Café in the Josef Korbel School of International Studies could do a better job of representing its students and the multiple cultures they are comprised of.

In the international school I think what I, what I like about it is downstairs in the café part, the Gilbert Cyber Café, I like how, I told you how they put posters and pictures out from, you know, students who have been abroad and have taken pictures and some events that are happening around town they take the posters and put them up. If they could incorporate that into the whole building, so the whole building would have art pieces by different artists or, you know, stories on the walls, things like that, um, I think that would make international students feel like they're coming to a place that they're comfortable there because it's not only for international students that come from abroad and for some students who are learning about the international environment, so I think that it's most important that they put, not just decorations like the banners and everything are great...but, um, the pictures from students I think is the biggest thing they would do and just on the walls like permanent ones, not just like stapled to the wall. But like, you know, the actual... Yeah, framed and everything, I think that would help a lot. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nova, JJ, and Abbie all suggested ways that the institution can incorporate a representation of not only African-American female identity, but the global community that walk its red brick paths. Recognition within its use of art to document all student perspectives especially those from underrepresented populations is emphasized. Abbie brought up an important perception regarding the reflection of one's age as well as harkening back to those who have come before us. She pointed out the use of red brick comes across as old-fashioned and does not reflect the youthfulness of her generation. Through the use of warmer colors and open hallways with art that reflects the images and

voices of those who came before us from communities of color a greater reflection can be achieved.

### **Transparency through the Use of Natural Light and Glass**

The concept of transparency is equated with the use of natural light and glass for the women in the study. The location of the University of Denver affords it the ability to utilize the 300 days of sunshine and blue skies we experience. The material recommended reflecting this natural light and view of its natural landscapes is glass. In fact many of the women would recommend utilizing less red brick in the construction of the built educational environment in order to allow for those inside and outside of the building to see one another, providing a connection from the classroom environment to the community. In this way, the institution's mission of serving the public good could be physically embodied within the manner it utilizes materials that invite engagement rather than blocking engagement through red brick.

When I asked JJ if she could change any built space on campus she immediately places her focus on the Josef Korbel School of International Studies. She stated its current architectural design and use of materials does not reflect the values and mission of the school.

I would have a lot of suggestions for them. I would hope they would ask me. Um, I always see Joseph Korbel school as, um, not a really high building, like not like Sturm or not even like Daniels, because it doesn't need that many classes. The classes are very small at our school. But maybe something just two-story with a lot of windows, a lot of glass windows. And almost no red brick for the school, just get rid of that. Um, and that's just on the outside just to symbolize its openness because it's one of the most open, liberal parts of campus. That we always invite, we had a speaker from Israel and Palestine last year, and, um, we always have those kinds of events at our school. But when it's encased in this brick red structure, nobody goes, nobody thinks about it. But if you have this big

glass structure, people are always trying to look in, people are always looking out and I think that's kind of, that symbolizes the school more. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nova reinforced the institution should use less brick and rather use materials to reflect a sense of openness. This is linked to her concept of the openness of learning and the connection to what is real and authentic. She referred to a brick as something that can “crumble” in the wake of a natural disaster, but a space that is open can last a life time and allow students to “leave their mark”. In this way, she is blending the concept of how the built educational environment and the materials it is constructed of reflect the possibility for transcendence.

I envision a space where each soul can leave something they cherish. This is one way for the folks to have made [a] mark. I mean who wants to buy a brick? One good quake, fire, etc. and it all crumbles. Space should not be about what looks aesthetically pleasing to the eye, or just about meeting codes, or just giving students a bulletin board. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

In this small excerpt from her journal she suggested the notion that if a red brick can be destroyed, then the ideas behind the red brick can also be destroyed. Therefore, the use of other materials that reflect openness of mind such as glass, while it may be perishable stands as a testament that the institution believes embedding openness within the built educational environment.

### **Sense of Warmth and Community through the Use of Color and Scale**

Natalie and Poppy emphasized the importance of utilizing warmth and openness to design an inclusive environment. Natalie stated that by creating welcoming environments the need to “hide in the shadows” to try to be invisible is no longer

necessary, rather in creating a space that is inviting, everyone will feel welcomed and reflected.

I think if something was really open and warm and welcoming you wouldn't have people trying to seek the shadows. Um, and you wouldn't have those in the first place. Um, because I think you seek, whether you seek that or you're placed in that invisible role, um, if you're seeking it because you aren't comfortable. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

During our initial cognitive interview tour, Poppy shared that she does not feel comfortable studying in the built environment of the Penrose library as it exists currently. She made suggestions of using natural light, warmer colors, and wooden materials to create a welcoming environment, one that she would feel motivated to study in.

I would say, you need to change the color décor, would be the main thing for me, because it doesn't feel comfortable. You know, staring at bright orange and yellow while you're studying is not soothing. Um, and I used to go to the CSU library...after it was remodeled because, I don't know if you know, there was like a flood in Fort Collins in '97 and it destroyed the bottom of the building. So they redid the whole thing and it's now all very like calm colors and it's very, it's not modern, it kind of feels like homey, you know. There's like nice wooden desks and nice new carpet and it's just kind of like pale green colors and I would prefer to study there, honestly. There's a lot of light, there's a lot more light in all the study areas. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nicole focused her recommendations on the built educational environment of Sturm Hall. She described that the color of the walls in the classrooms are not conducive to creating a welcoming learning environment.

I don't think it's necessarily the outside of Sturm that's the problem, as the inside. Um, because I find that it's more or less it's the inside of the classrooms that are the hard part, and the walls. I would change the wall color, um... Um, I don't know. I went to a Feng Shui sort of workshop and they talked about the use of different colors. But even, you know, a blue or even, you know, a color that's not so drab. I think the color almost reflected, it almost has this same reflection of like a hospital, where it's very sterile and very, you know, mellow because you're in a hospital so you kind of expect those types of colors. Not necessarily which, if I could design hospitals, I'd made them red because I think it serves for vibrancy

and for life, which I think that's what they should represent more than people who, who might be dying. I just think that's horrible that, you know, you already don't feel well and you're stuck in a place where the walls are not making you feel any better. Um, I would want something that shows a bit more vibrancy, that shows more open space, um, better windows to look outside even, that show the outside. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

### **Creating Comfort in the Learning Through the Use of Seating Arrangements and Smaller Scales**

Nicole and Nova made recommended how the classroom learning environment could become more inclusive from simply changing its arrangement, orientation, and options of seating to our entire concept of the built classroom space. Nicole reflected on her prior experience in learning environments of her alma mater of the University of Southern California that allowed for a large capacity of students who had the ability to move within their lecture styled seating to be able to see and engage with each other and their professor. She compares this environment to the static lecture style seating of Sturm Hall.

And, um, classrooms which are designed more, even if you're going to have say a sense of alike of a really large lecture hall, of moving that type of lecture hall where, again, you still almost have like the theater type of lecture hall like in the one classroom in Sturm, I forget what it is. Um, Lindsey Hall... Inside Sturm that's built that way, where although you, I understand that you have a large group of people so it's not always, you're not always able to design things in a round, but I have been in classrooms that can seat 75 to 100 that are done in semi-circle rounds so although you're in theater style seating, um, again, you still have the ability to swivel to see the people behind you, to see the people across from the circle from you, in a large lecture hall and you can still talk and have a discussion without feeling that you're forced in a very straightforward, I stare at my instructor, they tell me what to do type of setting. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova presented another recommendation to create, what she refers to as 'open' learning environments. These environments are free of the clutter of traditional desks, tables, and

chairs to allow the student to choose their own space whether it is on the floor, in a lounge chair or a couch, or even outside walking around while they reflect and gather their thoughts.

I'd like, um, um, a lot of just open space. Not cluttered with these. Chairs and, some with chairs that are comfortable. But, you know, like those, those round kind of like, you know what I mean... Things like that. Um, more eclectic kind of, kind of areas. Where people can just go in and hang and do their own thing. If they want to be on the floor, if they want to sit on the floor, they may feel like that. But, um, and just seats, but not cluttered, because I find spaces are cluttered with these desks, these big clunky desks and things. I mean, I just like, um, something where, you know how architects have their little tables that can move. Something like that, something we can just move... you have your space basically. Um, that to me is the way, that's the way ideas and thoughts come into being. Where you can have that and you can move it away, and then be free and flexible to move anywhere you want. And when you have open space, you can do that. That gives room for thought. At least in my mind when you have that. That's why I like walking because that opens you up for a lot of thought, just solitude and walking. Not being cluttered with stuff. (Cognitive interview tour, January 2010)

Nova also reflected back on her experience at Mount Ida as an undergraduate student.

She suggested there should be an emphasis on building spaces that are on a smaller scale.

This would allow for students, faculty, and staff to interact and engage as well as to recognize each other in the Hall and find each other within the walls.

With the structures, I'm thinking smaller. Because it makes people have to interact. If you want to do the online stuff, I'm talking options. You know, if you want to have the online stuff, have that, have it in another place. But scale this down. I'm like, just scale this down. It's a nightmare for me. I mean I find it to be a nightmare. One of the things I liked about, um, Mt. Ida as well as, but they've gone big, in the beginning it was small. They had, it wasn't overbearing. It was small. It was a small college. So it wasn't, you know, you still sat in rooms but you sat in, but it was still smaller. And people still had the time to interact. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nicole and Nova have provided suggestions to build more collaborative and engaging environments. The sense of connection to one another in our ability to see and interact

with those to our left, right, back, and front sides in a lecture hall to the ability to learn in smaller learning communities. In addition, the notion of creating our own spaces of learning whether it be sitting on the floor of a classroom with a portable writing surface amongst a rug and pillows or having the freedom to leave the structured walls of the classroom to walk and think outside in the campus green spaces and on the red brick path.

### **The Vision of the University of Denver**

Chancellor Robert D. Coombe's introduction to the university's architectural history book, *Built for Learning*, describes the built educational environment as one that is not stuck in tradition, rather it is open to change and opportunity to include all ideas and perspectives. He stated that at institutions that are not open to growth, "The ivy-clad buildings, walls, and echoed quads stand silent, as if to say "whoa there, not so fast" keeping its values steeped in its historic past, not welcoming the future (University of Denver, 2008, p. 4). He goes on to state, "These campuses create that timeworn image of the ivory tower that is somehow defending itself from the chaos and uncertainty of 'real' life" (p. 4). He sees the University of Denver's architecture then as an open book, one that anyone can read and one that flows from the embracing change. "So, change is our business as well, and that philosophy is reflected in the culture of our community and in the buildings, spaces, and rhythm of our campus" (p.4).

While the campus culture may be open to change under the university's commitment to inclusive excellence, I would argue that as a result of this study, African-American women do not fully feel their identities are reflected, respected, nor included

within the built spaces of the campus. Some of the women have expressed seeing themselves reflected in the higher architectural structures and materials the university has incorporated within its signature 'DU architecture', yet others have expressed the care and resources placed within the built spaces is not equal to what they have felt as individual women of color on campus. Rather they feel their presence is invisible by the university, neglecting them to fend for themselves in a community that does not reflect their racial or gender identities. What has become apparent for all the women in the study is their initial first impression of an institution with high standards and their hope to experience these standard in the social interactions with members of the community. Many have admitted that this perceived expectation has not been lived up to within their experiences, interactions, and perceptions of others within the community nor the built educational environment. Instead, they have adapted themselves to the campus environment, a psychological negotiation to enable them to continue to persist in their goal of achieving a higher education.

While some may argue that the women chose the university instead of the university choosing them, I would argue that the image that is presented to communities of color is not real or authentic. Certainly I would not argue that the built environment is not something to be proud of for its grandeur and use of quality materials. As some women would agree, the importance placed in designing both the built and landscaped areas of campus is apparent. However, what I would argue is that the architectural canons that have been documented and expressed by the university those of Tuscany, Vienna, Oxford, and the like are based in a Eurocentric notion of what an educational

environment should look and ultimately, feel like to any student at the University of Denver. While the institution has a predominantly white population, the cultural identities of communities of color are not reflected within these design canons. At this point I am certain that you are asking, “What would the architectural canon look like for the African-American culture?” To which I would respond, we do not truly know. Certainly we could look to an institution such as Duke University that was designed by Julian F. Abele, an African-American male architect, who did not receive public recognition for his work until 1986. This was over sixty years after the construction of the campus in 1925 (Duke University, 2010). The architectural style Abele was most inspired by his travel in France and its large grand scales. We could also take a global view and consider traveling to other countries abroad such as South Africa to draw inspiration. After all, would this notion be so abstract and off the beaten path? However, I would caution our thinking that the architectural canons of communities of color exist within their true form. For this would dismiss the long legacy and history of colonialism (Lorcin, 2000; Woollacott, 2006). Many countries across the world were reshaped and formed into colonies certainly by taking power of the native populations, but also by either destroying or reconstructing the physical spaces that they lived, worked and worshipped in. What I am suggesting is that we must reconsider our whole notion of how the built environment transmits hidden messages, messages that are so deeply embedded and often long since forgotten to hear. They are still there and continue to be replicated just like the English language across the globe. Referring back to the quote by Weismann (1992), space like language can position and maintain certain groups’ power over others. Within the context

of this study, I ask then that we listen to the narratives, feelings, emotions, and perceptions of the nine African-American women who participated in this study to determine how quiet or deeply buried those messages may be. Finally, I will state that in line with the portraiture methodology there is goodness that has come out of this study. We will learn not only of the negative, frightening and threatening experiences these women have had, but the welcoming, memory-making and soulful experiences as well. We will also hear their initial thoughts on how the built educational environment could be refined to reflect their racial and gender identities more visibly. Yet, I would argue as the portraitist this exploration of the unspoken messages that occur between the built educational environment of a predominantly white institution and its communities of color has more to be shared. There is more work to be done and I will make some concrete suggestions later in this chapter during the implications and further study section.

### **The Impact of the Study: Research Questions Revisited and Answered Through Collage**

During our final reflective interviews, I asked each of the nine women to share how their participation in the study impacted their consciousness of how the built educational environment may impact their experiences, interactions, and perceptions of being an African-American woman on a predominantly white campus. Many of them shared they had not considered it initially, but after participating in the study they realized it was something that they may have thought about at a subconscious level. In this way, the study brought what was hidden inside to the surface, bringing the invisible

to the visible. Poppy reflected in her journal that, “Looking at myself in relationship to DU has not really occurred to me. It was helpful to look at how I relate to others as who I am within my current space of DU.” Nicole shared that during her first exposure to the built educational environment of the university, she felt “slightly out of place and nervous of whether she would be good enough to be admitted into a graduate program, now she realized her apprehension was a ‘fear of the unknown’ of being in a completely different environment”. After participating in the study she began to realize what was happening to her was at a subconscious emotional level and after talking about her experiences and perceptions she has been able to become fully conscience of the impact the physical space has on her.

I think my experience in the study, for all of its craziness that I’ve put you through, has been really, um, eye-opening to me. As I mentioned, that I really that I didn’t think about it on a, on a conscious level, and I think that that for me has been helpful, um, in seeing just how much my physical environment impacts me. I think it also helps me, um, as a, as a student but also as a professional of seeing, of taking, not more time, but more time...better care as to looking into what type of environment do I want to live in, especially as I begin to move through my career. Like what sort of place do I want to, what sort of campus do I want to work on, um, how important is that physical space to me, is it really truly inviting, um, do I feel like there’s an ivory tower effect. All those things that I think we think about on the surface level but you tend to forget when, you know, someone is offering you a job. Um, but I think it definitely speaks to me about really understanding that institutional fit and what that means beyond just the cultural environment as to what the buildings say about the university. (Final reflective interview, February 2010)

Nykol shared that the study made something began to resonate with her. She realized that while her first exposure to the campus was a culture shock coming from a historically black college and university to a predominantly white institution. She recognized the

impact she has had within the environment and therefore, she can see herself reflected within it.

After the first meeting with Stephanie regarding her dissertation many of her questions resonated with me. The ones that truly resonated with me are the ones that dealt with the history that DU will leave upon me and how I would leave this university. I continue to distinguish the first time I interacted with the University of Denver and the time that I spend here now. During my first tour of duty at DU, I was an integral part of this campus – or so I hope to believe. I spent time in almost each of its buildings, interacted with students from all disciplines, was involved in campus activities, and clubs and I really had a ball being a part of this campus. This was a campus foreign to me, a place where I was definitely in the minority. Having come from a HBCU, I was comfortable in my skin, and knew who I was. I didn't necessarily come here to make friends or to make Denver my home, but both happened. (Reflective journal, January/February 2010)

The study also revealed a deep connection that some women have to the built environment of the University of Denver campus, specifically to its well recognized red brick pathways. Chancellor Ritchie selected red brick as a means to build walkways for its students, faculty, staff, and visitors to create an eye-pleasing first impression and to ensure it would last a long time. JJ shared that she most closely identifies with the red brick as an architectural element of the campus because of its longevity and its ability to endure the thousands of steps of those who came before her and who will come after her.

### **Data Represented through Vignette-Collage**

In the next several pages, I have combined the narratives and visual images the nine women shared with me during the study. The goal of the vignette-collage is to reflect the authentic spoken words, feelings, and emotions, alongside the photographs each woman captured during their participation in the study. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2005) purport that the portrait should reflect both the individual and the collective

stories of those engaged in the research process through their narratives and other expressive representations.

**Primary Research Question:**

**How do African-American women experience, interact with, and perceive the built educational environment of a predominantly white institution based upon their racial and gender identities?**

**THE LEO  
BLOCK  
ALUMNI  
CENTER**

My first A4 meeting was my last. They treated my white colleague poorly. It's not fair to treat others as you have been treated. (Natalie)

**Every day I realize  
'I' am the diversity  
outside of my program.  
(Nicole)**

**HIGHER  
STANDARDS**

**DU'S PRESTIGE  
COMPARES TO  
HARVARD,  
VANDERBILT AND  
YALE**

**CONDOLEEZZA  
RICE**

**MY PRIDE**

**MY ACCEPTANCE**

**ON MY WAY  
(Marilyn)**

**FEELING THE  
SHIFT OF CARE**

I feel the shift from one side of the campus to the other. It reminds me of feeling like a freshman.

**(Poppy)**

Status, money...the only thing missing is a fence. If I want inside, I have to let certain things go. (Nova)

Old-style, traditional, collegial, East Coast. It's just pretty, Mary Reed. It's what I think of when I think of college. (Abbie)

**I RECALL THE  
CONCRETE  
WALK WAYS,  
NOW THEY'RE  
BRICK**

**(Nykol)**

***Male dominated,  
Male Architects =  
Brick, Buildings,  
Layout, Walkways,  
Bronze, Huge, Clock  
Tower  
Do not reflect me or  
my ideas.  
(JJ)***

I don't think I'll look back on my experience and think of that "pretty school on the hill" that is really prestigious, I have had to work really hard to get the most out of DU and find the resources that appeal the most to me. (Rachel)

**Question 2: What importance do African-American women place on the built environment?**



”I realized that the built environment actually does impact me – from my daily routine, to my selection of DU as my first choice of colleges.”

(Marilyn, Reflective Journal)

When I walked over campus writing this journal it really occurred to me that when I came to DU I never expected or wanted it to reflect me in its outward appearance.

And I guess over time I started to reflect my college campus instead.

(JJ, Reflective Journal)

We bring all experiences, encounters, good, bad, ugly, indifferent to our environment, and so do the people who design the enclosures they believe make-up an environment.

(Nova, Reflective Journal)

The Women’s College in particular creates an environment that I feel represents African-American women and women as a whole. I feel that the environment is vibrant and colorful celebrating the creativity of women, but also shows strength. As an African-American woman, spaces which provide a source of strength provide a support for me that other areas do not. It makes me feel that I can be myself not live up to that of the dominant culture. (Nicole, Reflective Journal)



I didn’t think African-American women are reflected in the built environment of DU. However, I think it’s becoming more prevalent in the social environment. This is more important to me because DU would be nothing but a bunch of buildings without our faculty, staff, alumni and students. It’s the people here that makes it what it is. (Natalie, Reflective Journal)

Honestly, I do not think African-Americans are visibly represented at all at the University of Denver in the built educational environment of the campus or otherwise. I don’t think I’ve ever seen any sort of photo or anything on a wall that has a black woman in it. Minorities’ feeling of inclusiveness, usually isn’t taken into account when constructing a campus for quite an affluent, white population. (Abbie, Reflective Journal)



Over the last few weeks, I have been thinking about the construction of the buildings that I am privileged to learn in. I have also been thinking about how that learning is constructed within those buildings and then how that learning is then translated to the students, i.e., expectations. (Nykol, Reflective Journal)

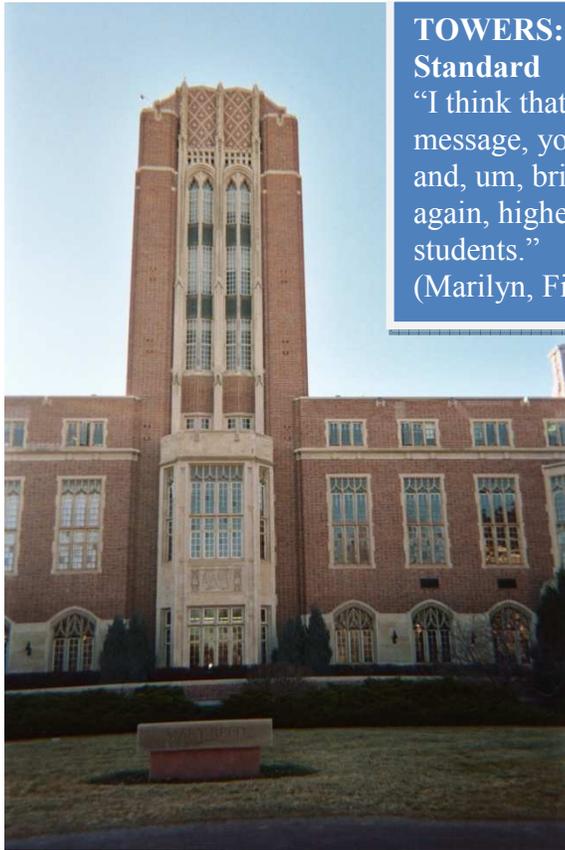
So it's kind of surprisingly enough to me, it's drawn me closer to like the DU community, because I've kind of been like, oh, that's just where I got to school, like whatever, but like with my new volunteering I'm like looking at this and like looking at spaces, it's kind of made me like think about like all my interactions within the one space. (Poppy, Final reflective interview)



I mean if you would had, if you would have asked the question like the first time we met I probably would have said not much. I mean it's one of those things like I just don't really think about, a lot, you know. Like the way the buildings are designed, because you can't really have a lot of control over it. But now I'm becoming more aware of DU, the impact like I guess like more disappointed. It's almost like you aren't

allowed to like have a voice because they're either like we're not about you or students don't want to have a voice. (Rachel, Final reflective interview)

**Research Question 3: What specific elements within the built educational environment reflect, or do not reflect, their racial and gender identities?**



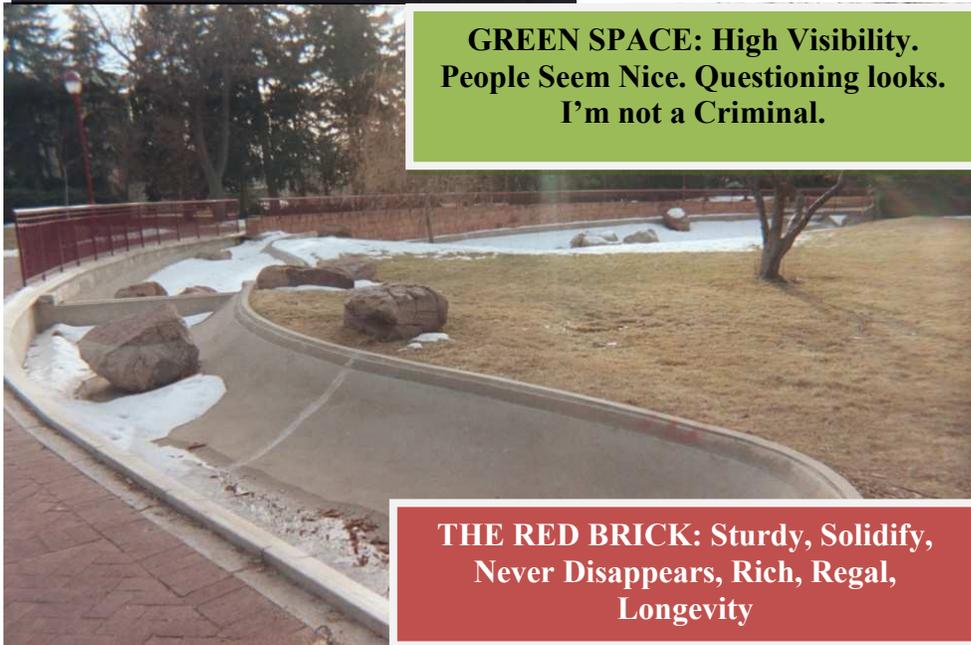
**TOWERS: Higher Perspective, Higher Standard**

“I think that DU really is conveying a message, you know, with towers and domes and, um, brick and things like that. Very, um, again, higher standard of living for its students.”

(Marilyn, Final reflective interview)

**COLLEGIATE GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE:**

“Buildings like Mary Reed, which is always so quiet and collegiate-feeling, make me feel really comfortable and secure in my place.” (Abbie, Reflective Journal)



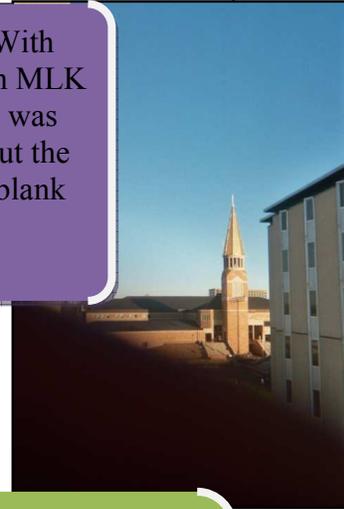
**GREEN SPACE: High Visibility. People Seem Nice. Questioning looks. I'm not a Criminal.**

**THE RED BRICK: Sturdy, Solidify, Never Disappears, Rich, Regal, Longevity**

**Research Question 4: Why may African-American women feel their identities are reflected, or not reflected, within the built educational environment within a predominantly white institution?**



**BLANK WALLS:** “With yesterday having been MLK day, I really wish that was visible somewhere. But the walls are completely blank as usual.” (Rachel, Reflective journal)



*“It made it clearer in my mind, the idea of the golden Ritchie tower representing all that I am not proud of and do not care about at DU.”*

*(Abbie, Reflective Journal)*

**LACK OF SAFETY –**

“I have yet to see campus police. I don’t see them out there. Where are they?” (Nova, Cognitive interview tour)



**DOORS TO NO WHERE –**

“...in reality it’s a door to nowhere because diversity is not as present or supported as they pretend. It’s not gonna be found in the structural building of DU.”



**BEING HIDDEN:** It feels very cramped and makes me feel like I am a number, a forgotten number at that. (Nicole, Reflective journal)

## **Research Themes Embedded Within the Conceptual Model and Refined Based on Research Findings**

Peterson and Deal (2002) purport that when considering the environments in which we learn, the visual scene of the architecture and the artifacts and symbols placed within these spaces have both a psychological impact upon us and communicative dynamic of what matters to the educational institution. Harper and Hurtado (2007) discovered that one of the nine elements that can impact the ways in which students negotiate a racialized campus climate, becomes the pervasiveness of whiteness. In their study, they found that students felt that, outside of a designated cultural space, they did not have another environment to socialize or call home. The findings of this study support this theme; however, a new theme has also been discovered, one that shows women of color reclaiming their space psychologically. In other words, while all the women indicated their awareness that the Center for Multicultural Excellence was located in what they perceived to be outside of the main campus boundary, they have found ways to connect to other common and hidden spaces that are centrally located.

Natalie shared that the reason she avoided the Center for Multicultural Excellence was based on her fear, that simply by taking those steps outside of the main campus boundary, she would put herself at more risk of becoming visible in a predominantly white community. Rachel shared that, while she is aware that a Black Student Association does exist on campus, she has not yet reached out to the group because she is still developing her own sense of her black and white racial identities. As a biracial woman, she has experienced her parents and grandparents encouraging her not to be

proud of her black heritage, so instead she has found a sense of community within the Latino culture in the U. S. and in Brazil.

Studies investigating how students of color find a sense of place within their institutions in specifically designated spaces such as cultural centers and minority student groups have been at the forefront of the work by Guiffrida (2003), Harper and Quaye (2007), Patton (2006), and Solórzano and Villalpando (1998). This study breaks new ground in our consideration of the ability of communities of color to see themselves outside of their campus cultural center. The notion that only one space exists for all communities of color on the university campus limits our perception. The nine women in the study felt physically walking and interacting within the larger campus space, that they left their footprint and thus, reclaimed the space psychologically by embedding their identities within the memory of the space.

Remarkably when we consider the groundbreaking article by Caroline Turner, “*Guests in Someone Else’s House*,” her description of students of color being “guests” in their campus environments due to their racial identity, the experiences of Marilyn, JJ, and Natalie implore us to reconsider this notion.

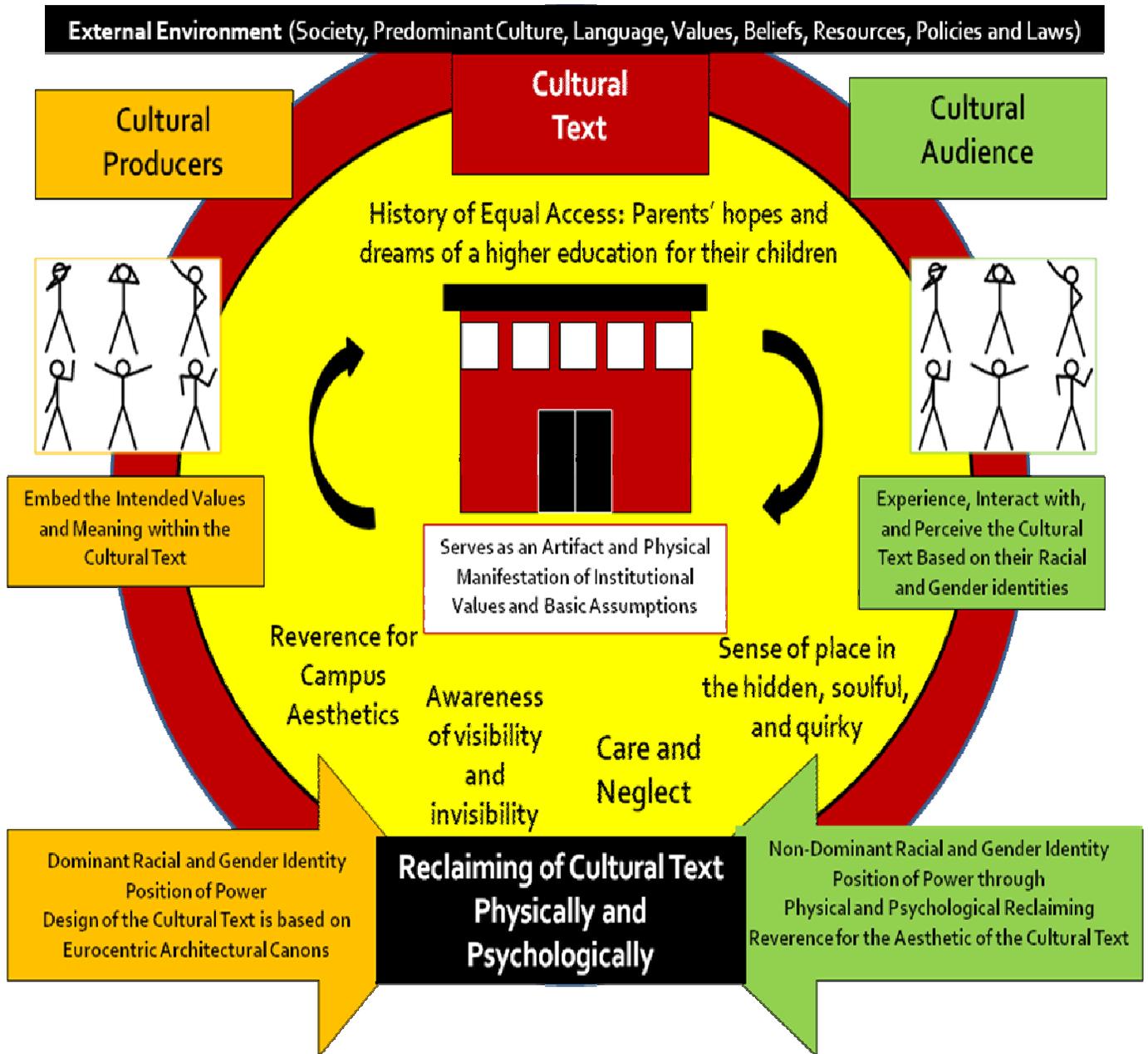
The metaphor can be extended further. Like students of color in the university climate, guests have no history in the house they occupy. There are no photographs on the wall that reflect their image. Their paraphernalia, paintings, scents, and sounds do not appear in the house. There are many barriers for students who constantly occupy a guest status that keep them from doing their best work. (Turner, 1994, p. 356)

All three women express an ownership of their campus environment. While they initially felt like guests, through their experiences within the built educational environment they have found themselves reflected and nurtured by it.

Marilyn associated the high quality of the design and building materials the campus utilizes to create built space as reflective of her qualities as both an African-American woman and as a student. She felt because she has gained admission into a prestigious institution, she is also prestigious. Natalie referred to DU as her home, the place she grew from a girl to a woman and from a student to a professional and future scholar. In fact, she found a specific architectural structure that most aptly reflects her as a biracial woman with cultural roots in Hawaii, the pineapple of the university's Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management School. She felt it reflected her identities and reminds her of where she came from to begin her higher educational journey. JJ reflected on the struggle of being an African-American woman within a built environment that she perceives as being white and male; however, she psychologically associates herself with one of the institution's longest standing built structures, the Buchtel Tower. The tower was almost destroyed in a fire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was saved and reclaimed by the institution. In its current location, on the north side of the main campus green, it is memorialized. In addition, she saw herself reflected within the prominent red brick the university utilizes to build its pathways and buildings. She associated her ability to be sturdy and resilient with the physical properties of the brick. She also expressed that even after she leaves the institution upon graduation, the fact that she has made her physical impression through her footprints on its red brick pathways, her memory of being an African-American woman will become embedded within the brick. I provide these as examples to introduce the conceptual model (Figure 7) redefined through the key findings

and overarching themes found through the experiences, interactions and perceptions of Abbie, JJ, Marilyn, Natalie, Nicole, Nykol, Nova, Poppy, and Rachel.

Figure 7: Reclaiming of the Built Educational Environment at a Predominantly White Institution by African-American Women



## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion – The Relationship Between Space and Place**

They wanted me to be exposed to different people. They did not take into account that no matter where I go, “the environment will always have the same elements”. The environment will always be a place I have to navigate with all of my idiosyncrasies. (Nova, Reflective Journal, January/February 2010).

As the portraitist, I have discovered that the built educational environment has been deemed as a place of serenity, inspiration, academic achievement, and personal success by the women centered in this study. While in contrast, the same spaces have become places that require one’s navigation of her visibility and invisibility. As a result, one’s sense of safety and feelings of belonging within their environment becomes impacted by her psychological impressions as an African-American woman. In this way, the built educational environment serves as a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional construction of one’s hopes, dreams, fears, and resolution. In order to understand this transition between one’s experiences and interactions with their environment into their perceptions of their place within that environment, the concepts of space and place must be revisited.

The space of the University of Denver was erected to serve as a place for the public to gain a higher education. However, the journey to access one’s education has not

been the same for all. The narratives of the African-American women centered in this portrait reflect a space that has more meaning than just a place to gain an advanced degree, it has become a space in which their racial, gender, and class identities have come into question.

### **Navigating the Campus Stage: The Roles Performed and the Costumes Worn**

The notion of the built educational environment as a stage was reflected in the women's narratives as they described the campus as appearing in the manner in which they envisioned a college campus should look like. When we reflect on the influence and ultimate impact Chancellor Daniel Ritchie had in transforming the nearly bankrupt institution into one with prestige and beauty, we cannot deny that he had this idea in mind. To create a place to impress prospective students and their parents, as well as future donors, was a primary motivation. In this we must consider his aesthetical inspirations, his own home in Hollywood California along with Cab Childress' many travels and knowledge of European architecture. This combination of men, ideas, and inspiration created what these women sensed, a perfect campus stage.

By creating a campus that appeals visually to the eye, reminiscent of the universities of the Eastern United States and the colleges of England and Germany, the notion of a woman of color walking on the stage generates an interesting dynamic. By reflected back into the American history of slavery, predominantly in the southern colonies, the concept of the plantation with the master's house and crops centered in the environment and the slaves and their quarters hidden to the eye, we cannot dismiss the

feelings visibility and invisibility that also exists within the campus stage (Woollacott, 2006).

The campus as a stage, while aesthetically beautiful, also places a burden on those who are not as visible. For African-American women, it is not enough simply to have received admission into the campus as a student; they must look good doing it. However, by whose standards, it always seems to be the standards of the dominant culture. In this way, the campus stage is able to maintain its beauty that is steeped in age old ideas of what a beautiful college campus should look like. The university has a full-time staff to take care of its green grass, trees, Koi ponds and built spaces. Whereas, the women in this study indicated the lack of support to aid them in their learning process, let alone the challenges they face to maintain a white standard of beauty while attending the institution.

In order to fit in as members of an underrepresented population, the need to put on costumes to navigate the stage has become a requirement. The campus was designed to look like what an ideal campus should appear, along with a prescribed idea of what type of actors and actresses would walk across its stage. Yet, the component that was overlooked was the diversity of identities its community of learners would bring. In this way, the spatial design considerations of the campus neglected to consider how the large campus green landscapes and grand scaled buildings would emphasize the visual difference of race and gender for African-American women within a predominantly white community.

Therefore, as a mechanism of survival, the women centered in this study have adapted their identities and developed navigational skills, in order to navigate the built environment. This reflects the similar experience shared by Dr. Patricia Williams during her time as an African-American female student at the Harvard School of Law, where she felt like an outsider based on her racial and gender identities. In addition, it reflects the experiences of the Native American students that Brayboy (2004) discovered in his study which illustrates how a group of students of color developed strategic navigational skills to avoid visibility within the campus environment of an elite institution.

As a result, this notion of space having an impact on one's behavior within the context of an environment built for learning pushed my own thinking. It challenged me to consider how the decisions that have been made regarding the institutional architecture have impacted our individual sense of identity and place. Further, when it is considered how the designs of our educational environment, can indeed, impact our sense of saliency pertaining to our racial and gender identities, it is powerful. The impact a space make on our experiences, interactions, and perceptions as well as our ability to adapt our identities — or rather present certain components of our identities — to fit into the environment, serves as clear evidence that one's notion of their psychological access truly exists. This provides new meaning and relevancy in concurrence with our abilities to both physically and psychologically access our environments in an equal manner.

### **The Impact of the External Context**

All of the women have shared the influence their parents had on their decision to pursue their higher education. Their dreams were based in the context of how African-

Americans have historically been denied access to higher education until the Emancipation Proclamation and within the last fifty years access to desegregated educational environments since *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*. The historical impacts of equal access laws have allowed us the possibility of going anywhere our minds and dreams can take us. Therefore, the dreams of our parents have been realized by our aspirations and persistence to access higher education at institutions across the country. We have made our way on the red brick paths of college and university campuses as a result of their hard work, passion, love, and support as well as the federal laws on equal access to educational environments. However, this journey has not been the same for all of us.

The journey to make our parents' dreams a reality has sometimes come with a price to our own self-reflection of our identities as African-American women. Yet, at the same time the built educational environment has inspired us and wooed us by its grandeur and beauty to persist in accessing its hallowed halls and red brick paths in order to see ourselves as scholars, community builders, and world-minded citizens. It is with this purpose and intention that I chose to explore the wide array of experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the African-American women at the University of Denver and their relationship with its built educational environment.

### **The Subjectivity of the Experience**

The findings in this study have been impacted by each women's background and experiences prior to and while attending the University of Denver. The concepts and expectations of what an educational environment should look and feel like may be

different based upon one's exposure to different built structures during their primary and secondary school experiences. The composition of one's community based upon racial and socio-economic class diversity should also be considered. One's regional experience within the United States can impact their perceptions as well as what type of environment be it rural or urban can also play a role.

During the first moments I shared with each woman in the cognitive interview tours, I sensed feelings of embarrassment, being ashamed, or unsure of whether their experiences were valid. As a result, trust became a key factor in establishing rapport and encouragement in order for them to feel justified in sharing experiences that were negative. In this way, they seemed to want to both project and protect the institution's image as being an inclusive environment, one that strove to serve the public good. However, after our initial meeting, I began to see the women trusting themselves and in this way, they allowed me to share in their journey of self-discovery through raw and authentic emotions. This was evident in their journal entries as well as the final reflective interviews. The more time we spent together engaged in the study, the more the moments of silence and impressing smiles transformed into visible tears and signs of frustration, challenge, and inspiration.

As the portraitist, I take ownership in directing the nature of the study by developing my own definitions of space and place as they were relevant from the literature pertaining to how the built educational environment can transmit an institution's values on a student's sense of belonging, sense of community, safety, respect and overall interaction (Bess and Dee, 2008; Strange and Banning, 2001; Weismann,

1992). In addition, I held preconceptions of how all or some of the women centered in the portrait may speak about their experiences, based upon recent studies of students' of color's experience within institutions of higher education, specifically those at predominantly white institutions. Issues of invisibility, microaggressions, tokenism, harassment, and outright discrimination have been documented and came up in this study (Brayboy, 2004; Solórzano, 2000; Sue et al., 2008). Further, as a critical black feminist scholar, I wish to be transparent about my goal in seeking out the full-spectrum of experiences based upon the intersection of the women's racial and gender identities (Crenshaw, 1994; Few, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1998). There was a realization that not all women may first and foremost feel their racial and gender identities impacted their educational experience and further, that not all women may feel their experiences were negative as a result.

### **The Use of Portraiture to Study the Dynamics Between the Built Educational Environment and African-American Women**

The portraiture methodology allowed me to center the three components featured within the conceptual model: cultural producers, cultural text, and cultural audience. This methodology allowed for a dialogue to occur between those who designed the educational environment of the University of Denver, the built spaces themselves, and the women centered in the study. As the portraitist, I was able to facilitate this dialogue with guiding questions and concepts informed by the literature that spoke to the dynamics that occur between one's senses of place within a space built to educate, as a result. In addition, the portraiture methodology allowed me to justify and qualify the lived

experiences of African-American women within a dialogue pertaining to a predominantly white community. Thus, the process of emancipating their voices could be achieved. While the number of African-American women at the University of Denver represents only one-percent of its entire community, the voices of the nine women are enabled to take a position of power. Additionally, this method allowed me to interact with each woman above and beyond a question and answering interview process. I was empowered to seek other methods to gain their trust in order to share in their narratives through video-tape, audio-tape, and personal journal entries, alongside their self-created photographic images. As a result, I was able to represent their authentic experiences in a rich, texturized, and meaningful way as individuals and as a collective.

I found the methodology to be self-empowering to my own experiences, interactions, and perceptions of the built environment. Additionally, as the portraitist, I was allowed to identify my shared racial and gender identities with the women. Finally, as I alluded to in the earlier section on subjectivity, I was able to let my voice be heard in concert with the research participants, which also served as an act of emancipation for all of us.

### **The Cost of Not Addressing the Built Environment**

I have been posed with the question, “What would be the cost, if the University of Denver did not change anything about the built environment, as a result of this study?” To which I would respond, that with recognition that long before this study and I’m sure long after, students will continue to persist in their quest to attend the University of Denver without regard to how its built environment may send messages of exclusion

based upon one's racial and gender identities. However, I would add that if we aspire to become an institution that fully embraces and embodies the tenets of inclusive excellence and in the context of the increasing diversity of our future generation of learners, we must not respond with inaction. Rather, we must become a model of what an inclusively excellent institution could look and feels like, right down to the very walls we construct and decorate.

A woman in the study shared her experience of attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and noted the architectural style of the campus buildings were similar in their design and materials as the University of Denver. However, what made her experience feel more inclusive at the HBCU was her recognition that she was part of the dominant compositional diversity of the institution. In addition, the institution offered curriculum that focused upon her cultural identity as an African-American woman. In close connection to her positive social interactions and classroom engagement experience, was her knowledge that while the built environment reflected a Eurocentric standard of aesthetics, she could connect with those who physically put the bricks in place. In this way, she felt a connection to their memory of her ancestors who were the slaves that placed the very bricks that constructed the campus. I share this example as one way in which institutions across the country could recognize the diversity of history and culture that resides within their built environments. The creation of a historical plague of recognition and the inclusion of the stories of those who built the spaces should be included in any publication written about the institution's history.

Additionally, I share this example because it speaks to the importance of students of color's need to know their cultural history within institutions of higher learning, above and beyond the modern day marketing and branding methods to promote diversity through the use of their images on websites and brochures. Institutions of higher learning serve as conduits of knowledge and history; it is therefore a disservice to dismiss underrepresented cultural groups' presence within the built environment albeit in the past, present, or future. Ultimately, the lack of acknowledgement and incorporation of communities of color who have attended the University of Denver is an outright disrespect and does not serve the goals of the institutional mission to serve the public good nor does it adhere fully to the tenets of inclusive excellence. Rather it continues to perpetuate the systems of racism, sexism, and oppression of the dominant group over the non-dominant groups (Crenshaw, 1994; Few, 2007, Weismann, 1992).

### **Belief in the Institutional Mission Realized in the Daily Actions and Dreams of Higher Education**

I asked every women in the study, "How will we know you were here?" in an effort for them to consider how important is their presence within the institution and the legacy they leave. In addition, I wanted to gain an understanding of their knowledge of other African-American women who may have come before them. In this effort, I strived to bring to the surface their concept of how African-American women have been documented in the institutional history. Thus, serving to encourage them to consider how important they are to the institution. Overall, many of the women indicated while they did not consider there would be any physical way that anyone would know that they were

here. Rather they felt the work they were doing within the campus community or would do in the greater community would be enough to prove they were here.

Ultimately, we cannot deny that all of the women in the study and for that matter all of the communities of color are here for one shared primary purpose, to obtain a higher education. Yet, their presence will not be reflected in the physical record of the institution. However, in the particular context of the University of Denver, I must ask where are the visual cues and signs of recognition for Emma Azalia Hackley, Grace Mabelle Andrews, and Condoleezza Rice? Dr. Condoleezza Rice's presence is known in two file folders of photos, various newspaper clippings and announcements yet, no visual recognition of her presence of her time on campus as a doctoral student in the Josef Korbel Graduate School for International Studies exists. Grace Mabelle Andrews was the one of the first African-American woman to step foot on the university campus as a freshman in 1906, yet the only institutional records are four student yearbooks. No historical sculpture, plaque, or book is present within the built educational environment. Why are there no campus buildings that reflect the names of either of the aforementioned women or other African-American alumnae, faculty, or staff member that have yet to be discovered, who have been an outstanding representative of our institution? Efforts should be made to generate photos to be displayed within the interiors of the built environment, sculptures should be erected to honor these women and historical plagues and publication should be created to engage the entire community to begin a dialogue centered on the true history of the university.

## **Implications of the Study**

The study presents a new concept of equal access to education. Specifically, it brings to light that we do in fact experience the built educational environment in differing capacities of 'equal' through our ability to psychologically access it based upon our racialized and gendered identities. With this said, the study also highlights that one's perceptions of an environment embodying inclusivity can be impacted by their own saliency within their racial identity. In addition, one's social interactions within an environment can impact their perception of feeling welcomed or unwelcomed. In this way, one cannot separate the dynamic that exist between the built environment and those who interact within its physical structure. Therefore, while a campus may be built to express a high aesthetic, if this high standard is not reflected in the individuals who interact with each other on the campus, the aesthetic may be lost. Likewise, if the interactions among those of a campus community are of a high quality and the aesthetic of the campus is low, they may not perceive themselves as not being held in a high regard by the institution. As a result, the goal is to be considerate of both the physical and psychological access of our built educational environments and of our expectations and standards of our educational communities.

With this stated, I hope this study will change our notions of the concepts of equal access from our physical right to access the educational environment to the implications of our ability to psychologically access the educational environment. In addition, I hope to challenge those outside of the institution who make federal policies on the design of public spaces. To date there is no federal policy that specifically addresses the need to

ensure one's ability to psychologically access education through its environment; rather policies are still focused on our physical ability. While we should be thankful for policies such as the American for Disabilities Act of 1990, I argue that it is time we as a country take responsibility and acknowledge that the manner that our educational spaces are designed still continue to perpetuate a Eurocentric standard. The national discourse recognizes the increasing diversity of our country and how we must prepare for more diverse learners. Yet, we have not discussed how we will diversify the space itself to provide a welcoming environment to this diverse population of learners. Therefore, it is also my hope that those who teach and develop curriculum in schools of architecture will reconsider the canons of design that are currently utilized and by doing so to redefine our visual definitions of what educational environments from elementary schools to colleges and universities should look and feel like. I hope this will send a call to practicing architects who are continuing to create educational environments across the American landscape to become critical in their conversations with their clients to challenge our notions of replicating the white standard of education, one that continues to perpetuate the dynamics of power and control between the administrators, teachers, and students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

First and foremost it goes without saying the study focused solely on the experiences, interactions, and perceptions of African-American women at one predominantly white institution. In addition, the sample population was comprised of both undergraduate and graduate students whose experiences may differ from women who are faculty or staff at the institution. The experience of African-American women at

this institution may also differ from African-American women at other predominantly white institutions. The institutional type may not reflect the racialized experiences of communities of color at a Historical Black College or University, a Hispanic Serving Institution, or a tribal college.

The length of the study may have also limited the ability to gain insight as to what the women's first impression of the built educational environment has on their experiences, interactions, and perceptions. Given that all of the women in the study initially experienced the built environment at a subconscious level and began to experience it at a conscious level during their reflective journaling, photo documentation, and in the final reflective interview, more time and activities could have been allocated to gain a deeper understanding. Additionally, the women were each approached as individuals within the study, perhaps hosting a focus group would have allowed them to share their experiences together to reflect a collective sense.

A final limitation to the study was my limited access enrollment data from the institution. This could have provided a deeper layer of understanding of the context of African-American female enrollment in the institution since Emma Azalia Hackley in 1900. In addition, the limited documentation of African-American women in the institutional archives presented a challenge for me to paint a more textured portrait.

### **Further Research**

The impact of one's class identity came to light during this study. In fact, many women stressed that they felt their socio-economic ability impacted their experiences more so than their racial and gender identities. While eight of the nine women who

participated in the study self-identified as being middle-class, the contrast of their perceptions of the University of Denver catering to a community of learners from a predominantly upper-class background became evident. The institution has historically been perceived by communities of color, in the Denver area, as being inaccessible. They describe it as the “campus on the hill” in relation to its location and cost of attendance. In this way, the campus reflects a space that provides access only to those who have a wealth of financial means and ability to pay for a private school education. Therefore, further investigation into how one’s sense of access is impacted by one’s class identity when it is perceived to be in contrast with the institution, should be explored

In addition, the findings of this study present an opportunity to conduct comparative studies of African-American women enrolled at all predominantly white institutions across the country. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted at an individual institution to determine whether the first impression of an institution’s built educational environment stays the same or changes during a student’s undergraduate and/or graduate experience.

The sample population could be expanded to include or to focus solely on African-American female faculty and staff. The difference in one’s role within the institution may provide additional data that has not been explored in the literature. This leads to the next opportunity to expand this type of study, to include all communities of color, both women and men, to determine if there are any differences amongst racial and gender identities. While some may argue it would be beneficial to consider expanding this type of study to compare communities of color with their counterparts who identify

as White, I would argue that we must first discover and document the voices, emotions, and feelings of those who have historically been denied access to institutions of higher education within the United States. Once this is accomplished, studies could be conducted to determine whether there are differences or similarities amongst all racial groups.

Finally, the study could be expanded to include the voices of the cultural producers, those who have the power to change the landscapes and building designs of institutions. The perspectives of university presidents, boards of trustees, university architects, and institutional donors would be fascinating to gain insight into the cultural producers element embedded within the conceptual model. This is a research agenda I hope to explore as a future interdisciplinary scholar and one that I hope will inspire others in the academic community.

## Afterword

We walk on the red brick path to pursue a higher education. While at first glance our footsteps may not appear to exist. They may disappear with the melting snow, rain, and sunshine of the Denver, Colorado environment; however, they are there and they are connected to the physical space and remain in the psyches of our minds. They said it was impossible for a man to land on the moon, and for some Americans the thought of an African-American woman gaining her higher education, may have seemed like a similar concept. Yet this study serves as evidence, and as an official document, that we are here and we will continue to walk along the red brick paths of our predominantly white institution. In this walk, we have learned to navigate the space from those who have come before us and with the courage and strength our parents have given us. We have made up new steps to walk on the red brick path. We have tapped, jumped, skipped, leaped, and crawled our way. We have danced and sprinted across the red brick path in ways never considered. We live and breathe just as the built spaces do. We have seen times of joy and times of sorrow, just as the built spaces have throughout the different time periods of their existence. We are intertwined. While the built spaces do not have the ability to change themselves, we are trying to make them change through our minds. However, I would argue that is not enough. We must physically, visually, and boldly make our presence known in the walls through light, air, warmth, glass, sculpture, murals, photos, and more! The built spaces have a voice, one that originates from those who are in positions of power. Therefore, I make this call to those in power and to the academy, we ask for your recognition of this dynamic that exists between African-American women

and their built educational environment. We ask for a seat at the design table. We ask that our images be reflected in an authentic manner in the spaces we learn, socialize, live, and reflect in, rather than reflected in a random photo on the website or placed on the cover of a brochure about diversity. If we want to truly transform ourselves into an institution of inclusive excellence, our voices and our identities must be reflected in the bricks, in the walls, and in the green spaces that we define as the built environment of the University of Denver.

Madame Hackley's existence as the first African-American female graduate of the university and the connection that the women in the study felt to the Newman Performing Arts Center as a space where they could hear the unspoken messages of music, creativity, and soulfulness is truly astounding. As an oppressed culture in the American historical context, I find it intriguing that the few African-American women we know of in the history of the University of Denver were drawn to the musical genre. In this way, it is reflective of our culture's resonance to music as a means to reclaim our souls. Musical expression has given us new ways to express ourselves, to build our strength and resiliency, and to pass on our cultural narratives within the American context. So with this said, I would encourage us to continue to channel our narratives through music, dance, and all other realms of creative, intellectual, and political expression to reflect our culture and to find a way to embed our narratives into the architectural design of our colleges and universities. Only then will we ensure that the built educational environment is truly reflective of our presence in the past, present, and future.

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## Appendix A

### Timeline for *Brown v. Board of Education*

- 1857 The Supreme Court ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* that neither free nor enslaved blacks have constitutional rights in the United States.
- 1863 President Abraham Lincoln signs the Emancipation Proclamation freeing 4 million black slaves.
- 1865 Establishment of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, the first federal welfare agency established to provide relief for free blacks and poor whites during the Civil War era.
- 1866 Passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866.
- 1867 Howard University is established; this school would eventually train the majority of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund team.
- 1868 Passage and ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment.
- 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* establishes the doctrine of “separate but equal.”
- 1935 Charles Hamilton Houston, along with former student Thurgood Marshall, begins challenging segregation laws in graduate and professional schools.
- 1938 *State of Missouri ex. Rel. Gaines v. Canada* establishes that black students have the right to attend state-funded graduate facilities if no separate and equal facilities are available.
- 1948 The NAACP devotes efforts to an all-out attack on segregation in education.
- 1949 The NAACP files *Briggs v. Elliott* in Clarendon County, South Carolina.
- 1950 Charles Hamilton Houston files *Bolling v. Sharpe* in the District of Columbia. The Supreme Court hands down favorable rulings on *Sharpe v. Painter* and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, two graduate admissions cases that help pave the way for *Brown*. Charles Hamilton Houston, the chief architect of the NAACP legal strategy, dies.
- 1951 Charles Scott, John Scott and Robert Carter file *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in February, Spottswood Robinson files *Davis v. Prince Edward County, Virginia*, in May. *Briggs v. Elliot* goes to trial in May. *Gebhart v. Belton* and *Gebhart v. Bulah* go to trial in October. Robert Carter and Charles Scott lead the first trial phase of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in June.
- 1952 In October the Supreme Court announces it will hear all five cases collectively; segregation in the public schools is presented as a national issue.
- Chief Justice Vinson dies. Earl Warren replaces Vinson as interim chief justice.
- 1954 On May 17, the Supreme Court unanimously rules that state-sanctioned segregation of public schools is a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and is unconstitutional.
- 1955 Justice Jackson dies. He is replaced by John Marshall Harlan, grandson of the one dissenter in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.
- 1955 The Supreme Court hands down *Brown II* in May, ordering that desegregation occur with “all deliberate speed.”(Anderson & Bryne, 2004, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv).

## Appendix B

### STUDY ANNOUNCEMENT

Dear University of Denver Student, Faculty or Staff Member,

I am an advanced doctoral student in the Higher Education program in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am excited to begin my dissertation research study that is titled “Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of their Built Educational Environment.” The study will explore the experiences, interactions and perceptions of African-American women with the landscape and buildings of the University of Denver campus.

I openly identify as an African-American woman and have been a graduate student at the University of Denver for the last two and half years. One of the elements of the university campus that impacts me the most are its physical spaces. I have looked to the literature on the interactions and relationships humans have with their environment and I am curious how the built environment impacts one’s sense of place. By place I mean one’s sense of identity, feelings of being welcomed, respected, safe, etc. The literature stated that we experience the environment uniquely based upon our multiple identities of race, gender, age, class, language, etc. and that this in turn can impact our perceptions of our university environment (Burke & Grosvenor, 2009; Moos, 1986, Strange & Banning, 2001; Weisman, 1992).

Therefore, as both an African-American woman and as an aspiring higher education scholar, I am curious about your thoughts, engagement and feelings with the physical spaces of the University of Denver campus. I am excited to learn more about the amount of time you spend at the university and what activities you engage in within the physical spaces of the campus as well as how the campus makes you feel.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu) or 503.341.6067.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you!

Most appreciative,

Stephanie Krusemark, PhD Candidate in Higher Education

Email. [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu)

Phone. 503.341.6067

## Appendix C

### STUDY PARTICIPATION EMAIL

Dear University of Denver Student, Faculty or Staff Member,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation research study titled, "Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women's Experiences and Perceptions of their Built Educational Environment."

The first step in your participation will involve completing an online screening survey. I am attaching a consent form to confirm your participation in the online screening survey. Please print, complete and fax, email, mail or drop off in person to me at the below contact information. I will keep the original form for my records and will provide a copy to you.

The survey can be accessed through the below web link:

[http://udenver.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV\\_2aZLYUworwTqsss&SVID=Prod](http://udenver.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_2aZLYUworwTqsss&SVID=Prod)

Please note, if you are interested in participating but would prefer to complete the screening survey in a printed paper format, I will be happy to provide a copy to you. If you experience any technical difficulties please contact me.

You will notice at the end of the screening survey I will ask if you would be interested in engaging in several additional research activities. These activities will include individual interviews and opportunities for self-reflection. If you are interested in continuing your participation in the study please contact me via email at [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu) or phone at 503.341.6067.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. You can opt out at any time without any further communication or obligation to me as a researcher.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Most appreciative,

Stephanie Krusemark, PhD Candidate in  
Higher Education  
Email. [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu)  
Phone. 503.341.6067  
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University of Denver: Morgridge  
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Attention: Stephanie Krusemark, Higher  
Education Program  
2135 E. Wesley Avenue  
Wesley Hall, Room 100  
Denver, Colorado 80208

## Appendix D

### CONSENT FORMS



#### INFORMED CONSENT

### Screening Survey

You are invited to participate in the research project titled “Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment.” The study will explore your experiences, interactions and perceptions of the landscape and buildings of the University of Denver campus as an African-American woman. This research is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Higher Education from the University of Denver.

This research will be conducted by Stephanie L. H. Krusemark, (503) 341-6067, [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu). The research project is supervised by Dr. Frank Tuitt, Assistant Professor in the Higher Education Program of Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, (303) 871-4573, [ftuitt@du.edu](mailto:ftuitt@du.edu). By participating in this study you will contribute to the findings that will be used to inform the literature on communities of color’s experiences and perceptions within predominantly white institutions with regard to the manner in which the campus is designed architecturally.

Participation in this survey should take about 15-20 minutes of your time. Participation will involve responding to 9 open-ended questions about you, the activities you engage in while on campus, the amount of time you spend and how the design of the campus makes you feel. Participation in this survey is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the questionnaire at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please read and sign the following statement on the next page. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this valuable research project.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions and give my consent to participate in the research project titled “ **Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment at a Predominantly White Institution**.” I have asked and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this survey, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\*Please type in your name, signature and date. The document should begin to underline your information.

Name:

Electronic Signature:

Date:

\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this survey to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

*Thank you for your interest in this study.*

## Cognitive Interview Tour

You are invited to participate in the research project titled “Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment.” The study will explore your experiences, interactions and perceptions of the landscape and buildings of the University of Denver campus as an African-American woman. This research is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Higher Education from the University of Denver.

This research will be conducted by Stephanie L. H. Krusemark, (503) 341-6067, [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu). The research project is supervised by Dr. Frank Tuitt, Assistant Professor in the Higher Education Program of Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, (303) 871-4573, [ftuitt@du.edu](mailto:ftuitt@du.edu). By participating in this study you will contribute to the findings that will be used to inform the literature on communities of color’s experiences and perceptions within predominantly white institutions with regard to the manner in which the campus is designed architecturally.

This research study will require 60 minutes (1 hour) and no more than 120 minutes (2 hours) of your time. Participation will involve describing your experiences, interactions and perceptions of the University of Denver campus. Your responses will be audio-taped and video-taped during this cognitive interview. The cognitive interview will involve the exploration of your insight and reflections on the University of Denver environment (classrooms, student service offices, library, etc.). Therefore your willingness to allow the researcher to accompany you through the spaces while asking you questions will be required. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The tapes will be transcribed and you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of your recordings and give your final approval for use of your data within the research. The tapes will be destroyed right after being transcribed and the transcripts are approved by you.

Your responses will be identified by a pseudonym chosen by you and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please read and sign the following statement on the next page. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this valuable research project.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions and give my consent to participate in the research project titled “ **Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment at a Predominantly White Institution**.” I have asked and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this survey, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences. I have received a copy of this consent form. \*Please type in your name, signature, date and agreement or non-agreement to be audio-taped and video-taped. The document should begin to underline your information.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Electronic Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_ I agree to be audio-taped. \_\_\_ I do not agree to be audio-taped. \_\_\_ I agree to be video-taped. \_\_\_ I do not agree to be video-taped. \_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this survey to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

*Thank you for your interest in this study.*

## INFORMED CONSENT



# Reflective Journaling and Photo Documentation

You are invited to participate in the research project titled “Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment.” The study will explore your experiences, interactions and perceptions of the landscape and buildings of the University of Denver campus as an African-American woman. This research is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Higher Education from the University of Denver.

This research will be conducted by Stephanie L. H. Krusemark, (503) 341-6067, [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu). The research project is supervised by Dr. Frank Tuitt, Assistant Professor in the Higher Education Program of Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, (303) 871-4573, [ftuitt@du.edu](mailto:ftuitt@du.edu). By participating in this study you will contribute to the findings that will be used to inform the literature on communities of color’s experiences and perceptions within predominantly white institutions with regard to the manner in which the campus is designed architecturally.

This research study will require your individual self-reflection and documentation of physical spaces on the University of Denver campus (buildings, landscapes, etc.). Participation will involve engaging in reflective journal writing about the cognitive tour and responding to five research questions as well as capturing visual images of the DU campus. Your comfort in operating the disposable camera will be required. The researcher will pay for the photo printing process. The researcher will ask your permission to keep your journal, disposable camera and images captured by it to serve as artifacts of the study and to utilize in her analysis, interpretation and final presentation. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be identified by a pseudonym chosen by you and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this activity will address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please read and sign the following statement on the next page. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this valuable research project.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions and give my consent to participate in the research project titled “ **Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment at a Predominantly White Institution**.” I have asked and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this survey, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\*Please type in your name, signature and date. The document should begin to underline your information.

Name:

Electronic Signature:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this survey to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

*Thank you for your interest in this study.*

## Reflective Interview

You are invited to participate in the research project titled “Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment.” The study will explore your experiences, interactions and perceptions of the landscape and buildings of the University of Denver campus as an African-American woman. This research is being conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirements for a doctorate in Higher Education from the University of Denver.

This research will be conducted by Stephanie L. H. Krusemark, (503) 341-6067, [skrusema@du.edu](mailto:skrusema@du.edu). The research project is supervised by Dr. Frank Tuitt, Assistant Professor in the Higher Education Program of Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, (303) 871-4573, [ftuitt@du.edu](mailto:ftuitt@du.edu). By participating in this study you will contribute to the findings that will be used to inform the literature on communities of color’s experiences and perceptions within predominantly white institutions with regard to the manner in which the campus is designed architecturally.

This research study will require 45-60 minutes of your time. Participation will involve engaging in reflective conversation about your reflective journal and photo documentation as well as the research process overall. Your responses will be audio-taped during this reflective interview. The reflective interview will involve the sharing of your personal reflections, thoughts, feelings, reactions as well as a narration of the visual images (photographs) you have taken of landscaped areas and buildings on the University of Denver campus. Therefore your willingness to trust the researcher and to feel comfortable sharing your personal thoughts will be important. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The tapes will be transcribed and you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of your recordings and give your final approval for use of your data within the research. The tapes will be destroyed right after being transcribed and the transcripts are approved by you.

Your responses will be identified by a pseudonym chosen by you and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses.. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please read and sign the following statement on the next page. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this valuable research project.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions and give my consent to participate in the research project titled “ **Finding a Sense of Place: An Exploratory Portrait of African-American Women’s Experiences and Perceptions of Their Built Educational Environment at a Predominantly White Institution**.” I have asked and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this survey, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences. I have received a copy of this consent form. \*Please type in your name, signature, date and agreement or non-agreement to be audio-taped. The document should begin to underline your information.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Electronic Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be audio-taped.  I do not agree to be audio-taped.

I would like a summary of the results of this survey to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

**Appendix E**  
**ONLINE SCREENING SURVEY PROTOCOL**

1. Name and Email Address
2. DU Status
  - a. Current Student (Undergraduate or Graduate)
  - b. Current Faculty or Staff
  - c. Alumnae
3. Academic Information
  - School/College
  - Program/Department
  - Degree/Concentration
4. Demographic Information
  - Race, Gender, Age, Religious/Spiritual Affiliation, Socio-Economic Class, Country of Origin, Primary Language, Able-Bodiedness
5. How long have you been a student, faculty, or staff member of the University of Denver?
6. How much time do you spend on campus every week?
7. What activities do you engage in while you are on campus?
8. What feelings does the campus evoke in you?
9. Does your racial identity impact your perceptions of the campus? How so?
10. Does your gender identity impact your perceptions of the campus? How so?

## **Appendix F**

### **COGNITIVE INTERVIEW TOUR PROTOCOL**

I will ask you to select a time, date and specific location to meet on the DU campus. We will spend 60-90 minutes together. During the tour I will ask you to guide me through your daily routine on campus. I will ask you to point out and guide me through the physical spaces you have had either positive and/or negative experiences with as an African-American woman. I will ask you some questions as we tour the campus and move around the space regarding your experiences and perceptions. Our tour will be audio-taped and video-taped in order to allow me to recall your responses, reactions and behaviors. This will also enable the videographer to accurately and authentically capture the physical space design elements that you point out during our tour. At the conclusion of the tour, I will ask you to reflect on our experience and write down any thoughts in a reflective journal. In addition, I will provide you with a disposable camera to capture any specific spaces or building design elements to help you recall our experience and to provide visual images to reflect on in your writing. We will schedule a follow-up reflective interview approximately two weeks after our tour to provide an opportunity for you to share your reflections. Thank you in advance for your willingness to share your thoughts, feelings, emotions and stories within your built educational environment.

1. Name (Pseudonym selected by student)
2. How would you describe the campus? Why?
3. What feelings does the campus evoke in you?
4. Can you take me on your usual campus route?

5. How would you describe the University of Denver campus based upon its buildings and landscape? Why?
6. In general, do you feel welcomed or unwelcomed by the campus based upon its buildings and landscape? Why?
7. When you enter onto the University of Denver campus what buildings do you walk by?
8. What exterior elements do you notice about the buildings you walk by?
9. Do you feel any of the exterior elements are unwelcoming of your racial and gender identities? If so how?
10. What activities do you engage in when you are on campus?
11. Where do you spend your time when you are on campus?
12. When you enter the buildings you primary utilize, what interior elements do you notice?
13. Do you feel any of the interior elements are unwelcoming of your racial and gender identities? If so how?
14. Are there any specific spaces on campus that make you feel unwelcomed? If so, how?
15. Are there any specific spaces missing on campus that would make you feel more welcomed?
16. Do any specific exterior elements affect your sense of belonging? If so how?
17. Do any specific interior elements affect your sense of belonging? If so how?

18. Do any specific exterior elements affect your sense of respect for your identity? If so how?
19. Do any specific interior elements affect your sense of respect for your identity? If so how?
20. Do any specific exterior elements affect your perceived fit to the University of Denver community? If so how?
21. Do any specific interior elements affect your perceived fit to the University of Denver community? If so how?
22. Do any specific exterior elements affect your sense of learning? If so how?
23. Do any specific interior elements affect your sense of learning? If so how?
24. Do any specific exterior elements affect your thoughts on wanting to stay at the University of Denver? If so how?
25. Do any specific interior elements affect your thoughts on wanting to stay at the University of Denver? If so how?
26. Do any specific exterior elements affect your ability to interact with other students, faculty or staff members? If so how?
27. Do any specific interior elements affect your ability to interact with other students, faculty or staff members? If so how?
28. Do any specific exterior elements affect your ability to understand diverse groups and cultures? If so how?
29. Do any specific interior elements affect your ability to understand diverse groups and cultures? If so how?

30. If you had to name the predominant culture represented within the exterior elements of the building what would it be? Why?
31. If you had to name the predominant culture represented within the interior elements of the building what would it be? Why?
32. If you had to name the predominant gender represented within the exterior elements of the building what would it be? Why?
33. If you could make recommendations to the University of Denver regarding the exterior, interior and/or spaces of the campus what would they be? Why?

## **Appendix G**

### **REFLECTIVE JOURNAL AND PHOTO DOCUMENTATION PROTOCOL**

Please utilize the disposable camera to capture any physical spaces of the DU campus you have a positive or negative reaction to based upon your racial and gender identities. Your photos may be incorporated in the researcher's dissertation to provide visual illustrations and examples to your experiences and perceptions. The following questions have been designed to prompt your reflection on the cognitive tour and the primary area of research.

1. What importance do you place on the physical spaces of the University of Denver campus to your experience as an African-American woman? Why?
2. How did the cognitive tour impact your thoughts on this?
3. What specific elements of the campus impact you the most? How so?
4. Do you feel African-American women are respected at DU based on the physical spaces? How so?
5. Do you feel African-American women's identities are reflected within the design of physical spaces on campus? How so?

## **Appendix H**

### **FINAL REFLECTIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. What importance do you place on the physical spaces of the University of Denver campus to your experience as an African-American woman? Why?
2. How did the cognitive tour impact your thoughts on this?
3. What specific spaces on campus impact you the most? How so?
4. Do you feel African-American women are respected at DU based on the physical spaces? How so?
5. Do you feel African-American women's identities are reflected within the design of physical spaces on campus? How so?
6. What importance do you place on the physical campus spaces in regard to your sense of feeling welcomed, respected or safe on campus as an African-American woman?
7. If you could change any of the spaces on campus which would they be? How would you change them?
8. How would you recommend the university incorporate the African-American women's identity within its physical spaces? How so?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that I didn't ask?
10. What feedback would you like to provide to me about your experience participating in this research?