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The Adjustment of First Year African American Women to Predominately White Institutions: Implications for Best Practices

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The University of San Francisco

ADJUSTMENT OF FIRST-YEAR AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES TO
PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR BEST
PRACTICES

A Dissertation Proposal Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of International and Multicultural Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Maisha Beasley
San Francisco
May 2015

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

Adjustment of First-Year African American Females to Predominately White
Institutions: Implications for Best Practices

Currently, both scholarly literature and educational practice are lacking depth and scope about the lived experience of African American (AA) female students, and, as a result, they lack effectiveness for this population of students. In particular, they do not address the varying ways AA female students adjust to the university during their first year, the most critical year for student retention and persistence in the college experience (Pike & Kuh, 2005), nor do they recognize how intersectionalities of identities in AA women are salient to successes and challenges at PWIs. This study addresses this gap in the research by not only highlighting the challenges AA women face, but also by capturing their stories of leveraging resources and social interactions, academic attainment, and familial relationships as they navigate the normative terrains of predominantly White institutions. Using the theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and Community Cultural Wealth, the study was situated in the foundation laid by Christa Porter (2013) in her model on the development of Black undergraduate women. Utilizing narrative inquiry, it captured the experiences of 10 participants from a large, public university in the Western region of the United States through a reflection essay prompt, semi-structured interviews using a set of individualized

questions directly related to participants' reflection essays, and focus groups. All of the women who participated cited that some family member, whether parental or extended, assisted them during their journey to college and through the first year. In addition, the majority of the study's participants (7 out of 10) were not eligible to seek out the support originally mandated for oppressed communities, since these programs and services require that students be first generation and low income. The assumption made by predominantly White institutions that AA students who come from more affluent homes with college graduate parents do not need the same types of support as their first-generation, low-income peers is false and indicative of a deficit-thinking framework. This study provided valid examples of both first-generation and non-first generation students who needed the same resources as they progressed through their first year in college.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Maisha E. Beasley

Date

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4/29/2016

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4/29/2016

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4/29/2016

DEDICATION

My family, my friends, and to those who shoulders I stand on who have gone before me... I am forever grateful.

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Five years. For five years, I pursued this doctorate journey, and it all started when someone said I should, and then a school that will go unnamed told me I wasn't smart enough to attend their school. In the end, I am graduating from the program and the school that were just right for me. So I will start off by thanking Dr. Gregory "Coach" Wolcott for coming to a NODA conference in Arizona to find me just to tell me that he thought I could thrive in the International Multicultural Education program at University of San Francisco. Thank you for believing in me, Coach! To my dissertation committee, thank you for your words of encouragement, phone conversations, and pushing me to be a scholar, activist, and a better student.

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Actual First-Year Narrative

As a first-year Black woman at West University, I sat in Professor Mountain's lecture, "African American Nationalism in First Half of 20th Century." He began to speak about W.E.B. Du Bois and his theory of double consciousness, defined as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." I was consumed with an inner sensation—my experience had been corroborated with academic evidence. I characterized this realization as an unraveling effect, where I reach a state of critical consciousness, where emotions and thought process linked to my identity were being experienced on a communal level. Our education system exists as the prominent source of knowledge, but it also harbors the ideal American values projected on each individual who matriculates through each stage of the American education system. Prior to college, I suffered from varying insecurities due to the lack of "shelter" that needed to exist for me to calmly and peacefully coexist with my surroundings. I was first-generation Nigerian, but more importantly, society told me I was a Black woman. It was not until college that I realized that those identifiers were able to truly be combined and fluidly defined.

My reactions to Mountain's lecture were a feeling of self-worth and validation for my Blackness and the different feelings that arise from navigating life while constantly perceived as an "other," a "stranger," an "outsider," or simply "different." I did not understand how fluidness and interconnection of my attributes defined my experience far more than my biological makeup, until I was granted the opportunity to take an African American women seminar course geared towards dialogue and*

theorization of Black women, focusing on freshman Black women. I was confronted with oblivion to personal experiences and suppressed emotions and their impact on my identity. The image of four dynamic Black women professionals who all sought after higher education provided me with insight and wisdom that dominant methodological practices fail to offer. This was an image I had never seen in one frame prior to this class. The class provided me with tangible, practical resources and tools for surviving the “outsider” experience. The class allowed me to become more aware of inflictions that I had endured through and passively healed from, specifically my dissonance with my cultural ties and my sentiments towards men.

As an adolescent, I was always teased for being different; when I was around Black individuals, they created caricatures or satirized my culture as some distant, foreign object that they never had been taught to respect and understand. Other races labeled me as “White-washed,” because of my mannerisms and composure. I spent 19 years of wrestling with conforming to the standards others projected on me and the guidance I received through internal analysis and consciousness. My first year in college represents the “un-doing” I had to go through in order to deconstruct the conditions that had been defined around me, that limited my vision and relationship with others.

When I began to realize my true potential, adopt methods of self-love, and truly live my life modeled after what I felt was right, I was able to form a relationship with my parents of Nigerian descent. They were always critical and stern in their beliefs, but as a Black woman in America, your identity gives you the ability to transcend beyond constancy at an exponential rate due to their different oppressions, images, and characterizations. In American society, it is common to speak up and defend yourself,

rebellion is encouraged in the minds and spirits of American people. At the foundation of our educational institutions, before the introduction of the “isms,” exists the ability to obtain a future for yourself regardless of your past. My parents believe in the visions, but without the mindset. I was forced to continue a relationship that I oftentimes felt was purposeless and cold, only to find out as I matured through college that my parents were teaching me key methods on how to survive in society. The first realization was that Nigerians do not hold the burden of being Black mentally; even though the consciousness can arise through a physical alteration, they go about their lives with a mindset free from race. Additionally, they taught me to always set my standards high, rather than settling for the norm, and lastly, they engrained in my soul the ability to become docile externally, but to always stay true to myself. I grew up hating my parents because they existed as the antithesis of the falsified “American Dream” I created for myself based on the definitions of those who surrounded me.

As soon as I was taught to look within and was given courage through the academic resources and outlets at West University to have critical conversations directed towards analyzing the major changes that occur through life, in addition to my personality, my strengths, my weaknesses, and my vision and aspiration. This allowed me to embark on a different journey, the one less traveled. As a Black woman, when I made the conscious decision, followed by active effort, to go against the grain and introduce ulterior definition about myself and my community, I received the confidence and strength within myself and the various resources I have gained through higher education that allow me to envision a world beyond the barriers that exist around me.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

The short story of Lalah isn't fiction. Her story is also not the only story to be told. There are countless stories of African American (AA) women at colleges and universities all over the United States that go unnoticed or untold (Banks, 2009; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). In particular, the way in which colleges and universities address the social and academic support needs of AA women has rarely been addressed, thus the voices of these women have not been heard. African American women should be acknowledged as an emerging population of students who deserve special attention in the research literature, because the breadth of their experiences and a deep understanding of their college outcomes are not yet well articulated.

Having worked with AA women intensely for the past two years, and as someone who identifies as an AA woman with experience navigating various university systems, I feel moved to conduct this study, which will shed light on the unique experiences and circumstances of AA women in universities. In particular, my hope is to enhance the knowledge of faculty, staff, and families as it relates to how we prepare and transition these students for experiences at predominately White institutions (PWIs) around the country.

Statement of the Problem

As stated before, there is a void in scholastic research that examines the experiences of African American females in the collegiate setting (Morris, 2007; Moses, 1989). More specifically, research focused on the first-year experience of AA females is rarely addressed in the literature focused on college transition and retention. The literature that does capture the AA experience focuses primarily on the attrition or retention of AA males in the last decade. For the most part, this literature approaches the

experience of AA males from a deficit perspective and does little to engage their voices or understand the assets that these men bring to college. Comparatively similar, there is minimal literature that examines the experience of college success of AA females.

To this point, little is known about the lived experience of AA females in relation to the varying ways these students adjust to the university during their first year, the most critical year for student retention and persistence in the college experience (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Current research on AA females in college is limited to addressing issues such as stress and self-efficacy and their impact on student adjustment. In Lindsey et al.'s (2011) study, stress for African Americans was linked to intra and interpersonal relationships, time management, and academic success. In another study by Thomas et al. (2009), AA female college students were found to have low self-efficacy in the areas of academic achievement in comparison to their AA male counterparts. Studies also examine and reveal the role that family plays in AA women transitioning into PWIs. Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) conducted a study on first-year AA females in the first year of college and found that families have a significant role in the experiences of AA females. These are just two specific examples of research that focuses on specific AA women experiences in college, (Kennedy & Winkle-Wagner, 2014; Thomas et al., 2009), yet even they fail to recognize how intersectionalities of identities in AA women are salient to successes and challenges at PWIs.

My hope is to approach this study with a more holistic and complex intention to capture the actual stories and voices of AA females as a way to understand (a) how the intersectionality of race, gender, and class impacts their ability to adjust to institutions of higher learning that are classified as PWIs; and (b) their assessment of how the PWIs

support, harm, or assist in their transition through formally offered resources, programs, or information. More specifically, this study will focus on the areas of academics, collegiate socialization, and the significance of familial relationships in that process. Based on accounts from the literature that focus on AA females, these were the three areas where AA females had the most difficulty adjusting into PWIs (Kennedy & Winkle-Wagner, 2014; Moses, 1989). The ability to develop a well-rounded experience where the intersectionalities of their identity can be welcomed and cultivated is difficult for AA women when students, faculty, and staff are not able to recognize, respond, or relate to these intersections.

Background/Need for Study

The accomplishments of AA females are often highlighted in comparison to their AA male counterparts, yet these females still experience isolation, separation from loved ones, financial obligations, and the pressure to keep up with their peers academically (Lindsey et al., 2011). They are able to attain degrees from four-year institutions; however, they continue to be discussed in tandem with isolated aspects of their identity, usually their gender or race. Addressing issues AA women face from this monolithic paradigm is problematic to clearly addressing the issues of intersectionality they face at PWIs (Moses, 1989).

It is important to acknowledge that the spectrum of AA females entering college in this generation is expansive. They are coming from a diversity of environments, just as their peers are, yet in my 15 years of professional experience on four campuses, they are provided resources with the assumption that they are all from first-generation, low-economic, one-parent households. This limited understanding of the diversity of

backgrounds that AA females come from demonstrates the need for a paradigm shift in the way in which colleges and universities address the transition of AA women at PWIs. There is a need for an in-depth analysis and awareness of the diversity of experiences AA women face during their first year in college in order to create and/or draw attention to resources and programs that the entire population of AA women attending the institution can benefit from. I am conducting this study in the hope that student affairs practitioners, faculty, and university administrators will begin to think about ways in which they can support and challenge the experiences of AA females based on the assets that each uniquely brings to the college setting and that informs their adjustment to university life.

Although research has shown AA females to graduate at higher rates than their AA male counterparts, research has failed to address the reasons why AA females still have the highest attrition rates of all their female counterparts from other backgrounds (Vallani, 2013). This gap in our professional understanding of how to best engage and partner with AA females in their college pursuits further establishes the need for a study of this nature to critically examine the role PWIs, family, and AA females play in the adjustment to college. Through the narratives of AA women who have been successful in college, I hope to highlight experiences that were both challenging and triumphant in an effort to problematize the way in which PWIs view students of color as one-dimensional and to develop insight about the complex ways in which colleges need to engage these students.

Colleges and universities have both social and academic spaces where people are asked to engage and learn. Depending on the qualities of this environment or setting, AA females vary in their level of high academic achievement, comfort, and development of

successful relationships (Narcisse, 2013). Although several theories address the needs of adolescent and maturing females, not many theories specifically deal with the needs and problems many AA college females face with respect to adjustment during their transition and first year in college as a whole. This dissertation will highlight the experiences of AA women at a PWI in an effort to address the diversity and similarities in the ways in which they feel supported and marginalized by the institution as first-year students.

Additionally, research ties the retention and success of AA students to having visible role models and recognizable numbers of AA faculty on campus (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The other issue with adjustment is that parents and caregivers do not really know how to challenge and support the experiences of their AA female students as they begin their collegiate journey (Narcisse, 2013). With this need for support in mind, educators and administrators should be compelled to strategize and implement a way to expose the diversity of faculty and staff to AA women. In addition, programs aimed at supporting underrepresented student populations should create resources and support for families who may not understand the collegiate environment.

The aim of this study also is to add to the body of research that highlights how the intersectionality of AA females at these institutions can benefit from not only the healthy, happy, and holistic experiences of AA females at PWIs, but also the entire campus community. By seeing the beauty of AA female cultural capital and lived experience, PWIs can add to the richness and pluralistic of experiences offered and created on its campuses—and enhance the success of all students that are served there.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to address the dearth in research that delves into the experiences of AA females in college environments by not only highlighting the challenges they face, but also by capturing their stories of how they leveraged resources and social interactions, academic attainment, and familial relationships as they navigate the normative terrains of PWI settings. Currently, both scholarly literature and educational practice are lacking depth and scope, and, as a result, effectiveness for this population of students. In recent years, the focus of research has been primarily on the retention and persistence of AA males because of the concern about their persistence and graduation rates. While the experience of AA men is being highlighted in this way, AA females are rarely discussed in the scholarly literature nor are their learning and success needs well articulated in practice.

Some might argue that AA females in universities fare better than their male counterparts and, therefore, are not a priority at universities (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Allen & James, 1998). I would argue that these females need just as much attention as any other group at a university. Just because their issues are not as present in current literature as those of AA males, it does not mean that issues related to their adjustment do not cause them to drop out or not acclimate successfully to the university community. They experience similar issues to the same effect. However, not only do they deal with issues of institutional belonging, but also issues of adjustment in their home communities as their sense of belonging to a foreign college culture complicates issues of belonging in the multiple spaces that they occupy.

The need for this study is to bring some much-needed attention to the experiences of AA women at PWIs during their first year as a year that is key to their overall persistence and college success. The goal of this study is to share the diversity of experiences in a way that provides institutions with ideas and recommendations on how to engage and assist AA females from the moment they enroll in a PWI until the day they graduate.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the concept of adjustment will focus on the feelings, emotions, and experiences AA females experience in their first year of college at a PWI. In the research on college students transitioning into the university, there are three main tenets of adjustment: academic, social, and emotional (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). In considering academic adjustment, a student's ability to understand and meet academic expectations can vary based on their self-efficacy and prior schooling experiences (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Emotional adjustment for college students is really centered on one's ability to mesh well with the campus environment and begin to function independently from their family (Friedlander et al., 2007). Researchers have named social support and self-esteem as some of the categories that can influence positive or negative adjustment. It is important to note that while the theme of adjustment is universal for college students and there is some relevant research on AA females and their ability to adjust socially and academically to the university, the experience of AA females is not presented in the level of rich detail that would allow for the development of culturally responsive practices. In order to adequately highlight the issues of

adjustment that may arise for AA females, I have created an overarching research question, along with three sub-questions, that form the core of the study:

How do the participants' first-year experiences in relation to family relationships, academic pursuits, and social engagement in the college environment impact their ability to adjust to the collegiate environment?

1. What challenges do AA females face as a part of their adjustment to being a first-year student at a PWI?
2. What role do family relationships, academic preparedness, and social engagement, as defined by the participants in this study, play in the adjustment of AA females during their transition as a first-year student at a PWI?
3. What resources do AA females successfully use to navigate their adjustment to the first year of college at a PWI?

Theoretical Frameworks

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to use Black Feminist Thought and Cultural Community Wealth as theoretical frameworks as the foundations by which to examine the lived experiences of first-year AA females at PWIs.

Black Feminist Thought

Patricia Hill Collins's (1989) "Afrocentric feminist epistemology" (Ladson-Billings, 1996) presents Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as a paradigm of race, class, and gender in an interlocking system of oppression that re-conceptualizes the social relation of domination and resistance. Collins created an epistemology that provides a complex way to think about Black female identity through the intersectionalities of race and gender. These developed "truths" or criterion for knowledge provide validation to and for AA women who experience their identity in tandem, not in isolation of each other. These new truths shared within Black female spheres of influence can be seen as sanctuaries for Black women and men, who can be nurtured in these spaces to become

able to confront oppressive social institutions as a result of acknowledging their experiences as gained and shared knowledge (Collins, 1990). To further define the theoretical framework for BFT, Collins presents work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism as the core themes of the theory (Collins, 2002). Using these core themes as a backdrop, four major dimensions make up this epistemology, defining how AA females operate in the world: (a) concrete experience as a criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, (c) the ethic of caring, and (d) the ethic of personal accountability. These four criteria are important to dissect to provide the ways in which this framework will inform the study and the ways in which the study can inform this particular epistemology.

In order to understand how BFT fits in with the study of first-year AA women at PWIs, it is important to provide a brief overview of each of the aforementioned criteria. Lived experience as a criterion of meaning explains how the intersecting dimensions of their identity creates a specific way to know the world around them (Collins, 2002). Essentially, their “truth” is based on their lived experience, stemming both from both race and gender, and this truth merits its own validity. Use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims asserts that oral tradition sits at the core of African tradition. The ability to share knowledge from generation to generation through dialogue permeates each area of the AA women’s experience, including work, family, motherhood, etc. (Collins, 2002). The ethic of caring holds three components: uniqueness, appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy. They make up how Black women share and gain knowledge. This dimension asserts that while dialogue and experiences are important to the AA women’s experience, having the ability to show empathy and authenticity are central to the

validation of knowledge gained and shared with others (Collins, 2002). The ethic of personal accountability tenet of BFT is defined as not only the assessment of one's knowledge claims, but also the character and ethics of the individual who is providing the knowledge to others (Collins, 2002, p. 284). The last dimension of BFT is Black women as agents of knowledge, which simply asserts that Black women can validate their ideology through a lived and shared validation process (Collins, 2002). This validation comes through creating opportunities of lived experience to be shared in spaces that provide the knowledge of commonality to other Black women through purposeful dialogue. These dimensions help define how Black women gain identity and share the ideology of Black women-ness with others.

Those who agree with this articulation of BFT posit that females who ascribe to these dimensions use them as an ideology to deal with the micro-aggressions that arise in institutions of higher education (Ladson-Billings, 1996). These tenets allow participants in systems to distinguish between their own secure sense of self and the shortcomings of oppressive structures, thus gaining a better understanding of systems of oppression. Although the development of feminist theories have helped to make sense of female identity development, the implications of racism and the omission of class did not speak to the entire gamut of the AA female experience. Theories like BFT begin to address the variation of experiences based on race and class (Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013). For the purpose of this study, BFT will be used to create organizing principles that will be helpful to understanding the ways that AA women are taught and socialized before ever arriving at the university.

As the theory poses, the main tenets by which a Black woman operates are family, work, motherhood, and sexual politics. Thus AA first-year women come in with a strong sense of family, what it has meant to be mothered, her race, and her gender. The development of her identity cannot be separated from these experiences or facts according to Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1990, 2002). Therefore, it is essential for institutions to delve into how these formative experiences shape AA women's self-esteem, self-worth, and belonging in the first year. The first year is significant because this is when the majority of AA women at PWIs drop-out and do not return for a second year (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). While BFT provides a way of understanding the intersectionality of race and gender for AA women with respect to their lived experience, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) will address the view deficit thinking at PWIs in failing to acknowledge the skills and abilities students of color coming to these institutions that help them to navigate social and academic spaces (Collins, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Using CCW and BFT as theoretical frameworks, I hope to provide a lens for better framing my research on AA females at PWIs, who come to the university with a wealth of knowledge and experiences but are faced with pressures to assimilate to the dominant and often contradictory cultures of PWIs.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community Cultural Wealth stems from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is often used to show the impact of race and racism (both in the implicit and explicit) on social structures, practices, and discourse through theorization and examination of societies' injustices on oppressed people (Yosso, 2005). Out of this overarching theory stems CCW, which provides insights specific to education and challenges deficit ways of

thinking about the participation of peoples of color in institutions of higher education. Deficit thinking shapes a view of minority students and families as lacking certain essential factors to perform and succeed in academic institutions and assumes that students enter school without knowledge or skills that are normative to the larger cultural society and no support or value is the knowledge and experience that they already possess (Yosso, 2005). This deficit-thinking model is what causes institutions of higher learning to stereotype and “box in” students of color in the programs and services offered without addressing the knowledge and abilities these students bring to PWIs that could be developed and shared with the community.

The following themes guide CCW:

1. Culture refers to behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people.
2. Culture is defined by the material and non-material productions of people.
3. The characteristics of culture are not fixed or static.
4. Through the CRT lens culture can nurture and empower students of color.
5. Culture can draw from funds of knowledge. (Yosso, 2005, p. 75)

To further the understanding of CCW, it is important to get an understanding of what is meant by cultural capital. This is a term that asserts that the accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities are valued by groups in society and are privileged (Yosso, 2005). Out of these definitions and assertions come the tenets of CCW. There are six tenets or forms of capital defined in the theory: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. It is important to provide an overview of all of these forms for a deeper understanding of how the framework fits within this study specifically.

- **Aspirational** capital is having the ability to believe that hopes and dreams are possible in the face of actual and perceived barriers and/or obstacles.
- **Linguistic** capital is centered in the idea that dialogue around common experiences can help to develop social and intellectual skills.
- **Familial** capital is knowledge that is fostered amongst kin that carries a sense of community, history, and memory.
- **Social** capital highlights the ways in which people create networks by utilizing networks and their community.
- **Navigational** capital is the skills required to maneuver through social institutions that don't have communities of color in mind.
- **Resistant** capital is seen as offered knowledge and skills that are being fostered through oppositional behavior challenging inequality. (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-80)

The goal of CCW is to document and identify ways in which students utilize experience, resources, and networks as a way of transforming education and empowering people of color (Yosso, 2005).

Similarly, BFT asserts that the intersectionality of AA women's experiences creates opportunities for empowerment and knowledge (Collins, 1986). Therefore, the use of these frameworks helps to lay a foundation for this work with AA females at PWIs. Through examining the lived experiences of these women through dialogue and empathetic conversations with the researcher, the ways in which the participants have used their resources and networks to navigate through their first year will become apparent. BFT and CCW together provide a great framework for this study with the acknowledgement and assumptions that the onus for providing equitable, successful, fulfilling experiences for AA women lies on the institutions. By providing an outline of these two similar but distinct frameworks, I am developing a context for the research I will conduct. What I hope to share through my findings is the saliency in these frameworks and the breadth and depth they add to these and other theories. What is most

important to note about the similarities of these theories is the sense that they are both about redefining and reclaiming constructs that are inherent to and part of the history of higher education in the United States. BFT works in tandem with CCW because they both identify the significance and validity of the experience communities of color encounter as a result of oppression by the dominant narrative. Collins asserts in the same way Yosso does that the sharing of experiences, culture, and language are of value in the educational space. This is in direct alignment with my study in that AA females in the first year have experiences that live on a continuum but have some commonalities that should continue to be addressed in literature and in practice at institutions of higher learning.

Educational Significance

Griots in the African tradition were storytellers who passed the history of a tribe or family from one generation to the next. The importance of griots was not simply to tell stories, but rather they were to impart knowledge and wisdom to those who were to lead the next generation forward. Griots were seen as some of the most important people in the tribe, for without them history and knowledge of how to avoid previous pitfalls would be lost.

That is the purpose of this study and my calling to work with AA females at colleges and universities. It is to help them tell their stories so they can help other AA women who have yet to attend or are attending PWIs along the way. It is not enough to know if you do not share, and once shared, it becomes the responsibility of those who have heard to do something with the information to enrich themselves and those around them. By allowing a counter space for nine AA women who attend a PWI to tell their

story, they challenge stereotypes of what it means to be AA women adjusting to a space that is dominated by the society's mainstream norms.

From the voices of the AA women who have experienced and persisted through the first year, their intersectionalities and forms of capital used to navigate a PWI will come to life for those who have yet to think about this population of students. The importance of this research lies in the stories of these women, which are often unheard and untold. It has been shown in retention and persistence research that those who make it through the first year are more likely to graduate from an institution of higher learning. The research also references the importance of peers and models in this journey. Therefore these stories are important to pass on to high school girls and their families who play a significant role in their development and college choice.

Finally, this work is significant and important because it continues to challenge the deficit model that AA women face in society in general and in PWIs in particular. This study will show that not all AA females have difficulty adjusting to the same circumstances when attending a PWI. Some will fair better with navigating the dominant culture and find it harder to identify with women who look like them. Some of the women will find it hard to navigate family obligations and autonomy with their new academic agenda. These experiences and their ability to navigate through the first year will have commonality, but more importantly, provide a spectrum of experiences. This hope comes with the aspiration of providing faculty and staff with a counter-narrative of how AA women experience their first year at a PWI. Once the stories have been shared, it is the responsibility of those who have heard and read to address the issues and change the culture for everyone's experience to be seen as normative.

Definition of Terms

Within this research, I will use terms that should be defined for the reader. There may be terminology that is juxtaposed or terms used in a variety of ways that have the same meaning.

AA women – this refers to women of African American descent who live and were socialized in America. This includes women whose parents migrated to the United States from an African country but were born in the United States themselves, AA women whose family descended from slavery or indentured servitude, and/or AA women who are multi-racial but identify as African American. I may use the terms AA women or AA females to identify the population of this study.

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) – Black Feminist Thought is a theoretical framework that focuses on the intersectionality of race, gender, and politics of Black women. Throughout this paper, this theory may be referred to as BFT or Black Feminist epistemology.

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) – Community Cultural Wealth is a framework that invalidates deficit thinking for institutions of higher learning for people of color. The terms Community Cultural Wealth and CCW will be used interchangeably.

Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) – These are institutions of higher education that historically had a majority Caucasian population. Although the populations of these institutions no longer have Whites as the majority, they are still referred to as PWIs. I will also use terms such as institutions of higher education, colleges and universities, and institutions to describe PWIs.

PART II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

African American (AA) females come to predominantly White institutions (PWIs) with an identity shaped in the intersectionality of race, gender, and class that is not normative in dominant culture. They have to contend with stereotypes and oppression prior to college attendance, which is then magnified and/or problematized in a myriad of ways as they transition into the institution. Although there is a budding body of literature on microaggressions, campus climate issues, and ways to combat the counter narrative as it relates to AA students at PWIs, there is still a gap in the literature as it relates specifically to AA women. The missing research is twofold as it relates to this study: 1) the intersectionality of AA females' lived experience, which impacts the way in which they adjust to a PWi; and 2) the way in which campus climate issues impact the intersectionality of race, gender, and class as it relates to the adjustment of AA females. This study aims to shed light on these experiences in an effort to add to the discourse around campus climate and best practices at institutions of higher learning.

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of research that delves into the experiences of AA females in college environments by not only highlighting the challenges they face but also by capturing their stories of how they leverage social interactions, academic attainment, and familial relationships as they navigate the normative terrains of PWIs. In an effort to provide context to this study, this literature review will discuss the following: how this study's theoretical frameworks inform the examination of the literature, familial pre-college socialization, and college socialization and adjustment.

Intersections of Black Feminist Thought and Community Cultural Wealth on African American Females

Although Dr. Patricia Hill Collins's epistemology does not address the education of AA females specifically, her framework intersects with the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework that captures the experiences of students of color at PWIs. According to Yosso (2005), cultural wealth is defined as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppressions" (p. 77). As part of this definition, Yosso also defines "deficit thinking," the belief these students come to school without the knowledge or skills of the normative culture, and in addition, their parents do not value or support their education (p. 75). Using the definitions of cultural wealth and deficit thinking, Yosso developed a framework for communities of color in which a particular set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are not viewed as valuable by normative/dominant culture are seen as forms of wealth that can be obtained and shared within these communities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Yosso, 2005).

In a similar fashion, the epistemology of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is centered on acknowledging the oppression of Black women by the dominant culture. The intersection of oppression, which is based on race, gender, and class, is used as the foundation of a framework focused on the redefining of identity by and for Black women (Collins, 2002). Using a set of principles, Collins (2002) shows the saliency of creating knowledge claims for Black women that lie in both the social movements of racism and feminism. Thus, BFT provides an alternative view of how Black women validate their experiences and empower themselves through political and social movements that challenge the oppression of the dominant culture (Collins, 2002).

The central theme in both BFT and CCW is the notion that the dominant narrative does not in fact define all cultural, racial, or gendered experiences in America. The intersectionality of AA females' race, gender and class has a direct impact on their lived experiences. These experiences allow them to validate their identity using a set of values and knowledge that are shared by their community. This is a salient principle in both CCW and BFT. Both theories study and investigate the intersections of experiences and knowledge that are shared by communities of color, allowing them to challenge the White, middle-class narrative around normative practices and standards in society. Specifically, BFT challenges notions about family structure and who is seen as an agent of knowledge. Creating forms of knowledge and experiences that are salient and shared by Black women as a subculture of the community informs the knowledge claims, thereby providing agency the dominant culture; this does not make space for theories or epistemologies developed in the mainstream. In fact, identity development and social interaction models that are seen as broad-reaching theories often leave people of color out of the narrative. Thus, the creation of these models helps folks of color to explain, rationalize, and provide meaning to their own experience. Theories of identity development also may be helpful to understanding the socialization experience of AA females and the role that AA identity may play in college adjustment as a whole.

African American females at PWIs contend with the intersections of their race, gender, and class in a way that requires them to call on the values, skills, and knowledge they have gained as a result of their community and familial interactions. Thus, viewing the literature through a BFT lens will help to express the importance of lived experience in engaging AA females during their college transition. Using CCW will help to provide

a clear picture of how current literature is beginning to investigate the diversity of experiences college students are facing, as there are commonalities in the way in which they must navigate schooling practices in the United States.

Model of Identity Development in Black Undergraduate Females

Model of Identity Development in Black Undergraduate Females created by Dr. Crista Porter (2013) was designed as way to explain AA female development as an undergraduate to help both faculty and administrators understand the unique facets of their experience. The main tenets identified as a grounded theory are as follows: personal foundations, pre-collegiate socialization, collegiate socialization, interactions with others, and articulation of identity (Porter, 2013). In her dissertation study, Porter provided context and meaning around each of the areas, but for the purposes of this literature review, I will provide a brief overview of only personal foundations, pre-collegiate and collegiate socialization. Porter identified personal foundations as the lived experiences that provide AA females with a grounding based in history, legacy, and strength. Pre-collegiate socialization is seen as spiritual teachings, familial interactions, birth order, etc. that influence one's life prior to attending college (Porter, 2013). After which, collegiate socialization is described by Porter (2013) as how students interface in both curricular and co-curricular activities with staff, faculty, and peers at colleges and universities.

For the purposes of this literature review, I will focus on the pre-collegiate and collegiate socialization aspects of this theoretical framework to discuss the adjustment of AA females to PWIs. Although literature, including Porter's undergraduate model, lacks focus on the first year, this framework is the most useful in identifying how AA female undergraduates develop over time.

Under the tenet of pre-collegiate socialization in Porter's (2013) model, the following subcategories are identified: influence of religion/spirituality, socioeconomic status, influence of familial figures, birth order, strength, culture, media, stigma placed on Black females, and cultural climate at PWIs. Under the tenet of collegiate socialization the following subcategories are identified: involvement on campus, social interactions on campus, interactions among Black females on campus, strength, challenges of Black females on campus, support for Black females on campus, mentorship, media, culture, stigma placed on Black females, and cultural climate at PWIs. I will focus on the categories of familial figures and cultural climate at PWIs, as they most closely align with the topics that will be addressed in this study. This development model provides a good lens through which to guide and frame the literature review discussion.

Familial Significance in Pre-Collegiate Socialization

According to BFT, Black women are agents of knowledge who create a validation process in opposition to the dominant narrative that is oppressive to their identity (Collins, 2000). The intersections of identity that AA women contend with are race, gender, and class in the areas of work, family, politics, and motherhood (Collins, 2002). Given these intersections, AA women combat oppression by the dominant race and gender through their lived and shared experiences (Collins, 1998). Thus an important part of AA female socialization pre-college is their relationship with their family and, more specifically, their mothers (Porter, 2013). Literature supports the importance of family to most college student adjustment, but more salient for AA women is the impact the relationship they have with their mother is to their preparation for and adjustment to college (Banks, 2009). In addition to the mothering AA females receive is the

significance of their family relationships as both a hindrance and a motivation to their success in college.

Importance of Mother-Daughter Relationships

In her outline of BFT, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) discusses at length the importance of Black mother-daughter relationships. The central themes of this ideology are as follows:

1. The collectivist nature of childrearing shared by the Black female's community, including but not limited to "biological mothers."
2. Employment is an important part of the "mothering experience."
3. Mothering and motherhood is empowering to females.
4. An ethic of care that can be generalized and manifested into community and social activism.
5. Creation of a social expectation that promotes self-reliance, positive self-image, assertiveness, along with the ability to cope with societal pressures stemming from racism, sexism, and classism.

As supported in the literature, AA mothers, "other mothers," and daughters have a special bond, which helps them put into perspective the intersections of their identity. The resilience and dedication mothers show to their daughters provide a salient example and influence on how young AA females begin to imagine their pursuit of higher education (Narcisse, 2013). The importance of mothering is further demonstrated in a study conducted by Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014), describing how an AA female's mother and aunt began to influence her community college attendance while she was still in high school. In Porter's study (2013), which led to a development model for Black women undergraduates at PWIs, listed one of the tenets of the model as personal foundations. This tenet asserts that AA females have grounding based in history, legacy, and strength (Porter, 2013). When Porter asked her participants where their personal

foundation manifested, most identified their mother or “other mother” as the major influence. To this point, the lived experience of mothers is shared through dialogue and an ethic of care that allows AA females to validate their identity in the collective as opposed to silos of race or gender (Collins, 1998).

Importance of Familial Relationships

Based on the strong ties created in the mother-daughter relationship, leaving home can be one of most challenging aspects of going away to college. African American female experience is steeped in the traditions of family and community (Narcisse, 2013). Specifically, Porter (2013) points to these relationships as the foundation in the AA female’s preparation and transition into college. A study by Barrera, Sandler, and Ramsay (1981) provides a four-point outline of support offered to college students by their friends and families. They are: (a) guidance and feedback, (b) non-directive support, (c) positive social interaction, and (d) tangible assistance (Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay, 1981). Although not mentioned in the dominant narrative, these are all ways in which forms of cultural capital are salient to the AA female experience, as they learn to incorporate forms of cultural capital into the new environment of a PWI.

A study by Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) found that AA females chose to attend college based on familial support regardless of their parents’ educational background, supporting the CCW tenet of aspirational capital by which families remain optimistic about their dreams and hopes for the future regardless of oppression they may face as a community (Yosso, 2005). While there are studies by Sax (2008) that state that African American, Latino, and Asian American females in particular need to learn to individuate from their families in order to successfully adjust, there are also studies that

show the significant positive impact that families and, more specifically, mothers can have on students' college experience (Sax, 2008). This notion or claim is in direct opposition to how communities of color operate. Both BFT and CCW provide concrete data that show how the intersections of identity are not addressed or seen as normative in dominant society, thus researchers miss the mark in providing useful recommendations for the success of AA females at PWIs (Collins, 1998; Jayakumar, Vue, & Allen, 2013).

To illustrate this point, researchers who feel that AA females should find ways to individuate from their families have not delved into reasons for AA attrition. Even though there are a good number of students attending college close to home, there are students who choose to move farther away for college, and these students have less contact with both family and friends, which can negatively impact their transition into PWIs (Friedlander et al., 2007). One study supports this claim, finding that even the most academically talented AA students leave school based on lack of connection and encouragement (Ford & Harris, 1995). In addition, researchers were able to conclude that students who felt more supported by their families had higher levels of self-esteem and tended to adjust better to university setting (Friedlander et al., 2007; Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1995). African American women thrive in community settings, thus those with strong family ties may find it hard to find a similar community on campus at PWI, one in which their experiences are validated and essential social-emotional needs are met.

While family support is a cornerstone of AA female success at a PWI, the impact of family relationships can be both challenging and very supportive during the adjustment to PWIs. Again, I draw on the work of BFT to address the intersections of AA female identity. When race, gender, and class intersect for Black women, a diversity of

experiences must be addressed to show where similarities and differences exist intraculturally (Collins, 2002). To illustrate the complexity of an AA female's role in family, one study concluded that while there were family members who served as positive influences and motivators in continuing students' education, there were also family members who were a distraction to the educational process (Shaw & Coleman, 2000). Distractions such as these can lead AA females to find different strategies to navigate through the oftentimes oppressive educational process than those of her peers who have supportive family structures (Yosso, 2005).

The research by Shaw and Coleman (2000) showed the distraction of family was not often intentional but innate to the role of AA females. Their roles can be multifaceted and require balancing school, work, and home life, which can be difficult to maintain. In the book, *Black Undergraduates, Cultural Capital, and College Success*, Dr. Cerri A. Banks (2009) further maintains the importance of family support through interviews with AA female undergraduates who felt well adjusted to university life based on their parents' academic status and emotional support. The research found students whose parents attended college were able to assist in navigating them through the college environment in a way that students whose parents had not attended college could not. African American females without the social capital of a parent who had a college background felt at a disadvantage during their collegiate experience (Banks, 2009). Some first-generation AA females recall feelings of isolation from their families in the first year of college due to the inability of their family to relate to their new educational environment (Kennedy & Winkle-Wagner, 2014). Therefore, the work of researchers

should include studying the role family and community play in AA women's adjustment to PWIs.

Impact of K-12 Schooling

Finally, it is important to address the way in which AA female students make meaning of their identity and academic pursuits prior to coming to college. According to Porter (2013), many AA females consider their socialization to a PWI before ever arriving at one. Schooling from K-12 can begin to dictate for girls how they will develop their identity in relation to the dominant culture before ever attending a PWI (Porter, 2013). In K-12 schooling, AA females students appear as more disciplined and enthusiastic in classrooms than their AA male counterparts (Morris, 2007). Even though AA boys are not seen as astute in the classroom setting, the truth is they are not more or less intelligent than AA females, however, they are seen to have a more aggressive and assertive personality to the teachers and administrators with who they interact (Constantine, 2000; Constantine & Perna, 2000). In a study done by Edward W. Morris (2007), he found that teachers did not take well to their AA female students asserting themselves in classroom settings. More often than not, teachers are working to improve the social skills of their AA female pupils than that of their Caucasian female peers (Grant, 1992). What is interesting is that although AA female teenagers have been found to have strong academic pursuits and to do better than their male peers in terms of behavior, teachers still find these young females to behave inappropriately in classroom settings (Morris, 2007). In fact, in the same study these two views are illustrated in the data. According to Morris (2007), AA female teenagers were the highest represented minority out of AA males and Latina females in all AP courses in his study. Even though

AA girls were acknowledged for their academic successes, teachers often felt as though these young females were undermining their authority in the classroom (Morris, 2007). This view of AA females in academic spaces can impact how AA females approach academic spaces in higher education.

In this deficit view, AA female behavior can be counteracted in environments that espouse cultural sensitivity. One study showed that students who received support in community-based, college-going programs felt higher levels of support within them than in their high schools (Jayakumar et al., 2013). To further illuminate the positive impact a culturally sensitive school can have on AA females, researchers found that AA females were willing to share their issues with teachers and generally felt good about the campus climate and their ability to succeed when seen as valuable members of the community (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). Both studies are salient to AA females' schooling experience, and they can be directly correlated to how the socialization experience in their communities can be undermined by their experiences of oppression in the classroom.

In a study on AA students' preparation for college, Jaykumar, Vue, and Allen (2013) found that even students with high socioeconomic status were socialized in K-12 schools with a deficit model of thinking. Their research showed that a college-going culture was not promoted in their school, and students often felt like "outsiders" who were let in as exceptions (Jayakumar et al., 2013). Additional literature on this topic shares similar sentiments about the oppression students feel around schooling.

Alexander-Snow (1999) conducted a study on AA females who attended a predominantly White boarding high school and the connection of that experience to transitioning into a

PWI. The participants of the study noted that attending a predominately White boarding school for their high school years helped them to more successfully navigate and negotiate interactions with their White peers and professors in college (Alexander-Snow, 1999). In both studies, the researchers note that although students were able to better navigate PWIs than their peers, they still felt like “outsiders” who were seen as exceptions by the dominant culture.

Academic Preparation at Predominantly White Institutions

In addition to lack of preparation to handle the campus climate at a PWI, once on campus, AA students experience difficulty integrating academically and socially (Malaney & Shively, 1995). Research shows there is a direct relationship between academic expectations, performance, and self-efficacy (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). However, as stated earlier, AA students often feel unprepared when entering a PWI. Thus, their cumulative GPA can be the lowest of all underrepresented groups at the end of their first year in college (Malaney & Shively, 1995). Even more specifically, AA females often endure a double-bias of preconceived notions about African Americans and females (Moses, 1989). In terms of curricular offerings, AA females find themselves absent from academic lectures, leaving out the ways in which AA females have made significant contributions to education, science, and other areas of study (Moses, 1989). The lack of validation in the sharing of AA female academic contributions in the classroom could be in direct correlation to AA females’ unwillingness to speak up frequently in class, not to mention how their lack social assertiveness can play into their academic success at a PWI. While this holistic approach is idealistic and possible, other researchers assert that in the interim, the recommendation was made that the space that

explicitly supports AA students should ensure policies and practices are in place to support the intersectionalities of experiences at a PWI (C. A. Brown & Jayakumar, 2013).

These are just two studies that highlight the feelings of oppression that students face even when socioeconomic status is not a barrier to attending college. Schooling in the United States is shaped by the dominant society, and thus those with higher socioeconomic status tend to have a better understanding of the cultural norms and practices than students from a lower socioeconomic status (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005). This statement is central to the argument that as practitioners, researchers, and K-12 educators, we have to continue strategic and effective movement toward more culturally sensitive practices to make schooling more equitable. There is also more work to be done in the literature with respect to how schooling, mixed with the intersection of community norms, impacts AA female socialization prior to attending college.

College Socialization and Adjustment

Historical Background of AA College Access

When we look at the statistics on AA females in the university, we can track their attendance to historically White institutions back to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. In the report “Black Undergraduates from *Bakke* to *Grutter*: Freshman Status, Trends and Prospects 1971-2004,” the researchers provided a timeline for AA student enrollment into institutions of higher learning (Allen, 2005). Desegregation and affirmative action helped to usher in a new direction for previously segregated institutions with the inclusion of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, poor Whites, and others marginalized in the country (Allen, 2005). This new direction increased the enrollment of African Americans in college and those who were able to attain four-year

degrees. As of 2004, there were 1.8 million AA students enrolled in universities across the country, which is three times the number enrolled in 1965 (Allen, 2005) . Over the years, the number of AA students earning degrees from PWIs as opposed to historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) has increased (Allen, 1992). Since 1971, the number of AA females has surpassed that of AA men enrolled in college (Allen, 2005). With this statistic in mind, it is important to note that although AA females attend and graduate from universities at a higher rate than their male counterparts, it does not indicate that there are not issues around adjustment and retention that need to be addressed by gender (Moses, 1989). Providing a historical background of African Americans in higher education provides a foundation for this research project. Having data that shows more AA students attending PWIs and higher numbers of AA females graduating from these institutions is an indication that more research is needed to investigate issues and triumphs of these students in an effort to ensure their continued success both inside and outside of the classroom.

Predominantly White Institutions and Retention Efforts

A 2013 report called “The State of Blacks in Higher Education in California” showed an increase in AA students attending community colleges right out of high school and a decrease in those attending California State Universities and University of California institutions (Vallani et al., 2013). To further support this claim, the death of affirmative action led to communities surrounding institutions of higher learning being more diverse than the institutions themselves (Orfield, 1998). This indicates a stark culture shift from students pursuing higher education in the 1970s at the height of affirmative action (Allen, 2005). In considering this difference it is also necessary to

consider culture differences and make-ups of the families these AA female students are coming from as they choose to attend a PWI. As seen above, females from the African Diaspora are intimately connected to their families and, specifically, their mothers. In addition, they develop a sense of self in the classroom based on how their peers and teachers see them. Thus, developmentally they have to use the different forms of learned experiences and cultural capital to navigate new environments while trying to remain true to the identity they developed as a result of their familial relationships (Collins, 1989; Yosso, 2005) .

First, it is important to note that in the process of recruitment and retention of AA students, colleges tend to use a one-model approach that does not take into account in-group diversity and differences (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). To support this fact, Vallani, Siqueiros, and Dow (2013) revealed that there are more AA students attending college today with a mother and/or father who have graduated from a four-year university than ever before. Thus, it can be assumed that AA students attend universities with a wider range of cultural capital than in previous years. In addition, there is research that shows differences in familial and cultural ties for African students who are American citizens and AA students, and these differences should be taken into account when researching AA females in college (Kennedy & Winkle-Wagner, 2014). Even though culturally and developmentally they may have similar experiences, there is little research on how the diversity within culture can affect AA females' adjustment to a PWI, especially in the first year.

PWIs often seek to address issues of adjustment with norms that prove successful for the dominant culture in mind. In thinking about first-year students in general, studies

have found, through interviews with faculty and administrators, that the most successful college students tend to be involved in a variety of social and academic activities (Astin, 1984). The concept of involvement is defined in terms of what can be seen as positive experiences with clubs, organizations, part-time work, and faculty interactions (Astin, 1984). Not only do positive interactions have a lot to do with adjustment, but self-esteem can be a factor as well. Those who have a positive self-perception are likely to adjust better to university settings (Friedlander et al., 2007). In addition to using Astin's Theory of Retention and Socialization to show how positive experiences lead to positive adjustment, there are also studies from the AA female perspective that support and provide contrast current studies on college student adjustment.

The problem with a theory like Astin's Retention model is that it does not address the intersectionality of identities or the diversity of experiences that student of color may face prior to attending a PWI. The biggest challenge may be that Astin and others suggest that the goal is to involve students in a way that separates them from their families, not one that includes them as key to the college learning experience. According to Maldonado, Rhoades, and Buenavista (2005), the goal is to challenge colleges and universities to be more reflective of their diverse populations, as opposed to asking students of color to assimilate to White norms of college going. Similarly, other researchers assert that Tinto's model of integration, which is closely aligned with Astin's theoretical framework on retention, only values the dominant culture in relation to schooling (Brown & Jayakumar, 2013). Black students too are apt for success in schooling when their racial identities are validated and their cultural history/values are not dismissed (Brown & Jayakumar, 2013).

PWIs have in theory addressed issues of multiculturalism and diversity on their campuses, but in practice there is a decrease in the types of programs and practices designed to promote the retention and success of underrepresented groups (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). This inability to maintain consistent and effective programs for students of color at PWIs creates even more barriers to forming social ties, which leads to decreased retention (Brown & Jayakumar, 2013; Maldonado et al., 2005; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). These barriers to retention became evident when it was reported that less than 43 percent of Latino, Black, and Native American students attain a degree in the same six-year timeframe, compared to 63 percent of their White peers (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). This is why it is the responsibility of PWIs to provide not only racially diverse student bodies, but also retention practices that can positively impact the success of students of color (Maldonado et al., 2005; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Cultural Climate at Predominantly White Institutions

It has been made clear that students of color at PWIs struggle to find connections and assimilate to cultural norms (Maldonado et al., 2005). This is due in part to the campus climate students of color experience at PWIs. For AA students specifically, there is not group consensus about experiential satisfaction at PWIs; in large part, AA students are less satisfied with the racial climate at these colleges and universities (Walter R Allen et al., 1991; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Part of the cultural climate issue is the ways in which PWIs choose to not address issues of racial disparities from a holistic point of view (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Another pervasive issue at PWIs in respect to campus climate is that the activities and programs on campus are perceived to be focused on White culture, which students feel is a counter-narrative to

institutional claims made around the importance of diversity (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). To further support this claim is a study by Walter R. Allen et al. (1991), which found that only eight percent of AA students felt there were activities on campus that represented their interests. The systemic racism on college campuses feeds into the feelings of isolation and ostracism by students of color, which also leads to a high level of dissatisfaction and retention issues (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

In contrast, there are students of color at PWIs who have positive experiences on campus. A study by Malaney and Shively (1995) showed a 24 percent increase in involvement for AA students in co-curricular activities during the first year. The assumption can be made that if AA students increase their involvement on campus, they must in fact feel better about the campus climate. This, however, is not shown in research presented on AA students and, more intimately, with AA females at PWIs. In large part, AA students feel unwelcomed and harassed by the campus community, an experience echoed by their Latino counterparts (Malaney & Shively, 1995). For AA females, the socialization to college can have a lasting effect on their self-esteem and ability to mature (Moses, 1989). The opportunity to become involved socially seems more utilized by AA females than by AA men according to Moses (1989). However, along with the willingness to become involved is the need to stay connected to the larger AA community (Jackson, 1998). African American students who have faculty and peer support are more likely to adjust and persist through the first year than those who have a hard time finding community (L. Johnson, 2013)

There is not a quick and easy solution to transforming campus cultures, as it must shift through the values and assumptions that administrators, faculty, and staff hold and

their related commitment to moving the needle forward over time (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Research on campus climate shows that there are continued systemic and cultural barriers to making changes that can improve the racial climate of PWIs, yet researchers and advocates of the cultural pluralism continue the work to ensure such changes will occur and be sustained (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

The Intersectionality of the African American Female and Predominantly White Institution Experiences

For first-year students in general, adjustment is seen as the ability to successfully navigate the academic and social environment of a college campus (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Current data shows that although AA females are seen as strong and academically focused, there is still a need for support (Evans-Winters, 2005). While students can feel prepared academically for the intellectual rigor of a university life, the individuation from their family and friends can take a toll on their emotional stability (Chemers et al., 2001; Friedlander et al., 2007). As seen in the previous literature, the relationship AA females have with their family has a significant influence and impact on their college experience.

Furthermore, there is overwhelming evidence showing the success of a student is widely dependent on the experiences in their first year (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). While the retention and attrition of AA males is more widely studied (Sims, 2008), issues with persistence, specifically for AA females, is lacking. Even when college campuses create programming for diverse groups, they fail to consider group dynamics that can impact monolithic programming offerings (Jackson, 1998).

In her book, *The Unchosen Me: Race, Gender, and Identity among Black Women*, Rachelle Winkle-Wagner (2009) characterizes the way in which AA females navigate their relationships at PWIs into two categories: between-group tensions and within-group

tensions. The between-group tensions can be seen as microaggressions from peers, faculty, or staff (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Winkle-Wagner describes within-group tensions as interactions that exist with AA peers and family both on and off campus. Using these two categories helps to steer the conversation around the intersectionality of the AA female experience at PWIs as it relates to socialization.

The between-group tensions most AA females encounter at PWIs are related to academic success and social interactions. One study performed in the Northeast showed that first-year students' social expectations of their initial year in college are not in alignment with their actual experiences (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Allen (1985) claims that many of the feelings around isolation and marginalization are in direct correlation to lack of preparation for the collegiate experience. Another way AA females experience marginalization and tension in the first year are in the form of microaggressions, which are defined as subtle acts, often identified as verbal or nonverbal insults (McCabe, 2009).

A study by Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) discussed their Latino/a participants' experiences with microaggressions at length, concluding that these students' feelings of rejection were a result of trying to integrate into the dominant culture. Similarly, a study on high-achieving Black students discussed how other races would question AA students' academic ability through rejection (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). The research on AA females and the microaggressions they face in tandem with their awareness of how the intersections of their identities are at play in academic and social spaces can lead them to code-switch or act differently based on their environment (Banks, 2009; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Even though research does not provide a wealth of findings on the topic, the notion of being seen as "too White" or "too ghetto" pervades

AA females' experience in a manner that AA males do not have to contend with as part of their normal interactions (Banks, 2009; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). This form of microaggressions is evidenced by one participant in a study by Winkle-Wagner (2009), who shared that a White peer stated that she considered the participant to be White, based on the assumption that her actions weren't "Black" in nature. Statements like the aforementioned happen at PWIs frequently, which chip away at familial, navigational, and resistance capital AA females build over time. In addition, microaggressions strip away the intersectionality of identity that most AA females hold salient to their college-going experience (Brown & Jayakumar, 2013).

When discussing within-group tensions, AA females tend to work to fight off stereotypes within their own cultural group and, even more specifically, the intersections of race and gender (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). These intra-group dynamics play out in a myriad of ways, usually around one's actions and socioeconomic status. African American females from predominately White communities can be seen as "acting White" by their peers (Banks, 2009). To further describe what is meant by "acting Black," Winkle-Wagner (2009) states: "to claim an identity as a group member meant acting, dressing, speaking, or thinking in a particular ways" (Loc. 1400, Kindle). This explanation shows that AA female students again have to question the intersection of their identity as justified in the dominant culture because of personal preference for dress, speech, or actions. This type of tension can also lead to the isolation that AA females feel as result of being on a PWI campus (Banks, 2009).

Not only do tensions around how their preferences and actions influence how they are viewed on a racial continuum, but also AA females have to deal with the intersection

of class and how that impacts intragroup dynamics. In a study by Brown and Jayakumar (2013), the researchers contextualize the limiting nature of the monolithic view of what it means to be Black. The research suggests that while Black can mean that a student has come from a low-socioeconomic background, it can also mean that a Black student can experience oppression in the form of microaggressions and privilege based on socioeconomic status in tandem (Brown & Jayakumar, 2013). The intersection of these identities can often lead to feeling of oppression by both the dominant group and the AA female's own cultural group (Banks, 2009). Although race and class can be bounded and fixed ways that at times seem difficult to alter, the work of schools is to shift the dominant culture in ways that create alternative safe spaces and norms where all intersections of one's identity are validated (Brown & Jayakumar, 2013; Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

Conclusion

Although the current research aims to explain how and why AA females develop in ways that differ from their Caucasian female counterparts, more attention needs to be paid to socio-economic status, environment, and external influences that play a significant role in how young females *experience* their college years. The purpose of this study is to add to the body of research that delves into the experiences of AA females in college environments by not only highlighting the challenges they face but also capturing the stories of how they leverage social interactions, academic attainment, and familial relationships as they navigate the normative terrains of PWI settings. Given the influence of family and community on AA females, parents, extended family, and community environments need community organizers to help family members adequately prepare

themselves and their budding students for the collegiate experience. The ability to create a culture of success, self-esteem, and self-preservation that permeates young AA females' educational experience from childhood through adulthood will not only be beneficial to their academic and career success, but also to the college/university as well. We need to be persistent in our work to understand the ways in which we can empower AA females to use their agency and knowledge claims to combat the oppression placed on the intersection of their identities. In addition, we must continue to challenge normative stereotypes of AA females that do not allow for a wide spectrum of identities to be validated. We must also provide families with the tools and resources that will add to the cultural capital they share with their daughters in preparation for and during their transition into schools. Overall, we must address the monolithic approach used to engage AA females in outreach and programming efforts made by those who are in charge of the spaces and places where these women can feel most validated (Brown & Jayakumar, 2013).

PART III: METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to add to the body of research around the significance of African American (AA) females' first-year experiences in college environments. By identifying specific successes and challenges they have faced and highlighting individual stories about navigating the normative terrains of predominately White institution (PWI) settings, I hope to shed light on the varied yet deeply woven stories of their first-year experiences.

Purpose of the Study

For the purposes of this study, I explored the adjustment process for AA females in their familial, academic, and social lives as first-year college students at PWIs. When discussing adjustment, I am referring to the ways in which AA females are able to navigate and adapt PWI environments and create new norms in their interactions with their community of origin. African American females go through a series of shifts in their transition to college, including moving from the comforts of home and community to an institution of higher learning: from the familiar to unfamiliar. This study took an intimate, in-depth look at the college transition period of AA females to get an accurate understanding of their experiences as they navigated the first year, including campus climate and off-campus relationships with family and friends.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the concept of "adjustment" will be used to highlight feelings, emotions, and experiences AA females encountered during their first year in college. In order to adequately highlight the issues of adjustment that may arise, I created an over-arching research question, along with sub-questions for further inquiry:

How do the participants' first year experiences in relation to family relationships, academic pursuits, and social engagement in the college environment impact their ability to adjust to the collegiate environment?

1. What challenges do AA females face as a part of their adjustment to being a first-year student at a PWI?
2. What role do family relationships, academic preparedness, and social engagement play in the adjustment of AA females during their transition as a first-year student at a PWI?
3. How do AA females successfully navigate their adjustment to the first year of college at a PWI?

Research Design

I conducted qualitative research to capture the complexities and nuances of the experiences of AA women at PWIs. In order to accurately and adequately depict these experiences, I gathered three to four-page reflections written by all of the participants, which detail the most salient memories/reflections from their first year at a PWI.

Qualitative Approach

The basis of a qualitative study is to allow the research and the reader to create meaning out of the worlds they are studying (Merriam, 2009). Strauss and Corbin (1990) identify some key benefits of using qualitative research in capturing narratives and experiences within given contexts, including the following:

1. ability to provide specific details about a phenomenon and/or issue that is not easily explained using statistical data;
2. ability to leverage the researcher's own experience and positionality with regards to the research topic and participants; and
3. ability to create deeper meanings of phenomenon uncovered in the inquiry process.

For these reasons, a qualitative approach complements the conceptual frameworks and purpose of this study. To be more specific, however, this study will use some methods

outlined in critical ethnographic research, which will further allow for a multidimensional and robust data collection process.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry can be seen as part of the ethnographic family in that it is an in-depth study of people as it relates to their experiences, a time in their lives, a place, or social interactions (Clandinin & Huber, in press). The use of narrative inquiry as methodology allows for the participants to share their stories in a way that is created in collaboration with the researcher (Conle, 2001). According to Clandinin and Huber (in press), the use of a methodology where participants are asked to share their experiences from an autobiographical perspective is different than other forms of study in that the researchers are able to study the complexities of the relational composition existing in the lived experience. Thus it is important for the researcher to provide a framework using one or more of the following areas to the participants as a way of conceptualizing the research: temporality, sociality, and/or place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In making sense of each of each of these, it can be understood that the research must set the scene for the stories of the participants to be told. The temporality of the research provides a timeframe for participants to focus the attention of their inquiry; sociality is the conditions based in cultural, social, or institutional perspectives participants hold for themselves; and place speaks to the location of the story (Clandinin & Huber, in press).

Once the time, manner, and place the participants will use to tell their stories are set, determining how the stories will be shared becomes the next task for the researcher. Although there are two forms of storytelling according in the narrative inquiry schema, I will ask my participants to start our work together by telling stories (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000). By beginning with telling stories, I am asking the women in my study to think about events that have already happened to them while in college (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The alternative method would ask participants to live their experience while participating in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

When participating in narrative inquiry as a form of research, there are considerations that need to be made. In discussion on narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) and Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray Orr (2007) provide an outline for what researchers should consider when using this design as a framework. In the work by Clandinin and Huber (in press), the three main considerations are identified as personal justification, practical justification, and social justification. In this research, it will be important for me to share why I am conducting this research, along with the practicality of this work in terms of new learning for PWIs and the social impact it can make for future first-year AA women who attend these institutions of higher learning. Finally, when conducting this type of research, the stories themselves eventually have to be analyzed to make meaning of a phenomenon experienced by the participants (Clandinin & Huber, in press). Since these will be small stories that focus on the first year, it is important to note that it is not only the sharing and re-sharing of stories that make the analysis rich, but also the way in which the participants situate themselves in the story that is equally as salient (Georgakopoulou, 2006). To further illustrate this point, when the researcher poses a prompt for the inquirers to reflect on the telling of their story, it is not to provide a directive for an efficient or correct answer, rather it is to gain a mutual understanding between the research and the participants (Habermas, 1984). This theory is called communicative action, and Conle (2001) uses it as way of sharing the importance of how

the participants choose to share their stories in non-chronological order, including and excluding information based on their memories of their experience. This type of storytelling allows for a continued dialogue between the researcher and the participants in an effort to make meaning of the stories as a collective piece of research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The goal of narrative inquiry is to provide readers with the analysis of stories, and from those stories, conduct interviews that hopefully show shared and unique experiences of the participants that can be used in practice and to further research on a particular population (Conle, 2001).

Participants

The participants for this study came from a large, public university in the Western region of the United States. When using narrative inquiry, the criteria for the study needs to be set by the researcher before the population can be selected (Merriam, 2009). Thus, the criteria for this study was AA women who lived in residence halls their first year, completed a seminar course for AA females, and were willing to participate in the study throughout the summer. In addition, the females were from a variety of geographic areas. The researcher was able to attract both in-state and out-of-state participants. Finally, the AA females had to be willing to identify their socio-economic status, major, and family make up (i.e., mother, father, sister, etc.). All of these criteria helped to identify participants who could provide a diverse look at lived experiences with respect to feelings of adjustment for this population.

In order to recruit up to nine females for this study, an email was sent females who took the seminar course in the spring of 2014, winter of 2015, or spring of 2015. The course that was used to gather participants was developed, designed, and facilitated by

two colleagues and me in the winter of 2014, specifically to address the needs of AA females at a PWI. The course was initially open to only first-year students and has since expanded to include all class years. It was used to recruit participants due to the familiarity of the researcher to the students. In addition, the course is taught on a volunteer basis, as the researcher's official position at the university does not include direct interactions with the student population. The email was sent to all cohorts in June 2015 and included a link to a Google form that asked potential participants fill out the following fields:

- Name
- Phone number
- Email address
- Quarter they were enrolled in the course
- College class standing
- Hometown
- Major
- If they were in the city of West University (if not, they were asked what video chat technology they had access to)

As a result of the email, 18 women completed the initial intake form. As a method of reducing the number to a more manageable participant group, I removed one participant who didn't fit the criteria of living on campus as a first-year student. The other 17 participants were sent a consent form to sign and return to me. Out of these participants, 12 returned their consent forms. I sent the remaining 12 a reflective journal prompt using an online form system (www.jotform.com). As result of this prompt, 10 submitted reflections, and these women became the participants who completed the study.

Setting

The setting of the university where the study will be conducted is on the West Coast at a large, Research Institution. It will be referred to as West University throughout this study. The institution is part of state university system, with eight schools in the system. The university's total population is 29,663 undergraduate and 12,121 graduate students. African American students make up about 4 percent of the population, which is a mostly domestic campus with about 12 percent of the undergraduate student population being specified as international. The university is made up of approximately 55 percent women and 44 percent men. The number of AA women at this institution was not identifiable; however, it is important to note that only 33 percent of the women at this institution are faculty and only 26 percent of the faculty are from underrepresented backgrounds. Although retention and graduation rates are high at this university, AA students are listed as one the highest groups to not persist to graduation. The reason for choosing this institution is centered on accessibility to students, the diversity of the campus population, and its urban environment.

Data Collection

The research for this study was conducted in three parts. In part one, 10 females responded to a reflection essay prompt. In the second part of the study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with all 10 participants using a standardized set of questions that asked of all participants individualized questions that were directly related to their reflection essay. The third part of the research was focus groups facilitated by the researcher to allow the participants to hear each other's stories and ask questions that stemmed from their individual interviews in a group setting. All parts of this research allowed me the ability to extract rich data that tends to support claims made around the

experiences of AA females in their first year of adjustment. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved me to conduct research using the participants as outlined in the IRB application process. (See Appendix A for the IRB application and Appendix B for the IRB's approval.)

Reflective Essay

The reflective essay prompt was as follows:

In a reflective essay, not to exceed four pages, please share your experiences as a first year student at West University*. In this piece discuss your transition from home to the residence halls, changes in your relationships both family and friends, academic and social interactions on campus. Please address each of the areas in your narrative using both positive and challenging experiences.

The narrative prompt was created to help the participants provide a firsthand account of their lived experiences as AA females during their first year at a PWI. More specifically, it served to convey the feelings and emotions these females experienced when working to adjust academically and socially to PWIs.

Individual Interviews

Once the narratives were collected, I followed up by sending a Google form to set up individual interviews with each participant. Although I created participant-specific interview questions unique to each participant, all were asked the following questions:

1. What would you identify as your socio-economic status?
2. Did you decide to stay close to home for college or explore a different environment further away from home? Why did you make this decision?
3. Was there a reason you chose a PWI over a HBCU?
4. What has been the easiest area for you to adjust too? Academics, social activities, or new relationships with family members and friends from home?
5. Academically do you feel like you were prepared to be at a Research Institution that is predominately White?

6. What social activities did you get involved in your first year?
7. How often did you go home your first year?
8. Did you feel isolated and/or included in classroom discussions and/or projects?

This study was completed in the summer and fall of 2015. The individual interviews were conducted in person and via video chat technology and were all audio recorded.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were facilitated mostly in person, with one focus group including a mix of in-person and video chat technology. Two of the focus groups were conducted in a meeting room on campus, and one focus group was conducted in the researcher's home at the convenience and availability of the participants.

The reflection essay, interviews, and focus group meetings were further by my field notes, observations and reflections on interactions with the participants.

Data Analysis

The interviews and focus groups were conducted, and the data from both was transcribed by a transcribing company. Once the reflections and observations from both are completed, the data from the interviews will also be transcribed by an outside source for analysis. I coded some of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews using the tenets of CCW and BFT to draw comparisons of the participants to that of the theoretical frameworks. Although the semi-structured interviews will be analyzed and coded, I will work with the participants to ensure their reflections are presented without manipulation or generalization to that of other participants, which is one of the most salient tenets of narrative inquiry (Gergen, 2004). Therefore, the analysis of this research will be

not be conducted as a collective, but assessed individually in relation to the conceptual frameworks and body of literature presented in Part II of this dissertation. In most qualitative research, data is collected and evaluated for generalities; in narrative inquiry, the uniqueness of each story is valued in order to provide the reader with the ability to imagine possibilities that could work for their particular institution (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The analysis will include careful attention to ensuring that each story reflects its uniqueness while also remaining multi-layered and complex (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This is particularly important when using frameworks like CCW and BFT. The main claim of BFT is that the intersectional experiences of AA women must be lived and shared through dialogue (Collins, 2002). Thus the semi-structured interviews will support the individual stories through themes that arise in the participant's responses. In tandem with the importance of the interviews is the ability of the AA women to share the forms of capital they develop before, during, and post their first year at a PWI. This assertion in their narratives challenges the deficit thinking of institutions and challenges them to assist in the development of skills and talents from the diversity of the population they serve.

Introduction of the Participants

Lalah

Lalah is a third-year student with a major in psychobiology; she is from the San Fernando Valley in California. She identified as middle- to upper-middle class. She took the AA women seminar course her first year at West University, which was in the spring of 2014. Lalah is a first-generation Nigerian whose parents came to America in their early twenties on student visas. They raised their three children, two boys and Lalah, in the same house outside of Los Angeles County from the time Lalah was born until

present day. Lalah's experience as a Nigerian-American student is shaped by her struggles to fit into dominant narratives of Black culture that she couldn't ascribe to within the African American culture or from other ethnicities that could only identify her one way.

Carmen

Carmen is a fourth-year student from a small town in Southern California. She has an older brother, mom, and dad, and she identifies her family as having upper-middle-class socioeconomic status. In her interviews with the researcher, she mentions her mother and grandmother as the main parental figures in the home. Her mother and father are married; however, Carmen's father works out of the country running a health clinic with his brother and comes back to California during the holidays and over the summer. Carmen took the AA women's seminar course during the spring of 2015.

Tonette

Tonette is a second-year student from the Southwest region of the United States. She identified as having a middle-income family made up of a mother, father, and brother. She is a political science major who took the AA women seminar course in the winter of 2015.

Sarah

Sarah is a fourth-year student from Texas who considered herself middle class. A sociology major who took the AA seminar course in spring 2015, Sarah was raised by her grandmother and aunt in the home with her sister. She has an older sister who assisted in the college application process.

Sarah's grandmother and aunt guided her toward the path of college. She explains how this dynamic came to be,

It was just me, my mother and then my middle—my middle sister is 15 months older than me—and my oldest sister, but my oldest sister, she went to college when I was five. Our dad had been incarcerated since [I was] one-ish. So he was never a part of our lives as a figure. [When I was] eight our mom passed away we moved to [state], and then it was the same, me and my sister, my middle sister, and then it was my grandmother and my aunt, which is my grandmother's youngest daughter.

Janet

Janet is a third-year student with a major in psychology. She was raised in southern California with her mother, father, and three brothers. Janet identified herself as upper-middle class. She took the AA women seminar course in spring of 2014.

When Janet and I met to talk about her first-year experience and how she made the decision to stay close to home, she provided some background on her family and explained it thus:

But me and my brothers have lived and seen a completely different life than they [her parents] have. But that was for me always counterbalanced, which is why I feel I got through it so well. It was always counterbalanced for me at home because my dad grew up in Compton and my mom grew up in South Central. And some of my family still live there. So they were not shy or not, they did not shy away from that in their upbringing.

Ciara

Ciara is a second-year student from the Central Coast. She was raised by her mother with her brother and stepfather in the home. She is majoring in business economics and took the AA women seminar course in the winter of 2015.

Ciara opened up about her upbringing on the Central Coast with sharing her racial background, family make-up, and a little about her hometown,

My mom is White. My dad is Black. I don't live with him. My stepdad is also Black. Then I have one half-brother who is full White, so his dad was White. He's

from my mom's side. I grew up in a very nice area. It's a really small town. I think majority White, and then probably second, other. Black people, Indian, all of that is put together. It's a pretty nice area. Really small. It's a friendly area. You cannot lock your door all night and leave your windows down, and you don't worry about it.

Jules

Jules is from south Los Angeles from a lower-middle-income family. She was raised by her mother and father along with two brothers, and she has additional siblings from her father's previous relationships. She is a second-year student whose major is currently undeclared, and she took the AA women seminar course in spring of 2015 after not being able to stay in the course during the winter of 2015.

When describing her family dynamics over the course of our initial conversation, Jules shared that her father is the rule maker, while her mother is more lenient as long as Jules stays within the religious guidelines of their Muslim faith.

Donna

Donna is a second-year financial actuarial mathematics major from northern California. She was raised by her mother in the house with an older sister and younger brother. Donna identified that she comes from a working-class family, and she took the AA women seminar course in the winter of 2015.

Reading Donna's reflection and knowing a bit of her background from her time in the AA seminar, I asked her to provide a more in-depth overview of the environment she was raised in,

I grew up with my mom, only my mom. My dad wasn't there. My mom had a girlfriend my whole life until four or five years ago, then she got married. But before all that, it was just me and my mom and my older sister and her girlfriend. So growing up, I never was abused or anything, but my mom and my older sister were. It was like I was that child who was good. At least, I was good. I did my work; I didn't talk back, because I didn't want to get in trouble. So I didn't

have to deal with any of that, but I had to see it, so I grew seeing that stuff. As I got older, my mom finally left the person that she was with. She had sent my sister and I to live with my dad, because my dad was married to this woman named Julie. She was like my stepmom. And she found us. She is the sweetest person ever. She found us. It was like perfect timing. So when she found us, my mom was going through a patch, so she sent us out there with them.

Asya

Asya is a second-year student from an upper-middle socioeconomic status background in the San Diego area. She was raised in a household with her mother, father, and sister. Asya is double-majoring in art and African American studies. and she took the AA seminar course in the winter of 2015.

During my individual interview with Asya, I asked what growing up with her parents was like, and she shared,

At home, there wasn't much freedom. There was really no going out. Every now and then, there will be a party, like a function or something like that. I would think about asking my parents, and I would just be like, no, because I already know what they're going to say. They're going to ask questions about a chaperon, what time I'm coming home, who's going to be there, who's hosting the party. I didn't always want to have to deal with that. As Asya talked about growing up in a strict, two-parent household, she explained the roles each of her parents played in her upbringing.

Angel

Angel is a second-year student from the High Desert area of southern California. She identified herself as lower income, being raised by her mother and step-grandmother along with her younger sister. She is a pre-human biology and society major who took the AA seminar course in winter of 2015.

Angel's life prior to college was met with a lot of transitions. She revealed in our first conversation,

So I come from a low-income family. I was born in [city], but I moved around a lot. So I kind of grew up in Nevada and parts of California, so just the desert. Growing up is my mom, one of my younger sisters who is 11, and my step-dad.

My mom had other boyfriends. Occasionally we lived with my [step] grandparents.

Role of Researcher

As the researcher, my position in the study was to create opportunities for first-year AA females at a Research Institution that is categorized as a PWI to share their experience from a narrative perspective. I served as active participant in the role of interviewer during the research process. Recording the in-depth interviews of second-year AA female students also allowed the participants to think critically and reflectively about their experiences as first-year students. As the researcher, the ability to read these females' stories and delve deeply into their lived experiences will help to create depth and breadth in the analysis of the participants' responses. Having this opportunity will allow me to share the multiplicity of AA female's experiences in the first year of college. This will provide validity to my study, which aims to share with student affairs practitioners and education researchers the wide spectrum of AA female experiences at a PWI. Moreover, these experiences can show the importance in providing support and resources to this specific population of college students.

My draw to this topic is twofold. As an AA woman who persisted through a PWI in the late 1990s/early 2000s, I know the challenges and triumphs my friends and I experienced as students. According to the research, AA females often feel isolated and marginalized by their Caucasian counterparts while attending a PWI. This was not my experience, as I felt marginalized by other AA students on campus during my first year. Even as I transitioned into the collegiate environment, the summer prior to starting college in an on-campus college summer program, I was uncomfortable around other students who looked like me mostly because of previous experiences with AA females in

high school. Being raised in a predominately White environment, I had developed coping mechanisms for addressing microaggressions and bigotry of Caucasian folks. What was more difficult for me was adjusting to developing relationships with other AA females. Although I figured it out, they found it difficult to understand and accept my upbringing. Having come from an upper-middle-class background with an understanding of the perils of urban environments was often hard for other AA students to comprehend. Therefore, I had to learn a new normal to adjust socially. Academically, I didn't find it hard to adjust. I had always known it was my right to discuss my grades with my professors and perform to the best of my ability to obtain a desired result. From a family perspective, leaving home was a way of escape from the family socialization of taking care of younger siblings and relatives. In addition, I was observing a great deal of turmoil with close relatives that I wasn't able to handle emotionally or do anything to remedy physically.

As destiny would have it, my career path lead me to work with first-year students and their families in orientation and first-year experience programs at various institutions over the last 14 years. In this work, I have seen how important the transition process is for the entire family. Students come into a new experience that they will be moving through into adulthood with a bit of anxiety. Their families will have to transition from full-time parents to parents of pseudo-adults. In this transition, there are experiences that are similar, but in my anecdotal observations, the way in which AA females transition has a unique twist. Unlike their AA male counterparts, they have different responsibilities in the home, are marginalized and posed negatively in the media, and are engaged awkwardly by their new peers at PWIs. Not just students who are different from them culturally, but those who differ from them academically and economically.

I have been able to observe this experience more intimately in the last year, as an instructor for a first-year seminar of AA females at a PWI. The privilege of teaching this class has allowed me the opportunity to further validate the need for a study like this. As I write these words, I am working to help two students who took the seminar course make decisions about their future now that they have been academically disqualified from the university. In the seminar course, they were given tools for success, but two hours of mentoring one day a week is not enough to provide them with the resources, programs, and services needed to ensure AA females can successfully adjust to a PWI. In the same vein, there are females who are thriving and successfully navigating the collegiate environment. The problem is that neither of these stories are being told in an effort to celebrate and continue to provide support for AA females in an environment that is asking them to become adults, contributors, and one-day alumna who feel good about their experience and are willing to pay it forward to other AA females who come after them. This is the reason these stories need to be told—because these women deserve to have their stories heard, and it is our job as educators to listen, teach, and inspire change.

PART IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to address the dearth in research that delves into the experiences of African American (AA) females in college environments by not only highlighting the challenges they face, but also by capturing their stories of how they leveraged resources and social interactions, academic attainment, and familial relationships as they navigate the normative terrains of PWI settings. In previous chapter, I introduced 10 participants whose unique yet themed stories provide a glimpse into their lives as first-year AA women at West University. The participants of this study were introduced in Part III; however, I would like to provide additional context to the participant group and how this chapter is organized.

All of the participants in this study also completed one quarter of the AA women's seminar course I co-facilitate with two colleagues. The structure of the course allowed participants to share their experiences as women of color in the classroom setting; therefore, I had some background knowledge of the women participating. However, there was no way to prepare for how honest, tragic, inspiring, and authentic these women would be with their lives. Through in-depth conversations both individually and grouped with their peers, I was able to hear the emotions carried with the stories the participants told. Through their triumphs and struggles, these women's stories provide the data needed to begin to redefine how institutions of higher education view, resource, and advocate for AA women.

I have chosen to tell each story individually using subtitles/subthemes to further remove AA women from being viewed only through a monolithic lens. While there are common themes that arise from participants' stories, individuation allows the reader to

see how the experiences of the participants are intertwined and layered. As the stories unfold, the participants' ability to articulate their experiences helps to illustrate how the intersectionalities of their gender, race, and class were directly linked to their ability to adjust to a new learning environment successfully. To help link the finding to the literature review, I will be using subtitles/subthemes that come from Christa Porter's Model of Identity Development in Black Undergraduate Women. In particular, the tenets introduced in Part II: personal foundation, pre-collegiate socialization, and collegiate socialization. The term socialization is used by AA theorists to position the process AA women endure in both positive and negative ways based on their experiences and identity development (Porter, 2013). Thus in each of their stories, I will attempt to identify areas of interaction with family, peers, university administrators, and faculty that in turn shaped each participant's experience in the first year. Finally, as a way to share the most salient pieces of their stories for the purposes of this dissertation, I have combined my narration of their interviews with excerpts from both their reflective journals and individual and group interviews.

Lalah

Lalah is a first-generation Nigerian whose parents came to America in their early twenties on student visas. They raised three children, two boys and Lalah, outside of Los Angeles County from the time Lalah was born until present day. Lalah's experience as a Nigerian-American student is shaped by her struggles to fit into dominant narratives of Black culture that she couldn't ascribe to within the African American culture or from other ethnicities that could only identify her one way.

Pre-Collegiate Socialization

In her reflection essay and in her interviews, Lalah provided a picture of how her identity was shaped by her environment:

[Reflection Essay] I've always paid attention to race. It began in elementary school, like I always knew I was different because they all—not they, well, people of—I think that my Asian friends and my White friends always made it a fact or like—they also made it like their passion to making me seem like I was an outsider. I wasn't included and that I was different. That was even probably in middle school that these girls are like mixed in our multicultural group, and then there's Black and White. But the mixed girls, they were fine. They were accepted, which is weird. They are accepted, but if you were full Black, I don't know. The Whites and Asians would just make it their point to always make sure they made it known like they were Black in regards to you're this, you're that.

As she reached high school, Lalah became more conscious of how the intersectionalities of her identities pulled at each other, causing her to feel at war with herself, her family, and her peers. Growing up in a suburban area, race was a constant conversation for Lalah; however, it was her ethnicity and cultural identity that were at constant odds,

I feel like it was always three wars I was fighting. I was fighting a war with my parents, because they wanted me to be Nigerian, only Nigerian. But it's like, no, I'm Black, because I grew up Black. As soon as you're born in America, someone tells you you're Black, you just go with it. You're always fighting a war as Black people. Like “You're not Black enough. Your parents have so much money. You don't have any issues. You don't work for anything. You just had everything handed to you.” Clearly, that wasn't true.

Parental Involvement in College Choice

Growing up in an environment where race was a main topic of internal conversation led to Lalah, when considering college, wanting to move as far away as possible. University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill was her first choice. However, based on the experiences her two older brothers had in college, her options were limited to California. Lalah's father, however, was thoroughly involved in the process. He took

Lalah to her SAT and ACT tests and encouraged her to apply to schools in and out of state. Having her parents in disagreement about where she could go to school was hard for her to make sense of as she prepared for college:

I feel like there's a lot of chaos in the household. My brothers weren't handling their business. Culturally, if you're older, you're supposed to pave the pathway for those to come. They weren't doing that. My dad had lost his job. I feel like he was taking his anger out on the household. My mom had to be the sole provider. I feel like she was always stressed, because that's a really hard job to provide....

Based on the parameters for attending a four-year institution her mother provided her with, Lalah waited to see what schools in California would accept her. When she didn't get into the other school she applied to in California, she decided to go West University, even though it wasn't one of her first choices. Once the decision was made and it was time to leave for college, Lalah made the decision to act as though she was out of state and not come home on a regular basis. At the time, this was an easy decision for her as a young woman who felt she didn't belong in high school or her home. Having little emotional connection to her home environment, Lalah was ready to start at new life at West University.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

Adjusting to life at West University was a completely new experience for Lalah. As a first-generation Nigerian, she was never allowed to participate in sleepovers or high school parties, thus her ability to exist free from the rules of home was a new and exciting experience. Even though the ease of making friends was based on the similar experiences of other Black students at a PWI, finding a solid friend group was more difficult than she originally imagined. Difficulty maintaining a consistent friend group did not keep her from staying an active member of the campus community, “For health [her major], I was

a patient expert at the hospital, but for the African Student Union, I would just go to different events. My first year it was fun because I feel like the Greek community was more active.”

Lalah’s involvement on campus did not mean it was easy for her to develop community in the residence halls as well. When discussing living in the residence halls her first year, she mentioned that she didn’t attend programming offered by the staff and chose not to live on the African American-themed floor based on what she heard from older peers as an admitted student the spring before enrolling at the university. Based on her choices to not engage in formalized programming for both residential students and, more specifically, spaces for African American residents, Lalah found difficulty building community her first year. When asked about her ability to develop a community on campus, here is what Lalah had to say,

It's really hard to get that—even at West University—to get Black women to come together and talk about Black women. It's just not popular. Me, my friends—the other Black women don't understand it—but yet, I'm not going to say nothing doesn't change, but I feel like Black women aren't necessarily jumping to create this community. Ask any Black woman, "Is there a Black women community you feel comfortable with?" They'll just all say no. It's all jaded. It is what it is. It's either I make my Black woman friends, or I go somewhere else and I make other friends.

Interestingly enough, in reflecting on the hardships of making community, Lalah and her peers discussed how they all grew up in predominately White communities and the impact that had on them as AA women coming into a PWI,

So I feel like that goes to say just because you grew up in like a predominantly non-White area. I mean, a predominantly White area, does not mean like you're all going to be monolithic, you're all going to think the same, dress the same, act the same. All three us just look and act different. I feel like that was my issue. That's still my issue when you go to places and they automatically, for some reason, I think in the Black community that's like a major identifier. It's like what

was your life before I met you and how did it look. Then they kind of use that to gauge who you are.

Lalah was eventually able to create community through enrolling in the AA women's seminar course at West University. She shared how taking the course enabled her to redefine her identity as a Nigerian American within Black cultural norms and find the sisterhood that she had been longing for. In addition to finding community, she was also able to see what was possible for her future by seeing professors with advanced degrees. She went on to say,

Oh, wow. There's Black women that have master degrees in other fields of study. They're getting their PhD. I didn't even know what a PhD was. Then it's like a Black woman getting a PD.? I was like, "This is a lot." The first day of class, I don't walk in, and I'm like "Oh, wow. All these Black women trying to get their PhD. I'm so shocked." I feel like the only Black women I knew—I had an aunt that was in banking, but I never saw her work. She had some great position in banking. But other than that, I only knew Black women that were nurses. That was it.

Seeing women who looked like her in a position of power for the first time, she began to see herself and thus her peers differently.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

Lalah also felt academically prepared to engage in the academic rigor of 10-week quarters at West University. "I think my high school prepared me better than others but not compared to the group of people I was competing against." When asked why she felt she was able to adapt quite effortlessly academically, Lalah shared this sentiment,

They're Nigerian in the present term [her parents]. Yeah. I feel like they instilled in me some academic skills that at least pulled me through my first two quarters. I would say out of three, that was the easiest to adjust to.... I just felt really sorry for all students who never took an AP course, because for math, the first two math classes I took that fall and winter, and personally, I didn't have to ever go to class. All I did was the homework. I studied that textbook. I looked up the answers. I just had a system going. I was just doing well on tests. I didn't go to discussions. I didn't go to office hours.

Although she did well academically her first year, Lalah did notice the degree of difficulty increase in her courses as the year went on, but she stayed motivated to do well in all of her courses.

Family Interactions in the First Year

Not only did Lalah find herself adjusting her expectations of college life socially and academically, but also she found that her family dynamics impacted her first year as well. During her first year in college, Lalah had little to no contact with her father other than when she went home for breaks. As stated before, she didn't want to have a relationship with her family based on their different ideologies; however, as she reflected on her first year, Lalah was able to see the positive influence they had in preparing her for college and providing her with the mindset to matriculate through her first year.

[Reflection Essay] I was forced to continue a relationship that I oftentimes felt was purposeless and cold, only to find out as I matured through college is that my parents were teaching me key methods on how to survive in society. The first realization was Nigerians do not hold the burden of being Black mentally, even though the consciousness can arise through a physical alteration, they go about their lives with a mindset free from race. Additionally, they taught me to always set my standards high, rather than settling for the norm, and lastly, they engrained in my soul to be able to become docile externally, but to always stay true to yourself. I grew up hating my parents because they existed as the antithesis of the falsified "American Dream" I created for myself based on the definitions of those surrounded me. As soon as I was taught to look within, and I was given the courage through academic resources and outlets at West University that has allow[ed] me to have critical conversations directed towards analyzing the major changes that occur through life in addition to my personality, my strengths and weakness, my vision and aspiration, this allowed me to embark on a different journey, the one less traveled.

This self-reflection also allowed Lalah to articulate how being raised by Nigerian parents while participating in Black culture influenced her ability to make decisions as a first-year student.

History-wise and knowledge, wisdom, cultural practices, quotes, religion, is all from my Nigerian culture. Basically, I feel like everything that has to do with me internally is attributed to my Nigerian culture. Yes, Black culture has impact to me in ways that have changed that. Foundationally, it's Nigerian in its core. It always returns back to my roots and what my parents taught me, what my culture taught me. Growing up, I was always inside—I always felt like—Nigerian, but the way I express myself, it was always Black culture. I always conformed to what was going on in Black culture. That's just the normal thing. I feel like the way I went about life and the way I made my decisions, it was always based on my Nigerian culture. I just never spoke about it, and I never actively showed people what that looked like.

Lalah's first year was a year of discovery that set the foundation for her time at West University. Once she was able to clearly identify her identity and reconcile this identity with her upbringing in both in the home and in K-12 schooling, she was able to thrive in a new environment.

Carmen

Carmen is a fourth-year student from a small town in Southern California. She has an older brother, mom, and dad, who she identifies as having upper-middle-class socioeconomic status. In her interviews with the researcher, she mentions her mother and grandmother as the main parental figures in the home. Her mother and father are married; however, Carmen's father works out of the country running a health clinic with his brother and comes back to California during the holidays and over the summer. Carmen took the AA women's seminar course during the spring of 2015.

Growing up with mainly her mother and grandmother, Carmen discussed the complicated dynamic of growing up with a father in another country and a grandmother who attributed to her issues with self-esteem. In terms of her relationship with her parents, she admitted to issues with authority and how her father would have to ease the tensions between Carmen and her mother when she was a teenager. She also mentioned that sharing emotions was not something that was the norm in her house, and later in the

research process, she discussed the impact the absence of her father had on her as a first-year student. In addition to the absence of her father, she shared how her grandmother impacted her thoughts about body image,

My grandmother is always, always talking about my weight, like, since I was little. Every single time we would go clothes shopping, she'll be like, "Oh, you're buying new pants for her because she's gotten bigger." Every single time I was eating something, she would always make a comment. I'm just like, "Okay, this is great." And I always felt really, really self-conscious about it since I was little. I think the first time I ever really dieted or anything was probably in the fifth grade and that never really stopped since then.

Carmen's grandmother did not just have a negative impact on her—she also had a positive one. She taught Carmen to cook, sew, and read (Carmen, 2015).

Parental Involvement in College Preparation

Carmen's parents were both involved in her college preparation process. Her mother made sure she would be adequately prepared for college by placing her in college entrance exam preparation classes and consistently discussed college options with her. Not only was her mother active in ensuring Carmen was academically prepared, but also her father encouraged her to do well academically. Although she appreciated her parents' involvement in the process, she became frustrated by her father's input as she neared the end of the application process due to his preference for the types of schools she should apply to. While Carmen was fine applying to a variety of schools that met her interest, her father was more interested in the prestige of the school. She shares,

I wish that my dad would have stayed out of it, honestly. I wish he wouldn't have even tried. If he wasn't going to fully understand the process, I don't think that he should have put his two cents in. I tend to like, especially with my dad, just let him influence me even though I'm saying or thinking the complete opposite like he's thinking... All of a sudden, I had to apply into 16 because he was like, "Why haven't you apply to any Ivy League schools?" ... So I wasted my time applying to those. I was just like, "Oh, this is just going to ruin my self-confidence when I don't get in, but whatever."

Having hands-on parents in the college preparation and choice, Carmen choose to attend West University at the encouragement of her father.

Pre-Collegiate Socialization

Growing up in a small suburban town, Carmen had endured her share of bullying and ignorant comments from her peers during K-12 schooling. Marginalized for her looks and weight over the years, she grew self-conscious, and during the focus group she participated in, she revealed,

I did not hang out with Black people when I was in high school, whatsoever. To be honest, even though we grew up in the same environment, had the same socioeconomic status and stuff like that, I still felt like the outcast because none of them were really trying to be in AP courses... None of them were trying to get involved in different clubs other than whatever sport they're playing.

In this same conversation, Carmen also revealed that she was not aware of her Blackness during her formative years. She conformed to her peer's standards of beauty by straightening her hair daily, applying make-up in ways that minimized her cultural features, and dressed like her culturally diverse group of friends. Having not interacted with AA peers in high school, Carmen was nervous about attending the pre-college summer program (PCSP) with mostly AA peers,

[Reflection Essay] Before I began West University's PCSP, I had not been in a new space with new people in a very long time. Furthermore, before PCSP, I never had solid relationships with Black males or females. Even in my predominantly Asian and White school, I still felt as if I wasn't Black enough for the Black kids. I was convinced that I was not going to be able to connect with anyone or make any lasting friendships with anyone in the FSP program. And to be honest, I did not. At least, not until the very end. I felt completely alone during PCSP, I hated staying at school during the weekends, and I constantly hung out with my high school friends every chance I got. Although I felt alone, I was not completely isolated during PCSP. It wasn't as if my classmates didn't like me. I was invited places and people thought I was a sweet and nice person. But everyone had a deep bond and knew each other within a few days, so I immediately felt out of place.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

In Carmen's first interview with the researcher, she was asked about her academic success during the first year. Here is how she responded:

I wasn't focused and then I got caught up inside my social life, too, and then I was just like, "Oh, it's a thing to stay up all night and talk." I just wasn't all there academically. I just didn't put it first, probably just because I didn't want to.

Coming into college, Carmen felt academically prepared by way of the AP courses she took in high school. However, by winter quarter she was surprised at how she was struggling in her science courses based on how quickly each quarter moved. At the end of this quarter, she was passing all of her classes, but she wasn't impressed with her performance.

When discussing whether her knowledge of campus resources helped her academically, she admitted that while they were not hard to find, she didn't want to ask for help. Based on her relationships with her parents growing up, she had issues with authority going into her first year, so she opted to figure out how to succeed academically on her own (Carmen, 2015, individual interview). Even though Carmen admitted that she didn't want to ask for help because she wanted assert her independence, she did try to interact with professors as her pre-med courses became harder to navigate. During our individual interview. Carmen had this to say about her faculty interactions,

The professors were really just hard to communicate with half the time, and I felt like they didn't want to be bothered half the time. I probably have one or two professors throughout the entire year that was like, "Oh, okay. They seem approachable. I can go to the office hours." But the other professors, it was like, "I tried to go to your office hours. You're not that approachable, and you're not that nice when you explain things when I ask questions, so I'm going to stop going." So I guess I still stick to my 50-50 thing, but yeah, sometimes I felt included, sometimes I didn't...that was specifically freshman year. I'm not sure if it's just my personality or... I don't know, but I tend to not always go into the conversations not just because other people make me feel isolated, but sometimes

because I make myself feel isolated. So I would say maybe half of the time, not really always isolated, but it wasn't that bad.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

After experiencing the PCSP, Carmen had established solid friendships and embarked on the official start to her first year at West University. The ease of meeting new people for her came from only having to know one person, who in turn introduced her to several other folks. Before she knew it, she had developed a group of new friends, and her social life became full. Her reflection essay describes how school wasn't a priority for her and how she began to explore the impact friends and family back home had on who she was and who she wanted to become.

[Reflection Essay] I put school on the back burner and focused on maintaining my friends, participating in African Student Union events, and sneaking in a few hours of sleep between classes (that I rarely studied for). Even though school wasn't my priority, I don't regret this time period of my college career whatsoever. During this time, I learned the most I had ever learned about myself. My friends and I would stay up talking until 3 or 4am in the morning. Talking about our lives, reflecting upon our family interactions, discussing how our old friends used to treat us, and trying to understand why we, as a friend group, were so drawn to one another.

The friendships Carmen developed in the first year helped her work through her issues with identity and form a strong bond with other AA women. In addition, Carmen was drawn to campus organizations that helped channel the hurtful memories of her childhood in a positive direction. She was involved in the Student Wellness Commission, the Body Image Task Force, African Student Union, and Black Campus Ministries. Carmen's social life during her first year also included something she had rarely experienced before college, a romantic relationship. She recalls the lasting impact of this relationship in her reflective essay,

[Reflection Essay] Come winter quarter 2013, I was still an insecure girl who just wanted to feel wanted. I took any love that was given to me, and I didn't hold

myself to the highest of standards. By week 2, I picked someone who was in theory an absolute catch, but in reality he was a complete liar. When this boy started to come on to me, I thought that he possessed all the qualities I wanted in a boyfriend. This dude didn't exactly have the cleanest record, but I was convinced his reputation was only tarnished from an unfortunate track record of bitter exes.

When she met with me for her initial interview, I asked her about this experience; she shared the following,

So I was generally thinking, "Okay, you're an easygoing student. You're Black. You're good-looking, and I feel like you have your stuff together. You're very involved. You seem pretty promising." And so we start talking, and then obviously, people were still whispering in my ear, "He's doing this, that, and the other." Whatever. And I try to cut it off, don't really cut it off. And then next thing you know, a month down the road, his ex-girlfriend is chasing me down [campus walkway] trying to track me down.... No, he did it every single year without fail, try to get several different freshmen, at least one of the freshmen would actually fall for him and actually get involved with him, but then this time around, he messed with the wrong freshman. They got into an altercation. He kicked her out of the house, she went off, went to the dean of students, this, that, or the other, dean of students is like, "I can't do anything for you. He's not a student." And that's when all hell breaks loose, and everybody was like, "How did nobody notice that he wasn't a student?"

Family Interactions in the First Year

This experience and the realization that her family relationships were not where she wanted them to be led her into a period of soul searching through journaling and conversations with friends. It was through this journaling practice that she was able to express the feelings she had about the men in her life,

[Reflection Essay] Throughout my life, my father was home for about 3 months out of the year, and of course, he frequently missed important moments of life. Eventually, I didn't even want him to come home, because all we did was argue about my academics and future career. To top it all off my brother was a Stanford Graduate who went to Columbia University to pursue medicine. So when my father noticed I wasn't a 4.0 student who wanted to become a doctor, our relationship was a constant battle.

During her first interview, I referred to her reflection essay when I asked her to describe how her interactions with her mother were the same or different than ones with

her father during the first year. Carmen talked with her mother every Sunday, and although her mother never asked her to come home, Carmen felt guilty for not visiting her mom as often as she felt she should have. She also shared that she went home after her mother got sick in her winter quarter and felt guilty about neglecting her duties as a daughter. It was during this period that she recognized the importance of checking on her mother, who was living alone in Carmen's childhood home.

Personal Growth in the First Year

Towards the end of her first year, Carmen began to seriously consider a relationship with God. Although she had a religious background, she had never been consistent in her religious practices. In her reflection essay, she described how seminal a Black Campus Ministries retreat was in the development of her faith,

[Reflection Essay] This retreat consisted the people around me, God, and, myself. This wasn't my first time attending a church event all year, but it was my first time taking it sincerely to heart. I was raised Catholic and I hadn't exactly forged a personal relationship with God at that point. This retreat, in combination with the events that occurred winter quarter resulted in what I call a "Man Fast". Which means I refused to date or get to know any male as more than a platonic friend. I wrote down every rule that my fast consisted of, journaling about how winter quarter made me feel, and then made a pact with myself and God that I would not break my "Man Fast" before the end of my 10week quarter.

It was during this retreat that she came to terms with her relationship with her parents, in particular her father, worked through her bad romantic encounter, and began the journey to self-acceptance.

Tonette

Tonette identified as having a middle-class income family made up of a mother, father, and brother. She is a political science major who took the AA women seminar course in the winter of 2015. Growing up in her household, Tonette was close to both of

her parents. As a teenager, she realized she had selfish moments, but toward the middle of high school she began to help her mother more when her parents divorced. She also had a close relationship with her grandparents throughout her childhood.

Parental Involvement in College Choice

According to Tonette, her father was influential in her academic pursuits based on her desire to attend an Ivy League school. Once in high school, Tonette recalls his warnings about the discipline it would take to get into her dream school,

You got to get your stuff together. You're not getting into a good school doing that...." So then in my junior year, when I started playing sports, he was having me email all these Ivy League coaches about sports and we would go to see all these schools. I don't know. He had a really big role to play in where I went, what schools I applied to. He helped me a lot with my college applications, like reading over my essays, telling me to apply to these Ivy League schools that I didn't want to waste time applying to.

Tonette's mother was supportive of her college aspirations as well, reminding her to study for college entrance exams and the benefits of going away to school. Tonette grew up in a conservative state and longed to be around a more diverse group of people, and both of her parents encouraged her to succeed academically and athletically so this option would be available to her.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

Once accepted to West University, Tonette was ready to embark on a new adventure in a new state.

Transitioning from living at home to living in residential halls was not impossible. It was easy for me to adapt to the living situation. I got to know my floor mates well which made it feel more like home and I loved my roommate. It definitely took extra effort to constantly have to keep in mind the other person living with you, but it just made me a less selfish person. The hardest parts for me were adjusting to the food and the bathrooms. I found that the easiest way to adjust was to develop a system.... Living away from home really made me appreciate what I

had at home. I also realized how much I took my living situation at home for granted. Overall, living on campus made me a better person.

Living in the residence halls allowed Tonette the opportunity to find resources that would help her throughout the year, like her resident assistant and peer academic counselors. She would consult them about issues she was having or for information on how to find resources on campus. As a result of using her upper-class peers, she did use an on-campus program for first-generation and minority students.

Over the course of the year, Tonette was able to find a group of friends among whom she felt accepted as she was, but it took some time to find friends that didn't make her feel like she was less "Black" because of her socioeconomic status,

I've been used to growing up around White girls, because they're the ones that were at my school and my neighborhood and all that. And so, when I got to college, I wanted more Black friends, the main reason why I moved out to [city]. When I got there, a lot of things changed about me. I used to love straight hair. I got the Brazilian blowout, and all my curls were gone, and then all of a sudden, I want curls because all my friends want curls. They actually have curls. My friends aren't White with straight hair anymore, so that happened.... I always wanted it straight, and that was a product of my environment. All my friends had straight hair. They got more attention, so I was like, "All right. Maybe I need to straighten my hair. Maybe it looks better." I wasn't comfortable with being myself. I was more comfortable trying to look like someone that I wasn't. I was whitewashed.

Tonette shares the difficulty of fitting in with her Black peers based on the environment she came from, which was predominately White,

When I got to West University, I don't know if I was worried about making Black friends, but I definitely did feel like I'm outcast a lot just because—I don't know. They're just like, "Why do you always straighten your hair? Why are you always wearing makeup? Why do you talk like that? Why don't you dance? Why do you wear that stuff?"

After shedding this friend group, who even ridiculed her for how much she was willing to spend on clothes and manicures, she found a group of friends that she described like this,

My friends became somewhat of an emotional support system, which made my friendships stronger than they have ever been in the past, because we were each

other's family at school. The Black community also served as a big support system, but for everything: academics, social life, emotional support, and anything else I needed. This community made me feel so much more comfortable going so far from home, because it made me feel like I was never alone in anything.

Once we began to discuss the activities she became involved with on campus, it was apparent that she became well rounded in the selection of groups. She was involved in the African Student Union, went to LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) club events, and participated in Mock Trial. These social activities helped Tonette to build community at West University, which seemed to be a mostly positive experience.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

Academically, Tonette felt prepared to engage in the academic rigor of West University. Her ability to navigate the system was quite positive; she didn't feel ostracized or marginalized by faculty or peers. When asked about how she adjusted to the new academic rigor of a Research I institution, she responded,

My classes were a challenge at first. I was not used to the self-learning that some professors expected. It was also a challenge balancing my time with so much freedom. I cannot say I have fully adjusted, because the learning curve is different for each class, subject, and professor; however, I have learned how to take advantage of my resources in order to maximize academic success. Study groups were my biggest help my freshman year, because I learned various ways of studying. Although they are hard to join or make as a student of color, it is not impossible.

During the same discussion, we talked about her use of academic resources, including if there was ever a feeling that she was marginalized based on her race and gender. Unlike some of her peers, she did not feel marginalized based on her race. In her discussion courses, she felt comfortable sharing her opinions in the classroom. As a first-year student, Tonette reflected that she should have used more than the writing center as a resource to help her adjust to the academic rigor of a Research I PWI.

Family Interactions in the First Year

Getting adjusted academically got easier as the year went on, but as an out-of-state student, she felt the physical distance between herself and her family.

Being so far from home as an out-of-state student was very tough. I got homesick a lot, however, most of the time I was so busy I didn't always have time to feel that way. Because I was so busy, I developed a system in keeping in touch with my family. I would usually call my parents or grandparents on my way to, from, or in between classes if I needed to talk to them. It was the most convenient time, because I didn't have to worry about disrupting any environment, such as my room or the lounge, and it was a good way to make use of my free time. If anything, my relationship with my family became stronger because I did not realize how much I would miss them and how happy they made me.

While some students may feel closer to one parent over the other, Tonette shared how she stayed connected to both. Tonette found herself to be more open with her father and her mother, having in-depth talks about how she was changing as a person. The conversations with her mother were centered on issues she was having with friends or with adjusting to being away from home. To combat her homesickness, she would go home every other month to reconnect with family and help her younger brother, since her mother was in an MBA program majority of Tonette's first year in college. According to Tonette, her relationship with her parents throughout the first year remained strong and proved to be helpful in her adjustment.

Personal Growth in the First Year

During the focus group she participated in, Tonette thought about the changes she wanted to make in terms of building community her second year at West University.

Coming back, I feel the same exact way, like I'm really trying to branch out in this whole, like fraternity sorority thing isn't really helping, because the beginning of the year is a good time to do that. But it's like not that there's anything wrong with having a lot of Black friends, but I don't want all my friends to just be Black. I'm used to having a more diverse friend group, and you get a lot of things from that. I think that I kind of shot myself in the foot by limiting myself in my

freshman year and only doing that. But at the same time, I made really good relationships, but it's just like when we get older and graduated college, we're going to need to network with people, and we can't just know Black people, because, honestly, we're not to the point where a lot of Black people have connections. Black people don't even help each other most of the time. You know like, when I've needed help in the past, like this guy gave me an internship this summer, he was right.

In addition to knowing that networking outside of her ethnicity is essential in the college environment, she also shared her frustrations within the community around anti-White discourse based on the deep racial tensions on campus during this period of the research.

We still can't ignore the fact that some people might have just better things to offer us sometimes so we can't just limit ourselves. Yeah, that's kind of how I'm feeling right now. I think a lot of the Black people at West University are kind of anti-White, and that bothers me too because it's like, how can you only see one side?

Tonette's experience echoes a deep sense of community, learning, coming into a better sense of self, and the impact the university had on shaping her identity.

Sarah

Sarah is a fourth-year student from out of state, who considered herself middle class. Sarah's mother passed away when she was eight, and her father has been incarcerated since she was one. Raised by her grandmother, aunt, and older sister, who supported the family dynamic from California, Sarah never felt like she quite belonged in the household.

Sarah describes her upbringing as one in which she never felt as close to her family as she did to her friends. As she talked about reflections she had of her childhood during her first year in college, she candidly shares how her older sisters referred to her as a "crybaby" and "too sensitive." Being thought of in this way distanced Sarah from her family emotionally, which fueled her motivation to want to attend college out of state,

I've kind of just wanted to go away to my college, start my own life with my own person. I didn't want to stay close to home at all. Our family also encouraged us to explore the world, explore new places. So it wasn't like a shock that we want[ed] to get away. It was always encouraged to go to new places.

Family Involvement in College Choice

Sarah describes the support she received from family members when applying to universities. As she provided an overview of the help she received from her sister, she also shared that she didn't really ask for moral support from an uncle who was around during her high school years. According to Sarah, she acknowledges how her older sister provided guidance and support through the college application process,

I think the person who played the role of the college prep would have been my older sister. So it was the same like when it came to grades and stuff, she's not like she would really check on my grades, but they just know I was doing fine. But my sister took the role of helping us get to college. She did a four-year..., but she did a university, [school] and, yeah. So she helped us when it just came to like getting familiar with college prep. They [her sister and aunt] took us [Sarah and her sister] on college tours and stuff.

Family Interactions in the First Year

Sarah decided to attend West University with her older cousin and was so excited to start that she opted to attend PCSP.

[Reflection Essay] I could not wait to leave home and to begin this new journey of college, which is also why I decided to do attend the PCSP. PCSP was the most life changing experience. It felt awesome to want to be "myself" in every aspect, living at home I felt I had operated in a box, or within the realms of what everyone expected of me. I was never the same at school and with my friends, as I was at home, so to know I was free to be who I wanted, was breathtaking. Thus, the transition from home was easy. One of my cousins attended here and my extended family lived two hours away so I didn't feel alone, just far away enough to "do me".

Part of "doing her" included not engaging regularly with her family. During our first discussion, Sarah said,

Once I came to school, I kind of didn't really have anything to do with my family. I know that doesn't sound good. I didn't really talk to anyone in my family unless

for some reason we needed to talk about something. Maybe my sister was texting me, and I texted [her] them back. I was supposed to call home once a week, but I didn't. A lot of times it was months that would go by. My aunt would be calling me. She doesn't really care. It's not like her thing. We don't have to call her if we don't want to. It's not going to affect our relationship, per se. She wants us to at least reach out to our grandmother.... I probably should have called home but I just didn't really see a purpose in doing so.... If I don't call home, what's going to happen? If I don't go home, what's going to happen? You know what I'm saying? Absolutely nothing. I never felt that close to anyone. It was all like forced relationships. I love my family, but I just didn't feel the need to just sit on the phone for pointless conversations for five minutes.

Not only was maintaining relationships with her grandmother and aunt hard, but also she had remained estranged from her father throughout her teenage years. It was at the end of her first year that she chose to reach out to her father for the first time in several years.

This is interesting, because a couple of weeks before the BCM I just randomly got a weird thought. One day I was just walking, and all of a sudden I thought, "You should reach out to your dad," which was really weird because it wasn't ever a thought of mine. So I still question where the thought came from.... It's like a big coincidence or things or signs. Reaching out to him was really cool, the whole concept of it, because I started to realize we have so much in common, the way that I thought and who I was. I think that if I would have grown up with my father, we would have been a lot alike. We probably would have been really close. That was really cool, hearing about my dad, hearing about me, hearing about the stuff that he had to say about our life growing up and him with my mom, as well as the stuff they learned over the years was really fascinating. I would talk to him sometimes. I never was uncomfortable talking to him about my life, if that makes sense.

Once she learned more about her father, she recognized that his incarceration had nothing to do with the ambitions and goals he had for his children. They had to learn how to navigate a communication style through which he could encourage her without Sarah feeling the pressure of not meeting the goals he thought she could reach.

I explained it [feeling pressured by her father] to him. Of course, he's like "That's never my intention. I just want to make sure that you're the best that you can be." Sometimes that was hard, because I'm like, I already pressed myself enough. I don't like other people pressing me, because I don't want to let people down.

Pre-Collegiate Socialization

Not only was Sarah trying to distance herself from her family, but also she was trying to leave behind her high school identity.

Living in [state] had an intense effect on me. I chose to surround myself by my White counterparts, deny myself of my Black culture, and convince myself that we were living in a post-racial society. By my senior year, I could not endure the racist remarks and uncomfortable situations anymore, which sparked my new found “Black interest”. When I came to West University, I was eager to not only explore about my history, understand what it meant to identify as a Black woman, but as well as learn about myself and grow immensely.

Sarah took time to illustrate they types of comments she endured from her friends back home during our one-on-one conversation,

They would say, just little comments like, “I’m so much more Black than you, Sarah, or you’re not like the other Black people.” I remember one time I was working at my job... one of my coworkers was like “When you go to college, don’t go all Black on us”.... I was just over the comments. I was ready for new life.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

Coming to West University afforded Sarah the exact experience she was looking for, and she wasted no time diving into social groups and organizations that allowed her the African American experience she craved.

[Reflection Essay] By first quarter, I not only lived on the Afrikan Diaspora floor, but I was a part of every Black social and political space on campus. Becoming educated about our Black struggle did something to my heart; it struck a passion I never knew I had. I felt so broken to know I had lived my entire life viewing the oppressor as praiseworthy.

She not only found it easy to meet friends, but also to get over involved,

I started as an intern [activist program through student government]. SAP is Student Activist Project internship out of the [student government office], so the external vice president's office in [student government]. I did student council in high school. My cousin was really involved in the political aspect of campus. She was encouraging me to also be involved in the political aspect.

In addition to starting out as an intern, Sarah was also involved as volunteer coordinator for an overnight program for newly admitted AA students and marketing coordinator for the African Student Union, and she helped with the student government campaigns of a few of her friends. Sarah's involvement on campus did not fair well for her academic adjustment.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

Towards the end of her first year, Sarah was struggling academically, largely due to her overcommitment to friends and activities. She had come to West University to shed an old identity of pleasing people, yet she found herself in the same place as a new college student who needed to ask for academic assistance. At this point in her first year, it was evident that she wanted support but wasn't really comfortable asking for help. When discussing her inability to ask for help, she related back to her childhood fear of appearing to be too sensitive or a "crybaby." Sarah was able to rationalize in our conversation how the two experiences could be seen differently, but she still had a hard time justifying her problems academically as salient enough to share.

Not only did she have issues sharing her academic struggles, but also she experienced a new feeling around her White peers for the first time,

I would have to say isolated. Like I said, it wasn't that it was like a new thing for me to be around a whole bunch of White people or people with the mindset of the stereotypical Black person. The more that I became submerged in Black culture, the less that I was more comfortable in my classrooms. So that was harder for me to adjust to because this is a weird feeling. I've never felt uncomfortable or inferior or less than or not on the same level as my White counterpart. So that was a weird feeling.

Personal Growth in the First Year

During her first year, Sarah was able to create a new reality for herself and connect to a family member in way she never had before. All of these experiences led her to describe her first year like this,

[Reflection Essay] Freshman year was full of ups and downs, lots of growth, discovering my voice, who I wanted to be, and who I had the potential to become. I wouldn't trade it for the world. I learned the most about myself, and developed long lasting relationships; by far, the best year of my entire life.

Janet

Janet was raised in southern California with her mother, father, and three brothers. Janet identified herself as upper-middle class. Her mother and father were heavily involved in their children's' education and extracurricular activities growing up. As the only girl in the household, Janet felt particularly close to her mother and an extra sense of responsibility to help her around the home. Close to her father as well, she was able to depend on him to provide good advice and program opportunities that would prepare her for college. By raising their children in a suburban area, her parents ensured they were conscious of their race and culture in relation to the impact it would have on their education.

Janet was always aware of how hard her mother worked to ensure that she and her siblings were seen as students first in their predominately White and Asian classrooms. When it came to her relationship with her mother during high school, she reflected on her mother's supportive nature in various aspects of her development,

So kind of like the mother-counselor in terms of grades, schools, we're looking at really a person to talk through everything with in terms of what this whole college process looks like since I've never been through it before. Then two, I don't have any siblings, I mean, I don't have any sisters, excuse me. So as I got older, it was kind of like, I don't want to say big sister, but she's also a somewhat of a soundboard for me as well in terms of serving as that mother but sister-ish type of

role, especially in my transition into college, because we're able to have different conversations.

Family Involvement in College Choice

Janet provided her parents with kudos for equally supporting her through the preparation for college process. Her mother played more of a hands-on role through high school, but she also felt like she could go to her father for advice and support when deciding on which school she should attend. She was accepted into a number of schools, including a historically Black university in Georgia, but she struggled with where she would ultimately attend,

In high school, I went back and forth because I got accepted to Spelman. And I thought I really wanted to go there. Me and my dad took a visit, and I was like, it's kind a smaller campus, but I liked Atlanta actually.

Ultimately she chose to stay closer to home,

Staying close to family is important to me, one, because they're always kind of my support system. So I was kind of, I guess I was kind of a little bit afraid to go away. And, two, I knew that having that support would still be helpful in terms of the whole college transition and coming into adulthood.... So I was like kind of still wanting my support system close to me, an intact support system that I knew I could always count on.

Pre-Collegiate Socialization

Janet's experiences at West University started before she officially began as a freshman. As a high school student, she was involved in a college pipeline program offered to students of color.

Before coming to college, I [participated in a high school preparation and pre-college summer program, both sponsored by West University], in these programs I built a strong sense of community with Black women. In pre-college summer program, my community of Black women was brought together under the pretense of school. We were all doing the PCP [pre-college program], and we met in our classes. We built this community by first being open and honest with each other. Consequently, we have created a safe space for our small group. One of the things that I feel helped us build this community was understanding that it would

not be perfect, understanding that it would take time to create the ideal supportive community. Our community did have many ups and downs as our first year went on, but we all learned a lot from each other.

Even with the preparation through high school and a PCSP, Janet felt as though none of advice she received adequately prepared her for life at a Research I PWI.

Family Interactions in the First Year

Regarding adjusting to new family dynamics with respect to her ability to relate to her cousins or keep up with her extended family members in the same way she did during high school, Janet stated,

Because one of my cousins chose to just work straight after college and that was his—I mean high school. So that was his things. He's had worked different jobs, and that's what he is fine with. And I'm completely fine with that too, but I just feel like—I don't know. It's harder because the realities are different. It's just because not all of my family members went to college. So not all of them know that whole little thing, because it kind of came from my immediate family, but it also came from extended. There'll be times where I did not talk to my aunts and uncle, my grandparents, people that I was normally used to kind of seeing and talking to. One of my grandparents even come. She's like, “Yeah. I try not to bother you. I know you're on college and I don't want you to have to worry about other things.”

Having such a close-knit family, Janet felt less connected to her family, even though physically she was only an hour away from home. Janet soon experienced that being close to home didn't mean she couldn't experience the same types of freedom her peers who were farther away did.

Freedom was cool because I could essentially do whatever I wanted and my parents did not have to know or say anything about me staying up all night or going to some party. The challenging part was that I had to be accountable for my own actions and I had to still handle my business. I have been fortunate enough to have parents to help put me through school. It was still a reminder that while I did have freedom, I needed to be careful about the decisions I made.

In addition to her newfound freedom, she also began to experience a new type of relationship forming with her parents. She felt they were more willing to share issues and

ask her opinion on certain topics more than when she was in high school. Not only were her parents sharing more information with her, but Janet also was finding her voice with them. Janet found that her freedom and her new environment were helping her to form an adapted ideology different from that of her family. Coming to West University, Janet was also worried about having the opportunity to explore the university independently of her father, who is a tenured professor at the university,

I ended up here at West University, but the one thing I will say, that my father and I have also developed a good relationship where there's that sense of respect. As we said, West University is like nothing else. So West University is a big campus to where we still both have our own space and we're both on completely different schedules.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

When asked to discuss her social activities on campus, Janet shared that she was a well-rounded first-year student. She attended sporting events, participated in a few campus organizations, and volunteered with the high school preparation program she had just graduated from. However, she did find that her friend group had drastically changed from the one she had back in her hometown.

[Reflection Essay] Growing up in the valley, I had a variety of different friends. I had Asian, White, Latino, and Black friends. I always liked being able to have a variety of different friends. In high school, though, I found that I mostly had Asian and White friends. As I got older, my Black friends and I did not really seem to drift apart due to different interest. I found that I loved being part of this community, so I had to work through my feelings. Much like in my high school, when I came to West University I struggled with African Americans being viewed as a collective and not as individuals. I often struggle with these, because on the one hand I do understand that I represent my race because many people do not understand or know much about my culture. The problem I have with this is that it takes away from my individual experiences as a Black female, as the Black experience is not a universal experience. All my actions are attributed to my race and not just because I like to do something. As I mentioned before, there is often a lack of cultural understanding, and I have certainly interaction with people who have a lack of cultural understanding.

Based on her statement above, I asked in our semi-structured interview if building community exclusively with folks from the African Diaspora was conscious or unconscious. From Janet's perspective, the choice to build community with in the African American community came out of comfort and the ease with which she was able to do so. Having met most of her friends in PCSP and the high school pipeline program she had participated in, Janet found it more comfortable than the perceived work that would go into engaging with other cultures.

Even though she was a frequent visitor of the Afrikan Diaspora floor, even calling herself an "honorary member" of the floor, she lived in a different residence hall. Janet loved being with her friends but admits that a lapse in paying close attention to her housing application was really a blessing in disguise, since she was able to separate herself when needed from her close-knit friend group. Living away from her main friend group was comfortable, but it was not hard for Janet to notice the cultural differences between herself and her roommate. Hair maintenance was one of the cultural differences Janet noticed the most.

I oftentimes like would take my braids out in the room so she would see it. She never said—I mean, she'd be like, "Oh, I really like your hair. Oh, wow. Your hair is shorter now." Like she'll just say whole comments like that, which growing up with my hair I've been used to.

Making a conscious decision to create a community with mainly her African American peers also allowed her to be grateful for the opportunities she was given based on her parents' hard work to provide a better life for Janet and her siblings.

I've even had this conversation with my parents. Like what did I do different from other people? Why have I been so blessed that I still have both my parents, have an intact family not only with my immediate family. But like I said, grandparents and aunts and uncle that have always supported, love me, and care for me... I was able to have my car here for part of the first year, and other people—some people

didn't have a car, some people didn't even have a license. So that was kind of like, "Okay. Well, let me be grateful and let me make sure I am not taking some of the stuff I have for granted."

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

Janet's year was filled with positive revelations and new friendships, but the adjustment to academic rigor did not go unnoticed.

During my first year at West University, I took mostly general education courses so I did not find the academic rigor to be that much more challenging; it was hard, yes, but I felt I could handle it. The class sizes were much larger, which took a little adjustment, but I adjusted just fine. The one challenging thing I did find was that the quarter systems moves fast, and although 10 weeks seems like a long period of time, it really is not. I adjusted quickly as I had no other choice. The one class during my freshman year that gave me a little run for my money was my science class; that was the only class that made me feel like I was not properly prepared for West University.

I chatted with Janet about what were the hardest aspects of rising to the pace of a quarter system at a large Research I institution, and her response was the discipline needed to seek help from the teaching assistants, even when she didn't care for their personality, and the large class sizes. As a researcher, I appreciated her description of how hard it was to make connections with her peers in the academic setting,

Some of the general education courses were hard for me because of the fact that I was not really meeting a lot of people in those classes being that the classes were so large. Discussion, you were kind of meeting people, but it wasn't like elementary school where you go play recess after.

Like her peers, Janet mentioned how the pace of the classes and the competition over how quickly people can work through the major course work, starting with the first year, could feel overwhelming, even with the best academic preparation in high school. Even with the academic rigor and adjusting to a new way of life in a college environment, Janet was grateful for all of her experiences.

Ciara

Ciara was raised by her mother with her brother and stepfather in the home. She opened up about her upbringing on the Central Coast with sharing her racial background, family make-up, and a little about her hometown,

My mom is White. My dad is Black. I don't live with him. My step-dad is also Black. Then I have one half-brother who is full White, so his dad was White. He's from my mom's side. I grew up in a very nice area. It's a really small town. I think majority White, and then probably second, other. Black people, Indian, all of that is put together. It's a pretty nice area. Really small. It's a friendly area. You cannot lock your door all night and leave your windows down, and you don't worry about it.

In her small community, Ciara's interactions with other AA people were often her family on her father's side. Growing up she would spend the weekends with her cousins, aunts, and grandmother. Her family dynamic caused her to be fiercely independent as a teenager, focused on leaving her home community for college.

Family Involvement in College Choice

Living in a small coastal town, Ciara excelled academically, and when thinking about college choices, she researched the schools within California she might want to attend. When asked about her parents' involvement in the process, she shared how supportive they were but emphasized her independence in applying and choosing a university to attend. Specifically, when discussing her mother, Ciara provides some background about how her mother offered support during the process,

Mostly just support. I feel like for a while in my life, I just kind of did stuff. She went to the JC and got her nursing degree but she just didn't really know anything about university and paying for college or how to get in or anything, like grades. I just had good grades. She never checked my grades. She never asked me anything. She didn't—I don't think she knows everywhere I applied, but she's like, “Go ahead.” Then I got in and she's like happy, all excited and super supportive.

When describing the support and involvement of the father figures in her life during high school, she candidly refers to the support but lack of knowledge both her stepfather and biological father had regarding college applications and acceptance. Ciara was fine with completing the tasks required to attend college on her own, and she shared that she was excited to attend West University because of the diversity of the surrounding area.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

The academic expectations were an area of university life Ciara felt quite prepared for once beginning the quarter system, even without any summer preparation course prior to the start of the year. She felt her teachers had done a good job of helping her handle the material that she was being introduced to in her new classes. She also felt confident in her ability to build a study plan that would allow her to be successful in her classes. What she wasn't prepared for was how students would see her differently in college classrooms than she had been viewed in her hometown,

I didn't notice it at all in high school. I think just because like I said I grew up in a really small town, people knew I was smart. Like "Oh, Ciara got this on her test. That's not a surprise." Everybody just kind of expected it, because they knew that I was smart, and they grew up with me. Nobody was surprised by when I did well or when I answered well, but I felt like at West University, nobody knows you. They only see you. So when you do something that they wouldn't expect from what they see of you, it's a lot different. Nobody knew I was smart. They kind of just saw that I was there. It was just a lot different.

Ciara had mentally prepared herself for the fact that the work would be hard, but she wasn't prepared for feeling like people didn't believe she was there because she was as smart as her peers were,

I think that people assume that I play a sport here because I look like an athlete. I know that I look like an athlete because I'm Black and I'm in shape. But I just got really frustrated. I think also it was the second time that day. You know how hard

I worked to get into this school? Do you know my grades, the test scores, how much work I put in, and you're just putting all, "Oh, you're good at a sport? That's why you're here." No. I put in so much time to get here.

Feeling like she had to prove her intelligence was hard for her to accept, and she began to put extra pressure on herself to be on time for class and not be the last person to finish quizzes or tests. She became determined to prove her peers of different ethnicities wrong. She even shared how she felt folks would look at her in specific classes, "I think a lot of lectures or math discussions, I felt awkward. I felt like when I answered, people were looking at me like 'Okay. She doesn't know what she's talking about.'"

Family Interaction in the First Year

When I asked her if she shared the difficulty she was having feeling ostracized in the classroom with her parents, she shared that she didn't talk to them much, because she didn't think they would understand what she was experiencing or offer any advice that would be helpful since neither had attended a four-year university. After listening to her peers talk about their families' involvement during the first year of college, Ciara considered how sharing more with her parents could have been helpful. On how she could have been more open with her parents, she stated,

It probably would have been cool just to be a little bit more involved in all that. I feel like I'm kind of an independent person since I was young, and I just kind of didn't really, I guess, to ask for help. There was stuff I went through, but it was never to the point where I felt like I needed that much help to get through it. It was just kind of something I would get through. I feel like that's probably a trait that might come back to hurt me if anything for real happens, but for the most part, I felt like this year was not much that I really needed from them. It was just stuff that I had to go through and learn on my own.

As she shared her thoughts on how independence works for her but may be a trait she needs to reconsider, we also discussed how it felt to be trailblazer for the generations of cousins younger than her who were watching her successfully navigate the first year of

college alone. Here is what she thought:

I was actually just talking to my friend about this. On and off, because it's so hard and it's struggling to find your own place and deal with all that stuff, but then it's also building you up as a person, learning how to deal with stuff like that and how to get through stuff like that just makes you smarter and know how to deal with certain things better.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

When Ciara moved to West University, her experience as a first-year student was something that she could have never fully imagined or prepared for. She had chosen to live on the African Diaspora floor to find and create deep, meaningful relationships with other AA students in a way she had not been able to at home. However, as she became familiar with her new surroundings, she was surprised to find similar ways of thinking by her peers and feeling of isolation by those who looked like her. As she reflected on her first year, she was able to notice how being at a university with a small population of students representing the African Diaspora is created. The creation of this community didn't come easily for Ciara, partly due to her shy demeanor upon first meeting folks. In addition, a lot of her peers had already formed a bond during PCSP, and at times, she felt it was hard to join an already formed group. In her personal interview with me, Ciara said, "I have my roommates, and I have pretty solid friends, but they're still—I would love to make more friends. Deeper connections instead of like 'Oh, hey,' just walk past when I see them."

Having the desire to have a deeper connection with her AA peers was important to Ciara because it was one she never experienced with any of her White and Asian peers. The closest she had ever felt to women her age were her cousins, but she also hoped to gain experience with a new community of folks with whom she identified more. As the year progressed, Ciara found her place in a student organization for students who identify

with multiple ethnicities. When talking about this student organization in comparison to a student organization focused on AA students, she shared the following,

But I think the cons are, I felt—not even with just the freshmen, but just the entire ASU—one of the differences I found between going to initially going to ASU meetings and going to MSU meetings was MSU felt a lot comforting. They were really nice, really engaging. But ASU kind of had their friend groups. It was kind of like a lot of cliques, I guess you would say. It wasn't as intense as cliques, but they just kind of would all hang out. I'd go, and I'd like “This is super awkward. I don't know anybody.”

As she developed more connections with a community, she could identify she was more exposed to the history and atrocities the AA community faced as a result of attending a PWI. However, she found it contradictory the way some of her AA peers would simultaneously identify race with the ability to be successful. During the focus groups, Ciara criticized her peers' perceived stance on success,

So it's just like it doesn't make sense. I feel like, in a sense, that holds our entire community back when people who are successful, who have made it from the bottom but they instill different values on their family, are seen as less Black, so why are we equating to success as being less Black?

She was bringing attention to situations in which students don't hold themselves to the stereotypical confines of fashion, musical interests, or even hairstyles of AA people, and thus, are seen as less “Black,” when in reality they know and do more in the Black community those holding the standards up as a measure of Blackness. Not only did her peers agree with her point, but also a conversation out of the context of the research began and solutions to combat these types of stereotypes arose.

As already established, Ciara was a resilient and resourceful student who didn't often ask her parents for help in the first year; however, when asked if she used campus resources to ensure her success at West University, she provided a short list of resources, “Academic counselors. My RAs, they were pretty helpful whenever I had a question or I

wanted to get more involved with something or just kind of be there. They were definitely helpful.”

As she reflected on the year in total, Ciara opened up about the impact the year had on her relationship with her boyfriend.

As a person, I feel almost entirely the same as before I went into West University as a freshman, except I feel more aware socially. Initially, as I touched on earlier, I deeply felt that I was being attacked or heavily looked over every day due to my race. Race was something that I became so focused on after my first two quarters at West University, it almost began to create a divide between my boyfriend and I. My boyfriend is White, and after I made such a drastic change he started to believe that I did not want him anymore and that I would be happier with a Black man. He started to feel attacked and discredited a lot as we would get into arguments over racial issues that we had never gotten in before. It wasn't until later spring quarter and when I came home from summer that I realized how much I was really focusing on race and how it was something that was almost becoming destructive to me.

Ciara felt the importance of finding some balance in her perceptions of herself and even how others saw her. By the end of the year, through self-reflection she felt less self-conscious academically and more comfortable in the community she created for herself.

Jules

Jules was raised by her mother and father along with two brothers, and she has additional siblings from her father's previous relationships. She is a second-year student whose major is currently undeclared, and she took the AA women seminar course in spring of 2015 after not being able to stay in the course during the winter of 2015.

When describing her family dynamics over the course of our initial conversation, Jules shared that her father is the rule maker, while her mother is more lenient as long as Jules stays within the religious guidelines of their Muslim faith. She also shared that the age gap between her father and mother plays a role in the family dynamic,

My dad, he has very good intentions, but he is old. He's 70 years old, so there's a huge gap there. He's very stuck in the older ways, I guess.... My mom is 41... so there's this huge age gap there, and so he really has his ways of the past kind of stuck on him now. He's very strict and very one way, one mind. "This is how you do things, and that's it" type of thing. He was strict in the religious aspect, but everything else, I could still go out with my friends, have friends come over, go to the movies, go to the beach. Partying, no, because within Islam, no, not supposed to do that.

Family Involvement in College Choice

As part of the standardized questions asked in the individual interviews, I ask Jules what involvement her parents had as she applied to universities. Her mother had little involvement, and her father was involved in ways that he was comfortable with. This included financial support, taking her to various entrance exam tests, and ensuring she applied for scholarships and was completing college applications. She also participated in a high school pipeline program between West University and local high schools for first-generation students and students of color. When I asked Jules why she eventually chose to attend West University, she responded,

At first, I wanted to go to New York. A lot of people say that... just coming here [due to the high school college program], living here—I already knew the campus. I new some professors. I already had my foot in, so when I got into West University, why not just get all the way in the door?

Collegiate Socialization—Social

Once she began her first year of college, Jules found that she had a lot more questions than answers about her identity, even more specifically her religion.

I entered my first year very confused about my identity as a Black Muslim woman. I did not know whether I wanted to be Muslim or not. I thought I would enjoy my life better if I was just a Black woman. Without really putting much thought on whether or not I wanted to continue being Muslim, I just strayed from the daily practices, such as praying five times a day, and wearing beanies or hats instead of hijab so I could not be identified as a Muslim. I felt more adventurous and had a lot fun, but something was still missing.

Coming from her high school, a place where everyone knew her, to being in an educational environment where she was questioned about her religion and dress became a bit daunting for her to get used to. In contrast to feeling like her Muslim identity was on display, she found it easy to meet new AA peers and stay connected with the ones she had met during the PCSP she attended over the summer prior to beginning her first year.

One of the areas of her life she didn't share with many people at all was the new relationship she began during her first year. Her boyfriend was not Muslim, and she didn't have any intention to marry him, so as result, she kept her relationship a secret from some friends and her entire family. As a Muslim woman, she is not allowed to date outside of her religion or for any other purpose than to eventually become married. The relationship didn't last long, but Jules revealed more about the relationship that is best told in her own words,

That was probably the worst experience ever. I mean, it was cool, but I just didn't know—I was never in a serious relationship before, so I didn't know how to act. I didn't know what it meant to be in a relationship. Then being in a relationship, I was too clingy, he was too clingy, or he wasn't clingy enough. And I couldn't tell my family about him. It was a big secret. My Muslim friends, I didn't want to tell them about it. Because my parents weren't going to have it. None at all.... So later on after first quarter, I was just like, "Okay, let me just find Islam again and figure out my path with that, my walk with that." So now, I'm—how I interact with guys—just a lot more reserved. I'm still approachable and all that stuff, but just no touching and anything like that. If you want to talk to me about something, it needs to be something with purpose, not just anything random. Guys could be a little—they'll try to get in there any way they can sometimes. Do they not know that they're doing it?

After breaking up with her boyfriend, she became an active member of an AA student-based organization and a Muslim faith-based student organization.

In the new quarter, I decided to join the Muslim Student Association and focus more on myself and my relationship with God while still working and trying to do well in my classes. It may not seem like a lot, but for me it was a lot to juggle. I was very emotional during this time, because I was going through a lot of

transformations: being comfortable with myself and being single, and focusing on my religious relationship. I really loved being part of MSA, but with that I found myself pushing away from the friends I originally made during pre-college summer program and the friends I made during first quarter. I literally tried to change everything up, instead of steadily working on one thing at a time. I was able to keep up with it, but the process was harder than it needs to be. I tend to do that a lot though, as in making things harder on myself than they need to be. I do not remember much of my second quarter.

While searching for identity and a community to belong to, Jules found it difficult again to merge the two identities into one,

I can't really find the right words to describe it. Being in that Black space, but not really a Muslim space, and then later on going to the MSA, there isn't too many Black Muslims on this campus, so in terms of Black identity, there is a space for it because a lot of Muslim students understand oppression because of what's going on in Palestine, Syria, with occupation and all that stuff. They get it in those terms, but they can't really apply it to the Black identity. And the Black struggle in America, they don't really understand that, but they can be an ally and try to understand it.

As a way to gauge where she found solace on campus that didn't include her peers, we discussed campus resources, and she shared that she found a mentor in a staff member who worked with first-generation students of color. Having his office as a safe space was good for her to talk through her issues with community, identity, and family without having to censor herself or feel judged.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

During her first year, Jules also questioned if she was academically prepared for West University. Based on the academic material she encountered her first year, she felt,

I think maybe my high school was a bit too easy. For most of my classes, it was easy to get an A and pass it. I never felt like I had to really study or work hard to get an A. And now, being here, I just realized how much work it takes to really get a good grade, at least a B-plus or something. So I don't feel like I was academically prepared.

Jules not only experienced a drastic shift in how much she had to work to keep her academics in good standing, but she also experienced a different classroom culture where almost no one in her academic spaces looked similar to her. Although she was experiencing extreme culture and academic shock, she did well in her classes; however, she didn't enjoy anything she was learning.

Family Interactions in the First Year

What wasn't as easy for Jules was maintaining a close relationship with her family. Even though her parents would call daily, she would find ways to avoid speaking to them for long periods of time. The distance created by college between Jules and her family created tension that was difficult for her to articulate, although she tried,

I kind of forgot about my parents just a bit. Yeah. I didn't really go home. I thought I didn't go home too often, but I guess I did, but when I did, it wasn't like a fun experience. It wasn't like I got to go home and see my family type of thing. I just went because it seemed like the right thing to do. So, has he really impacted my experience here? Not really. I mean, he helped me get here. So I'm grateful for that, but he doesn't really know how to help, and the same with him if I'm not being a doctor. It's not really much of a conversation.

Not only did she feel like conversation was strained with her father, but she also noticed her mother wasn't as interested in her collegiate experience outside of her academic coursework in the sciences. Jules also expressed her internal conflicts with going home on the weekends. On one hand, she enjoyed seeing her younger siblings, but on the other, she also knew that when she went home, completing academic assignments came second to family time.

Personal Growth in the First Year

Overall, Jules struggled with self, peer, and family acceptance, which led her to write this as the final piece in her reflection essay.

I do tend to worry a lot about how people view me. I am overall confident in myself, but sometimes I can be too hard on myself and wonder if people notice the flaws in me that I notice. Overall, my first year of college has been a huge learning process and truly a time for me to figure myself out, where my passions lie, and I am trying to learn to embrace change.

Donna

Donna was raised by her mother in the house with an older sister and younger brother. She identified that she comes from a working-class family and that there were a lot of transitions for her growing up. Until Donna was a teenager, her mother dated women, and as a family, they moved around a lot. She saw her mother and sister physically abused by the women her mother chose to date. Although Donna was never personally touched, seeing the abuse had an impact on how she would behave both inside and outside the classroom. As a result of the abuse, Donna's mother sent her and her sister to live with their father and his wife for a year. While the siblings did not have a close relationship with their father, they did adore their stepmother, who cared for them in a way they had not been used to. Unfortunately, once Donna's stepmother passed away, her relationship with her father became non-existent. Once she returned to living with her mother, she excelled academically.

Family Involvement in College Choice

Upon entering high school, Donna began to excel in a more stable and caring environment free from the abuse of her mother and sister. Donna was motivated to attend college, and although her mother didn't check her grades or help with the application process, Donna's mother was involved through the financial and moral support she offered. Donna recalls the way her mother felt when she read her personal statement for college,

She cried because on my personal statement, I talked about her, but I didn't talk about her bad. I just said she struggled or whatever, but she was like, "I don't know why you have to let the people know my business." And she was just crying because she thought I was angry or upset with her, and I had to explain to her, "No, I'm not angry. I just have to write it down."

Donna was accepted to West University as a Gates and Jackie Robinson Scholar.

Once accepted, she began her first year at the university in the summer of 2015 as a PCSP student.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

As Donna's first year got underway, she felt academically unprepared for West University. She struggled not only to retain the material, but she also struggled with feeling comfortable enough to ask questions.

My first quarter was a learning experience. There were a few classes I was comfortable in because the size of the class was small, and there were classes that I was afraid to seek help in because the class was so large. I did not get helped in my math class, because I didn't know how to speak up. I was nervous that people would judge me and I would be looked at as incompetent. I didn't go to office hours, because I felt like my questions weren't valid enough.

In high school, Donna always performed well; therefore, she was hard on herself when she had a hard time maintaining the high expectations she had for herself as a first-year student,

And I feel like in the family, I'm that person who can't mess up, so I have to make sure I do everything right and I can't make a mistake, because everybody is looking at me... but then when I do end up making a mistake, then my mom always tells me it's okay. But I still feel like—myself—like they look at me as like I'm going to West University, I'm about to get a degree. I'm studying math, so I have to do good. Sometimes, I feel like I can't change my major even if I want to because I have so many people looking at me, and they already see that my first idea that I had in my head, and they expect me to not switch up and change.

Heading into her last quarter, Donna felt good about getting the help she needed academically, and socially she was thriving. Taking the AA women's seminar had helped her to feel more comfortable using her resources inside and outside of class.

I went to office hours every week for every class, I asked questions, and I was recommended for to go to students with disabilities from two professors. I have a problem with anxiety when it comes to multiple choice tests, and I continuously fail. I was unable to apply for OSD accommodations before third quarter ended, so I plan on applying first quarter of second year.

Becoming settled academically was a challenge for Donna to overcome as she constantly faced tragedy in her family throughout her first year in college.

Family Interactions and Social Interactions in the First Year

The pressure Donna put on herself to do well at West University was deeply rooted in the dynamics of her family at the time. Although she wanted to engage socially and did so to a certain extent, Donna focused mainly on helping out at home whenever she could.

In our one-on-one interview, she candidly explained how she felt a duty to go home and help, especially since her older sister wasn't around and her little brother suffered from seizures. She wanted to succeed academically, but she still struggled to fulfill her role in the family. While it was hard for her friends to understand her constant visits to northern California and Donna's continual struggles to maintain good academic standing at West University, nothing would prepare her for the tragedy she would experience in the next two quarters of her freshman year.

About four weeks later, I got a call from my mom saying my older sister was arrested. I was devastated, and the worst part was I had a flight to New York the next day for a conference with the Jackie Robinson family. I didn't feel like doing anything, and I did not know how to deal with this matter. None of my friends knew how to be there for me, because they couldn't understand the pain I was feeling. I went to New York and tried my best to deal with the situation, and I

talked about it in our family groups, which are an accumulation of scholars and committee members. I am glad I went to New York because that would have made me think negatively about the situation the whole time. I went back to campus, took my finals, and ended second quarter better than my first.

When thinking about the time her sister was going to have to serve, she was motivated to do better in school and think about continuing her education so her sister could see her graduate with a master's degree someday. Just as she was beginning to accept that her older sister was going to be in prison for sometime, tragedy struck Donna's family again,

Everything was going great until week 9. One of my family members picks me up and takes me to Disneyland for the weekend, and it was going great until I got a call from my mom. I was on a roller coaster when my mom called, and I called her back when I got off, and she was acting all weird. In the middle of Disneyland, my mom told me my little sister hung herself and had passed away. My heart was broken and still is. My little sister is gone forever, and there is nothing I can do. Family means the world to me, and I broke down.

I asked if she decided to share the passing of her sister with her friends,

I couldn't keep that to myself, but I didn't want to tell everybody because I didn't need everybody asking me if I'm okay or how I felt, because I couldn't tell you how I feel because it's not an aunt, an uncle, grandparent. It's my little sister. It just hurt. It's empty. And it just made me... I took that first test, and I was just like, "I can do this." And just when I left after that first test and I saw her at her casket, I couldn't do anything else, and I had to come back and take that last final, but I left and I knew I failed. I failed the room disappointed, but there's nothing I can do because it's not her fault.

Not only was she grieving, but she also felt a deeper sense of responsibility to her siblings, both the little brother from her mom's side and younger sisters on her dad's side. During the focus groups, the topic of siblings came up, and Donna offered without any prompting these feelings about her family,

Then family is just like really important, especially my siblings. There's nothing more than them. So I've dealt with my little brother, like one of my little brothers had seizures. He's two now, but he was having it when he was like one and stuff. So it was really hard. I'd go back home because he had a seizure. It's important because the last time he had one, they told us that he can't have another one... So

I was like, I have to go home, because if I don't and something happens, then I'll regret it forever. It's like I was going home all the time, ...I'm the oldest one who can do something, because the oldest is my sister, and she's in prison. So right now, I am like the support for them.

Her feelings of responsibility to her family and in particular her siblings had a direct impact on her ability to develop trust and friendships.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

One area where Donna felt comfortable was volunteering. During her first year, she was part of the student alumni association, she participated in Gates Scholar and campus volunteer events, and she attended a conference for AA students at colleges and universities in California.

Although Donna did not have a hard time building friendships, she did struggle to build community. In listening to her peers talk about community building during the focus group she participated in, Donna was able to reflect on how her upbringing may have had an impact on her ability to trust people. Having a mother and sister who were gay and had been abused had a lasting impact on the way she chose to engage with people.

Something I wanted to add is like I dealt with people a lot, whether they sincerely want to be my friend or are they just using me. I don't know, like before, people can say or do something, I just doubt their sincerity. I actually stood out doing that because then like I don't even give people a chance. So if they do something nice for me, I don't believe that it's genuine. That's just not right. You know what I mean? They don't even have a chance to....

Having a hard time trusting people's sincerity led Donna to feel awkward when engaging with friends, even those she had become close with. She explains how her awkward feelings can be perceived as uncaring by her friends and how that caused a rift with a friend she truly cared for,

We came into the school year, we're really close. I was still really close with the people from admin weekend. So it's like I had that group of friends, and they were really close. Yeah, of course, like other friends in general, but that main group of friends, we were close. Now, looking back, I don't even remember what happened between me and Tonette, but I felt like my trust was broken. Right now, I'm trying to repair it because it was like—I felt like she could be that lifelong friend. But I don't remember what happened, but I felt like my trust was broken somewhere. So that affected me really big in my first year.

Even though Donna's first year was met with adversity from every direction, she considered it to be a learning experience in which she was still able to say she enjoyed her time at West University.

Asya

Asya was raised in a middle-class household with her mother, father, and younger sister. Growing up in a strict, two-parent household, she explained the roles each of her parents played in her upbringing. Because of health issues, Asya's mother stopped working and began to care for her and her sister full time. Her father was the sole provider, and according to Asya, he wasn't around to talk to when she needed help or advice, so she would talk to her mother more about issues or problems as they arose. Not only were Asya's parents strict about where their children went, but they were also strict about what they watched on television,

My parents, they have parent control on the TV so we couldn't watch anything that was really TV 14. Even though I was 13, I would try to watch some shows but they were like "No. That's TV 14. Go back to TV PG or TV Y7," and all that stuff. They were really strict, but at the same time, they were really nice about it. They also always made sure to explain why they didn't allow me and my sister to have access to certain things or go do certain things.

Family Involvement in College Choice

When the topic of college selection comes up, Asya excitedly remembered her number one choice,

I originally wanted to go to NYU, but out-of-state tuition didn't allow that. My parents, they really want me to stay in because I would get in-state tuition.... I wanted to come to West University just because of the fact, one, I want to get away, and two, they have a really good art program, and I just really wanted to come to a big city.

In preparation to apply to a school where she would be able to pursue art but also have a great academic foundation, Asya gives her mom a lot of credit for making sure all applications, portfolios, and test grades were submitted. Her father's contributions to the college application process were mostly financial, but he was also supportive of her decision to go to West University.

Pre-Collegiate—Self Reflection

Prior to attending the PCSP, Asya committed herself to self-growth. She spent the summer reading autobiographies of other people and ultimately used these powerful stories to empower herself,

[Reading] about other people's lives and their struggles or how they would do some of the same things too. I realized there's no point in me lying. Let me just be me, wholeheartedly me. I'm not perfect, but at the same time, there are a lot of great things about me that I can enjoy and that other people will enjoy as well. That's the point where I was like "Asya would be Asya."

Collegiate Socialization—Social

Once accepted to college, Asya was ready to embark on a new journey.

Nothing excited me more than my newfound freedom. Although home was only a two-hour drive, I felt like I was thousands of miles away. Walking around campus felt like I was in my own little world. A world free of curfews, chores, nagging parents, and church. Between my younger sister and I, we had weekly chores. Much like any other child, we hated them. It was annoying and nothing was more annoying than losing allowance because we did not do them in a timely manner. In the beginning, I held on to this "freedom" tight as a child would a new toy. This new toy distracted me from the changes in my environment, and because of that, transitioning from home to the residence halls was a breeze. I was so excited to go out at any hour without having to ask permission. I could go to the movies with the homies. Go hang out when and where I wanted. I did not have to tell my friends that I could not go to the party because there was not going to be

chaperone anymore. I could go to the party and be my own chaperone. All of this made me feel like I was grown. I was unstoppable.

In discussing the easiest parts of adjustment once she was at West University,

Asya shared,

I would have to say the second one, which was social activity. Back home I was always really social, I always enjoyed making new friends and stuff like that. So coming here after participating in admin weekend and being an PCSP and just being surrounded by a lot of Black people, and I'm used to having Black friends, so it was easy for me just to say "Hey, what's up?" Whatever, just start conversations and then develop friendships.

Asya was involved culturally in her new environment. She was involved in the African Student Union, lived on the African Diaspora floor, planned programs for her residential peers, and began working in the student media office. With an intact friend group, social activities, and the freedom to come and go as she pleased, the idea of romantic relationships was nice to consider in theory, but she was very clear about that she wasn't ready to for a serious relationship in her first year.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

Asya admits that most of her friends were Black students, but based on her art major, she was able develop friendships with folks of other ethnicities. She excelled as an art student, but she struggled with some of her general education courses. To provide the researcher with the context of her academic struggle, she reflected back to high school,

The high school, one, it was very small, two, they had a really big focus on projects-based learning and learning about taking and different projects, and taking leadership in internships and jobs. During our junior and our senior years, we had to do internships with different companies. So we would take a month off of school, and we would just go do an internship throughout. Some people even traveled outside of the state for their internships.... My high school was media arts based, so they really tried to implement the media arts in every single project. That was something that I was really good at, so I typically did really good with the projects. There also weren't many tests or anything like that. It was as far away as you can possibly get from your standard high school or stuff like that.

Not having a traditional school background didn't help her to feel confident in her abilities to engage academically with her professors or peers. Asya would procrastinate and pull all-nighters to complete assignments, and she pointed to her insecurities as rationale for her last-minute nature,

I didn't know how to choose the key points that were in different reading or figure out what was the important things that I needed to know for class the next day. So that was something I really struggled with. To be honest, it's still something that I struggle with now.

Asya's experience in the classroom environment felt uncomfortable at times, especially in the art class spaces, where she experienced the following:

The majority of the people in those classes were all White, and they all had these really weird obsessions with Black culture that made me feel really uncomfortable. They would use the N word. They wouldn't use it openly in class, but it was when they were outside on break [in] different friend groups and circles, I would hear them use the word. I even expressed that it made me feel uncomfortable. They would be like "Oh, okay. I'm sorry," or whatever, but then later on, I would still hear them continue to use the word. It just made me feel really uncomfortable.

Although she felt uncomfortable with some of her peers, she felt completely supported by her major professors, who she went to frequently to get feedback on her work.

Family Interactions in the First Year

Asya didn't feel pressure to date or conform to the social issues her friends were experiencing, but she did find she wanted to check in at home more.

Whenever I called home, I was calling my mother. She was my main contact. Before college, I always felt most comfortable with my mother. Although I did not always tell her everything, she was the only person I told almost everything to. To this very day, there are some things I still do not tell my mother. But, during college we opened up to each other like we never had before. Few things were secret.

In addition to expressing the closeness she shared with her mom during her first year, she also opened up about their closeness during our individual interview,

I just feel really comfortable talking to my mother now, now that I have all this freedom, which is kind of weird. I don't know. It's like our relationship has gotten stronger since I've been in college, partially because of the fact that I've gotten all this freedom.

Conversely, Asya shared her inability to create a closer relationship with her father in a rare moment of peer comparison,

A lot of my friends have good relationships with their fathers or at least my friends who grew up with their fathers have really good relationships. They can talk to their dad about anything. My dad always tells me that I can talk to him about anything, it's just that I never really feel 100% comfortable doing so.

Intersectionality of Home and College Life

Asya's first year flowed relatively smoothly. She was active on campus, began using her resources academically, and volunteered her time to newly admitted Black students for the upcoming school year. In her reflective essay, she shared how a call from home solidified a sisterhood both biologically and by choice.

It was the second night of admit weekend I became aware that my sister was suicidal. I cried for hours trying to think of what I could do to help my sister from school. I had to compose myself in the presence of the admitted student [admit] I was hosting. I was so excited to host an admit, and she was a great girl, I thought it would be best to smile through my pained eyes and give her the best experience possible. When my [admitted student guest] went out with the group to eat, I confided in two people. I was scared and did not know what to do because she did not know that I was aware of her series of suicidal writings. My parents did not know either, and I was afraid to tell them that they were part of the reason why my sister contemplated killing herself. I wanted to help my sister, but at the same time, I was afraid because I did not know how she was react. My friends did not say much, but I did not need them to. I needed my sisters. I needed them to listen to me and hug me, which they did. I was grateful for that.

When discussing the details of what led to Asya's sister's suicidal thoughts, she remembered this,

When I left for my first year, it's like I wasn't there to really talk to her all the time. So then she got like a lot of built-up anger and then got to a point where she was suicidal, and she was writing all these messages in her diary and my cousin had read it. That's like a whole another story for another time. But basically, it's all these messages. Then he told me, and this is why I'm here at school, I'm like, "Wait. What's going on? I don't really know. I'm not at home, so I don't really know what's going on." The family could be saying like, "Oh, everything is good."

Everything wasn't good, but as a family, they rallied around Asya's sister, and she was able to get the help and support needed to combat her feelings of depression and hopelessness. During the discussion in the focus group Asya participated in, she shared how close she and her sister have become and her motivation to set a good example as a college student through activism and authenticity. As Asya brought her reflection essay to a close, her words were the perfect ending to a story of a young woman confident and full of promise.

Finding friends at West University was not hard. Neither was finding my core group of people. In college, I learned that life is too short for me to waste time being someone that I am not. As I go throughout life, I have to be wholeheartedly me. By not being me, I am robbing other people of the joy that I am. And more importantly, I am robbing myself of my own happiness. I cannot recall the exact event or moment that brought me to this. But it occurred during the Freshmen Summer Program. I vowed myself to live in truth, my truth. By being myself, I found people who shared the same interests as myself. Because of those, we began to learn more about each other and became fond of each other's company.

Amongst the Black female undergraduates, there is a sisterhood. There is drama, but despite that, we have established safe spaces with one another. I did not have those spaces growing up, but I have them now, and in those spaces, I have experienced the most growth. I am forever indebted to the womyn I have shared them with. I would not be here or find comfort in sharing my story if it was not for them.

Angel

Angel was raised by her mother and step-grandmother, along with her younger sister. Angel's life prior to college was met with a lot of transitions. She revealed in our first conversation,

So I come from a low-income family. I was born in [city], but I moved around a lot. So I kind of grew up in Nevada and parts of California, so just the desert. Growing up is my mom, one of my younger sisters who is 11, and my step-dad. My mom had other boyfriends. Occasionally we lived with my [step] grandparents.

Moving around as a child into adolescence, Angel found it difficult to trust people; however, she was able to build a bond with her grandparents that would give her the strength to pursue a college degree even in the face of the obstacles she would have to overcome with her parents, boyfriend, and finances. Her determination to succeed was evident in how she was able to prepare for college and navigate her first year.

Family Involvement in College Choice

Angel and I began our conversation about her parent's involvement in her college application process; unabashedly she admitted that her mother was not involved in her college preparation or selection. In fact, getting her mother to support the process at all was consistently difficult. Not only did her mother not participate in the college entry process, but also Angel shared,

My mom was also a big bully to me. She was always talking bad about me, like how I dress, my hair, how I look, and stuff like that. Plus my mom had other female friends. A lot of the Black women in my family, not my step family, are like her. So that was my main example, like, "Oh, my gosh. This is where I come from."

When asked the part her father played in her applying to colleges and universities, she shared that she didn't meet her father until the spring quarter of her freshman year in college, so he wasn't involved in the process at all. Her track coach, a high school counselor, and her grandmother were instrumental in getting her prepared academically and financially for college. It was through the advice of her church family that she decided to go to West University.

Angel opened up about how hard the decision was to leave her little sister based on the role she played as a caretaker during high school,

I only grew up with one of my siblings. I would say during high school, I wasn't close to my little sister at all because I had a lot of stress from my mom. So I often want to stay isolated from everybody just so I could cope with stress and stuff. And she always wants to play and do this and that. So my focus wasn't so much like a personal relationship with her, but I was making sure she did good in school. So I'd make her like read, make her study.

Collegiate Socialization—Academics

When the topic of academics came up in our one-on-one discussion, Angel didn't think high school adequately prepared her for what she was experiencing academically in college,

Not at all. I took a few classes in high school. I don't feel it prepared at all. To me, college is way more advanced than advanced placement classes in high school. The AP classes just have extra homework and take away so much of your time, but they aren't as challenging as college courses.

She went on to further illustrate how feeling academically unprepared impacted her during her first quarter at West University.

Academically speaking, I struggled during my fall quarter because I felt overwhelmed by the whole college experience. I didn't know what to expect, and I did not embrace the idea of exploring what I did not know. I limited myself to excelling because of my low self-esteem. I felt intimidated by people who, I believed at the time, were smarter than me.

Even with low self-esteem academically, she pushed herself to critically engage in class discussions on topics she felt more comfortable with. At the end of our discussion about academics, I asked Angel if she went to office hours, and her response was,

Unfortunately, I only went two or three office hours during the whole school year for every class I've had. Fall quarter, I wasn't even worried about office hours. I was like "Whatever." Winter and spring quarter, my work hours conflicted with it, and I cared more about money to pay off bills ahead and just getting answers from my classes.

She did mention that although she didn't go to office hours, she did use tutors and resources offered in a campus department whose services are for students of color, including first-generation students.

Collegiate Socialization—Social

Once the decision about which college to attend was made and her bags were packed, Angel came to West University ready to move away from an unstable upbringing.

My first year of college was filled with stress, joy, fears, triumphs, and anxiety. I had no problem moving away from home when I thought of living in a residence hall. I wanted to prove to myself and to my family that I could be independent, responsible, and overcome challenges alone. Not only was I paranoid during the first few weeks on campus, but I actually felt weird not having adult supervision. I could not believe that so many college students sold marijuana, bought marijuana, and smoked marijuana. Students went to parties every weekend and came back drunk, shouting in the hallways at 3 a.m. I expected people to be more mature and well-rounded in college because it's... well, college.

Being in this new environment was interesting for Angel, and she found it easy to make friends by participating and volunteering in various programs and activities. Not only did she participate in activities, but she also went to parties, sporting events, and dance workshops. She was thrilled to be in a collegiate environment that afforded her so many opportunities to be active.

Struggling academically, yet faring well socially, Angel was still searching for identity personally.

Ironically, I only acted buck wild whenever I went home for breaks; I never did anything crazy around my friends at West University. I guess I didn't feel comfortable being wild at school. My hometown became the place for me to be free and let loose. Now, don't get me wrong... I had plenty of fun acting out the way I did. All in all, I used my independence to the fullest extent when I transitioned from home to the residence halls. I became more open-minded, made plenty of mistakes, learned more about myself, gained insight about how to be responsibly independent, and I made new friends.

Angel shared that she waited until college to experiment with drugs and alcohol, but only when she went home for visits because she felt safer with her friends back home than her new group of friends in college. She determined quickly that neither drugs nor alcohol were vices she wanted to participate in regularly.

Still searching for deep connections that mirrored the ones she had in her hometown, Angel provided more insight into her inability to create these relationships in college,

I had never been close to Black women before. A lot of that had to do with my mom. I had two Black females who are my best friends. That was just because I've gotten to know them. Off the bat being cool with them, it's just like—no... because I automatically imagined my mom. Also getting bullied different girls who are also Black, that was my issue.

It took some time, but by the end of the year, Angel's involvement in a ministry group geared specifically for AA students and taking the AA women's seminar helped her move past her fears in this area. It was easier for Angel to build friendships with males, but since she broke up with her ex-boyfriend in spring quarter after experiencing a miscarriage and finding out he was unfaithful, she chose to only maintain friendships with her male counterparts. During our individual interview, I asked Angel to only share what she felt comfortable with about her miscarriage. This is what she chose to share,

Yeah. We always had unprotected sex. I, not being knowledgeable even though I learned to always use condom, he was like "I'll pull out in time." So I figured he was. Unfortunately, one of the times he had, inside of me—I waited about a week before I took a Plan B pill because it was expensive and I was nervous to take it. I was like "Can I do this? Should I do this?" So I took it. It was ineffective. Towards the end of the school year, like June 13th, June 14th, which was finals week, I bled a lot. It was a miscarriage, basically. It lasted two days. I had terrible stomach pain and back pain prior to it. It was a really stressful time.

Family Interactions and Financial Lesson in the First Year

Handling a romantic relationship was stressful throughout Angel's first year; however, this wasn't the only stressor she had to maintain. During her first year in college, Angel describes how even though she missed home and the comfort of her grandmother's hugs, their relationship changed as Angel found voice, made less conservative fashion choices, and hung out with her high school friends as opposed to spending quality time with the family when she came home over breaks. In addition to adjusting to a new normal at home, Angel had to learn how to manage her finances, something she had never been taught.

So I had done my financial aid. I never had that much money to myself before. My whole plan of saving my check went out the window. I was like "You know what. I have money." I was always wanting to help people. So my way of helping was getting people gifts because I can never give the way I wanted to. So I figured "Oh, let me do it through money." Christmas came around, I don't know how much money I spent. It was way too much. I bought stuff for my ex. I bought stuff for my best friend, my family. It got to a point where I was out with my ex and I started crying. I had 76 cents left. It went from hundreds to 76 cents. I was like "Oh, my gosh. What happened? What did I do?"

In addition to not saving any of her refund check, she had anticipated getting money she had loaned to her mother back, "I've given my mom \$2,000 from a settlement that I received. She's supposed to pay me back but she never did. So that cut a lot into my whole plan of having enough money along with my financial aid."

When asked why she didn't ask for help with financial planning before or after she saw she didn't have any money, she replied that she didn't want to ask her grandmother at the time because Angel's grandmother was assisting Angel's mother, who had to be admitted to the hospital for kidney failure after being homeless for the better part of Angel's first year in college. Moreover, watching her mother while growing up left her with a stigma around asking for help,

I guess I never wanted to be like my mom. She's always asking people for handouts and always just struggling. Even if she had money, she would still ask people for money. Watching her manipulate people—and then even still after she got money she wouldn't save it properly. She would just waste it. Even if I did waste it, I didn't want to come off needy. I just didn't want to embody my mom at all.

Personal Growth in the First Year

Angel's first year in college taught her some valuable lessons about self-reliance, the importance of asking for help, and persistence.

I couldn't say no before college because I felt like I was letting people down. My negative social interactions taught me that "no" is one of the best words to use because it protects me from unnecessary drama, danger, and stress. I definitely matured a lot from the experiences I had during my first year.

We all shared our triumphs, defeats, depression, and joy with one another. When either one of us was in grief or joy, we all grieved or laughed together. Without the encouragement, advice, love, friendship, and optimism I received from various people, my freshman year would have felt unbearable.

Angel's first year, while filled with triumphs, also had a severe learning curve that led her to ask for the help she needed to stay at West University.

AA Women's Seminar Course

All of these stories are remarkable and unique, but the one piece that I didn't anticipate as a researcher was how impacted these women were by the AA women's seminar course I co-facilitate with two other AA women who work at West University.

In this collection of their quotes are their feelings about the class.

Lalah: I feel like seeing a group of 30 women who are peaceful and emotional and open to new experiences, and it didn't matter if I dress a certain way or my hair was a certain way. Just talk. Deep down inside, people could have not liked people in that room, but it did not matter, because for that two hours, you have to talk to those women. That was something that was bigger than yourself, because it had nothing to do with just you as a person. It had to do with Black women as a whole.

Donna: I definitely think it helped me because I'm really strong in certain subjects as far as I don't want to hear about someone was mean to you or

someone rolled their eyes at you or this happened or that happened, but in AA Women's Seminar, I put a face for all those people, and I try to understand where they're coming from, especially since I'm walking the same path that they're walking at West University. So I definitely was able to take out on different mindsets in how to allow other people's opinions to speak for them and for me to look at their opinions. And it was a great opportunity for building friendships and expanding on the friendships that I already had. So there's pieces of my friends that I never knew until I was in that class. So that was definitely something that I took away from that class. It was a really powerful, especially you guys as professors or teachers.

Janet: But AA Women Seminar was a space like that, but specifically for first year. So it was a perfect way to end my first year, but one I kind of also—I guess you can say I became okay with myself. One, I was able to realize I don't have to feel guilty. Of course, that doesn't mean take it for granted, but it means do what I can. But I can't question that. Everybody's path in life is different. So it's okay for Janet to live with Janet and be okay with myself. And like I said, do what I can in terms of helping and expectations, but I don't have to apologize. I don't have to feel guilty. I don't have to make it up to people because I don't have control over everybody else's life. It also made me feel okay with, like I said, part of my thing was when you come to college, people tell you and then to a certain extent the interaction with males, they'll become a little bit different. But I also have to become okay with myself and in terms of the one male interaction didn't define me. Not that it ever has, but it's like, okay, even with that. Then even in the leadership, well, because my second year I took more leadership roles that were just like, "Oh, this is the perfect way to end the fact that I was okay. I was okay for multiple reasons." One, because I was able to maybe put a name to some of the things that I experienced. I was with other women that had. So I wasn't crazy. And two, like I said, it was also just kind of like a self-reflection moment. Like it's okay to just live and be okay with me. Even getting into leadership and helping me with the next steps in terms of how we move forward and completing this college process.

Ciara: Yeah. I definitely like the class that we did. That was super awesome, just having a place where everyone is on the same page, and even if we're not on the same page, seeing how other people are affected by certain things that you might not even be affected by or how you might be affected by vice versa, you know? I really liked the class. I think that it'd be cool if we had something to expand on just the quarter. I know they're trying to get that club going or whatever. They had the retreat, the AA Women Seminar retreat. I went to that. That was super cool. I'd just like to see I guess more stuff like that. Just building a stronger community within the women. I think by having that community, it would help a lot of people deal with the transition better and feel more

included, I guess, and just tend to feel that other people are on the same page.

Angel: AA Women Seminar, for one, I had never been in a class for Black women. And plus the instructors were evolved. I love learning from everyone. The readings are just about how to deal with stress, again, self-sufficiency versus surrendering for other and taking care of yourself, and basically just how to carry yourself. PWI was just very helpful. I always love getting advice and wisdom. For me, those readings and what you guys were teaching in the class were very helpful. I absorbed it and really tried to apply it. I tried. Also just being able to share our experiences in the class. How we could relate to readings is very helpful. Journaling was very helpful. It helped me express a lot of different things that I was dealing with. It felt like a safe space. That quarter, I did my best. I got the best GPA out of both quarters.

Asya: Honestly, I really did enjoy the Sister to Sister class, one, because of the fact that I was in a room full of Black women from different backgrounds and experiences. I didn't feel that the class was extremely challenging. I feel like I didn't experience the same type of growth a lot of the other girls experienced in the class. Everybody at the end of the class, even in my friends circle, they were just like "Man, I've changed," this and that. I did enjoy the class, but I didn't feel like I share that same amount of growth.

Jules: I think it was just great meeting all the other sisters on campus and just being really honest and open about our own experiences, how we feel.... Just being around that space makes you feel like you're really part of something that's larger than yourself, as cliché as that sounds. It's not just you that's going through this struggle daily. Whatever that may be, maybe just walking down [campus walkway] and not seeing a familiar face, but then going to that class and seeing all these faces who are just happy to see you. It meant a lot socially and emotionally and having all those beautiful ladies to surround you.

Tonette: I learned a lot about Black women in general and just how much we struggle compared to other women of other races and even just men in general. It seems like we struggle the most, and it just brought up things that I never thought about, how we have to deal with race on top of being a woman, most of the time, not getting the same opportunities that maybe a White woman would get. I guess I realized in the class that we're almost set up to fail, and that's why we need to be here for each other. Most of the experiences that I've heard about with Black women, it just seems like a lot of us don't want to help each other out. And so, I feel like that class is really good in letting us know that we do need to help each other out.

Chapter Summary

These women's stories are not monolithic; they are varied and have complicated layers that must be addressed in the academic discourse of the 21st century. The participant's individual stories provided context for lived experiences of first-year AA women. Each participant was able to articulate how intersectionality and cultural community wealth had a deep impact on their ability to persist through the first year. Their honesty and bravery in telling their stories authentically is to be applauded. These are the stories that will inspire their peers and hopefully motivate administrators and researchers to develop new models of engagement in theory and practice.

PART V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to provide real-life stories of first-year African American (AA) women at a predominantly White institution (PWI) to add to the body of research on how the intersectionality of gender and race, among other categories of identity, should be considered when preparing AA women for a collegiate environment and onboarding them to it. These stories provide evidence of the complexities that constitute the experiences of AA women in the first year of college. Colleges and universities should be keenly aware of these realities if they are to meet their articulated intentions to recruit and retain this specific population of students. This study highlights some of these AA women's experiences to raise understanding and to start a conversation about the types of institutional support mechanisms necessary to truly support these students.

Using the theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), I was able to situate the study in the foundation laid by Christa Porter (2013) in her model on the development of Black undergraduate women. The use of the tenets from this model, personal foundations and pre-collegiate and collegiate socialization, help to clearly define the different areas within each woman's experience. In addition, the depth of the stories describing the experiences of AA women in their first year provides a nuanced narrative of both challenges and triumphs this population faces during their initial year in college as a way of challenging the dominant narrative around retention and persistence. Finally, this study aimed to create an alternative meaning for the word "adjustment" as it relates to colleges and universities. In other words, adjustment connotes a need to adjust to an already

established, dominant institutional structure. What this study asserts is that institutions must “adjust” their structures and services to the specific needs of the various populations it recruits, in this case, the unique and complex experiences of AA women. This study also brings to light how AA women can isolate themselves from their home and college communities, thus complicating the issue of adjustment in an already oppressive environment. The hope is to provide recommendations and pending questions about how we address the current needs of the AA population, while questioning the best ways to change outdated programs and resources at PWIs for marginalized groups of students.

In addition to the theoretical frameworks in which this study is couched, I think the research findings bring to light another ideology and/or analogy by contemporary AA feminist Melissa Harris Perry. In her latest book, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, Harris-Perry discusses the idea of the “crooked room.” The use of her analogy is based on field-dependent and independent studies in which subjects were asked to determine the upright in a space that was intentionally constructed askew of typical 90-degree angles (Harris-Perry, 2012). In these studies, the subjects were brought into the room with the light off, and once the light was turned on, the researchers observed subjects as they moved their bodies in an effort to locate the space that felt upright in relation to the way furniture and accents were placed in the room (Witkin et al., 1977). To this point, Dr. Harris-Perry (2012) asserts that the “crooked room” study can be used to explain how AA women frequently feel in society, often trying to find the upright in a space that is crooked for them.

I believe this analogy can be applied to the way AA women feel at PWIs. The findings of this study show that although these women come from a diversity of

experiences, they are all trying to find the upright in the “crooked room,” a PWI. Using the frame Harris-Perry posits to problematize the educational system’s outdated methodologies and practices for the diversity of students it serves, I will also pose questions for consideration that may lead to recommendations for further research throughout my discussion of the findings presented in this study.

Family and Adjustment

Discussion

When thinking about the theoretical framework of BFT, Collins (1990) clearly outlines how salient relationships with other AA women are for this population to navigate the world around them. While Euro-masculine perspectives on family would argue that feeling a sense of responsibility and acceptance is not important for one to be successful, BFT argues that the very reason AA women exist is at the antithesis of this argument (Collins, 1990). It is the family that provides us with the aspirational, social, navigational, and resistance capital needed to endure the oppression faced when attending a PWI (Yosso, 2005). However, the dominant narrative presented to first-year AA women can shake their confidence and ability to succeed amongst their peers (Johnson, 2010). This narrative also hinders their sense of community, as it shifts from family and community of origin to solely peer, staff, and faculty interactions in their new environment. Adjusting to this new community culture can be more or less challenging based on the relationships formed with other AA women and the types of capital gained in their personal foundations, as posed in Porter’s (2013) grounded theory.

Patricia Hill Collins (1989) asserts that the need for an Afro-centered epistemology stems from the intersectionalities of the AA female’s identity. In contrast to the dominant culture, a woman of color cannot separate her racial identity from her

gender. There are a set of experiences that exist exclusively for Black women that only can be shared and taught by other Black women based on Collins's Black Feminist Thought ideology (Collins, 1989). Thus, for AA women the beginning of understanding how to operate in the world comes from other Black women in their family and/or community. With this framework in mind, it is made more clear how almost all of the women who participated in the study had a very close connection with the women in their lives, whether positive or negative.

The study revealed the power of the family relationships and in particular the relationship with mother as the most salient for the participants. For instance, Lalah and Carmen struggled to relate to or have compassion for their mothers in high school. Watching their mothers struggle in relationship to their fathers created dissonance in the relationship. Preparation for college was appreciated, but the limits asserted by their fathers based on finances or expectations left the young women at odds with their mothers. In contrast, Janet, Asya, and Tonette had positive relationships with their mothers in preparation for college. Their mothers provided support and guidance through the process, and they led to positive feelings about their college choice and distance from home. There were also the participants whose mothers were supportive but did not help with the preparation or college selection process at all. Ciara, Jules, and Donna were all self-motivated to apply, get accepted, and attend the college of their choosing, with little to no family support.

In particular, Angel and Sarah were two participants who struggled with the support or lack thereof from their families. Although Angel desired support from her mother emotionally, financially, and physically, it was not available. As for Sarah, it was

hard for her to accept the support offered from other women as a result of not having her mother or father's physical presence to help her prepare for life after high school. The saliency is stated explicitly and implicitly throughout the participants' discussions about the role of their mother, from preparation for college through the first year.

Throughout the first year of college, all of the women's relationships with their mothers shift in some way. Most commonly, the women gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for the roles their mothers or "other mothers" played in their lives. In other instances, the participants found their voice and were able to create healthier boundaries with the mother figures in their lives. The creation of these boundaries led to an increase in emotional and financial stability. Although the participants did not make direct correlations between their relationships with their mothers and their adjustment to the PWI, the ways in which they navigated emotionally through the first year is a clear indicator that these relationships had a direct impact.

In addition to the impact of the mother-daughter relationship on the first year, the participants shared how father/father figures and siblings played a role in their "adjustment" to PWIs. Only three women (Lalah, Tonette, Janet) described positive interactions with their fathers during the college preparation process. Their ability to depend on their fathers to guide and support the pursuit of education seemed to instill a sense of confidence in each of these participants. The participants with little to no support from their fathers seemed to mention the relationship as unimportant in both getting into and attending college. Interestingly enough, when asked about their relationships with the fathers in their lives, it was mainly around moral support or trying to repair/build a new type of relationship with these males. None of the women were able to clearly link their

adjustment in the first year with their relationships with their fathers. However, it is evident that these relationships impacted every part of their adjustment to a new environment. For instance, both Sarah and Angel had no relationship with their fathers and didn't give it much thought in high school, but once in college, both sought out their fathers to try to build a new relationship. In both cases, the fathers were able to provide more context to their identities and pasts, which in turn provided a better understanding of self and an increase in self-confidence.

Relationships within the traditional family structure seemed to have a positive impact on the participants' ability to navigate West University in the first year. In looking at the Cultural Community Wealth framework (Yosso, 2005), familial, navigational, social, and resistance capital were evidenced in this study. All of the participants had some familial capital, whether it was from their mother and father or extended family members; they all understood and depended on the love and support of family. In addition to familial capital, all of the participants were provided with aspirational capital. This capital was presented in family members who both attended and didn't attend a college or university. Whether their families could assist in the navigation of the university setting, all of the participants' support systems held hopes and dreams for their students' success in the collegiate setting (Yosso, 2005).

When assessing the social and resistance capital of the participant study, there is evidence that racial construct ideologies salient for African American families are not the same for African families who live in America. The resistance and social capital African Americans adhere to measure their self-efficacy and work ethic against their White peers. For instance, Tonette discussed how her father recommended the best college and

universities in the country to apply too, because she needed to be able to compete with her White peers, creating resistance capital in the face of racial oppression. In contrast, Lalah, a first generation Nigerian, whose parents immigrated to America, shared that her parents instilled values of academic preparation based on her own self efficacy, not in comparison to her White peers, which created resistance capital without using racial construct ideologies in the process. In terms of social capital, the study offered that this type of capital could be linked to socioeconomic status (SES). Tonette comes from a higher SES, thus her father was able to share how to use academic, professional, and peer networks when learning a new environment. In Tonette's interview, she discusses how her conversations with her father about the utilization of networks helped her to seek assistance both academically and socially. Unlike her peers, she felt comfortable engaging with her White peers in the classroom without feeling ostracized or isolated. Her sentiments remained consistent in that although she found community with her AA peers in the residence halls, she continued to see the value in creating a diversity of networks while at West University. This is not to say the women with additional areas of capital didn't feel isolated; however, they were provided with the needed support to overcome obstacles and avoid complete isolation in ways other AA women in the study struggled to combat.

Implications & Recommendations

The importance of family and cultural community wealth are validated by this study. All of the women who participated cited that some family member, whether parental or extended, assisted on their journey to and through the first year of college. However, what continues to be missing in the research, literature, and practice in relation

to the families of AA women is how to combat the deficit thinking model that continues to permeate dominant educational systems. Based on the literature review in Part II, researchers offered both benefits and challenges to parental support. The reasons offered by the dominant culture stated that students, in particular females of color, should learn to individuate from their families (Sax, 2008). While another study posits that support offered in the form of feedback, advocacy, tangible assistance, and positive interactions creates an outline of support that could be offered to students in the first year (Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay, 1981). Sax (2008) offers a deficit thinking model, while Barrera et al. (1981) offer ideology more in line with CCW and BFT. While there is research that offers a foundation for how institutions should support family involvement in the educational process, little research has been done to address the complexity of family involvement for AA women in particular. Further research should include the increase in parents with college graduates, the exploration of the growing number Africans who have immigrated to the United States, biracial family structures, and variance in SES and its impact on adjustment, difference in culture, and ethnicity.

Current research has focused on AA students as a monolithic population, which fails to address of the intricacies of the AA women's family structure. As evidenced in this study, 7 of the 10 participants had a parental figure who had graduated from college. However, programs and resources offered at PWIs for AA students have been provided with a deficit thinking framework. Most programs require that students who enter the programs post-Proposition 209 have to be first generation and low income. Thus students who were raised in higher SES environments with little to no family support would not seek out the support originally mandated for oppressed communities. In the same vain,

communities who have no knowledge of this country's racial tensions are not aware of the types of programs and resources made available to students of color based on explicitly stated criteria that are unofficially provided to AA students at PWIs, thus they are not able to provide the appropriate guidance or navigation to their students. Similarly, biracial families can face the same barriers, especially when the parental figure with culture knowledge is not in the home with the college-bound student. Finally, the assumption by PWIs that AA students who come from more affluent homes with college graduate parents do not need the same types of support as their first-generation, low-income peers is false. This study provided valid experiences of both first-generation and non-first generation students who needed the same resources as they traversed through their first year in college.

The need for a complete overhaul of the way AA students in general and AA women in particular are programmed and resourced is needed across the country. Family structure, SES, and parents' degree-holding status should not have a bearing on the types of resources offered to students from oppressed communities. Furthermore, PWIs should do more to build pipeline programs in the communities they serve that offer skills and resources that will help them to support their student's first year in college. In particular, they should reach out to families who do have degrees to be advocates for higher education and support families who are not as familiar with the structure, policies, and procedures of PWIs. In addition, we know based on BFT that AA women learn from each other, thus universities should enlist AA women who are faculty and staff on their campuses to build relationships with the families of AA women to ensure the successful transition of these women to PWIs.

Predominantly White institutions must also begin to acknowledge the complexity of the family dynamics of students who come into the institution and update faculty and staff training to accommodate the needs of these students. As seen in the research finding, two of the participants who came to the university with little cultural or navigational capital endured tragedies in their first year that most folks do not experience in a lifetime. However, if they had not taken the AA women seminar class, they would have never been exposed to the campus resources and departments needed to help them continue past their first year. It is imperative that PWIs and educational institutions in general stop creating programs and resources for generalized populations and begin to focus on the individual needs of students as a road map to their educational liberation, as opposed to continuing the cycle of oppression in educational spaces. This can be done by creating communities of support for all students and enable the building of relationships with staff and faculty who can support their journey in ways that their family of origin may not be able or willing to do.

This study showed the importance of family and community support during the transition into college. The absence of AA women relationships and community capital can lead to isolation of first year AA women at PWIs. While we will continue to push for change in the infrastructure of PWIs, families and communities of color must continue to show these women how to exist in the crooked room through advocacy, official programming, and mentoring. First-year AA women who refuse to let the oppressive educational community of a PWI isolate them from family will learn how to exist upright in a crooked room.

Socialization and College Adjustment

Discussion

Porter (2013) posits that the socialization of an AA woman to a PWI often begins to develop during her K-12 schooling. This is especially true for AA girls who attend school in suburban neighborhoods where African American people are the minority population. Based on the literature focused on AA students and K-12 schooling, they are again treated from a deficit thinking ideology. In a study by Jaykumar, Vue, and Allen (2013), AA students with high SES did not feel like college going was promoted in their schools and often felt like “outsiders” who were exceptions to the rule. This sentiment is reflected in the stories shared by the participants. For the women who attended schools with White and Asian peers, race stayed at the forefront of their minds. Although Alexander-Snow (1999) found that there were AA women who were able to successfully navigate PWIs after attending a Majority-White boarding school, the same feelings were not true in the current study.

Participants shared new feelings of isolation and discomfort when socializing with White peers at West University. For instance, Sarah, who had chosen mostly White friends in high school, began to feel uncomfortable in classes with mostly White and Asian peers during her first year at West University. Similarly, Tonette and Carmen assimilated to White cultural norms in high school, but once they were in college, they felt more comfortable in friend groups consisting of only AA women and men. Even a participant like Sarah, who had previously been comfortable around her White peers, longed for the day when she wouldn’t have to hear comments like “don’t go to college and get all Black on us” or “you are not like the other Black girls,” which over time had caused her question her “Blackness.” Both examples provide a backdrop for how K-12

schooling socialization has a direct impact the type of community AA women seek to find once a choice is available to them.

The desire to connect to AA students is evident in the participant's residence hall selections at West University, where 7 of the 10 women lived on the AA student-themed floor during their first year in college. For instance, Ciara mentions choosing to live on the floor as way of building deeper connections with AA peers, something she had not been able to do at home. There were a few participants who shared apprehension about moving to an all Black floor based on interactions with Black peers in high school. Carmen talks about her moving to campus for the pre-collegiate summer program (PCSP) and worrying about not being "Black enough" for her peers to accept her. The notion of Blackness based on the participants K-12 socialization was salient for all the women who were raised in upper-class, suburban environments.

When discussing peer interactions with participants whose schools were more diverse, they identified a different type of peer pressure related to fitting in. For instance, Jules, a Muslim Black woman, felt like her religion was always up for discussion in high school. She was able to go out with friends to participate in different activities, but wearing a hijab and having a dress code limited dressing in the same style or way as her peers. In another example, Asya, felt as though she needed to keep up with her peers of a lower SES. Thus she would create stories as a way to identify with her peers' real-life struggles and fit in with the stereotypical AA women narrative fed through media and seen in more impoverished neighborhoods.

As a result of their high school experiences, these women sought refuge in spaces where they saw folks who looked like them and shared similar experiences. Most of the

women described their new community as a newly formed family. Asya called her new peer group her “sisters” when sharing how she endured a family crisis back home that she couldn’t attend while participating in a campus program at West University. Janet, who didn’t live on the AA student floor, also mentions how in her room she would have to explain the cultural norms of taking her hair extensions out of her natural hair, but when she would go visit her friends on the AA-themed floor, she could wear a hair scarf without a second look. The feeling of comfort with other AA peers provided these students with a different kind of community—one whose members understood their daily struggles and small triumphs.

Peer interactions in these spaces for the most part were positive and provided a sense community; however, when asked how AA interacted with student and professional staff, there was a mixed response. Some students looked to their resident assistants and residence life staff for support when in crisis, and others never interacted with staff at all. When asked the reason behind not seeking support, the most common answer was feeling uncomfortable and like they could handle the situation they were facing on their own. What was interesting as researcher was how these figures on campus were only seen by the participants as problem fixers and not resources who could help in a variety of situations.

Peer interactions, too, were not without their own challenges. AA women in the study also felt a cultural divide based on Blackness and SES. In the book *Unchosen Me*, Winkle-Wagner (2009) describes the intragroup and intergroup dynamics most AA women face in relation to their peers. Intragroup dynamics are the feelings of community or isolation AA women feel when interfacing with the same race and gender. Intergroup

dynamics are the feelings of community and/or isolation AA women feel in relation to their peers of different races and/or gender. For AA women, both dynamics were challenging to navigate based on the complexities surrounding their identity in terms of their ability to feel comfortable in a new educational environment while navigating the tensions faced with in one or both groups. Tonette provides an example of the tension felt within her friend group when she would purchase a blouse or pay for salon services in the highly priced neighborhood that surrounds the university. Her intragroup peers would ridicule her for the money she could afford to spend, making her feel guilty about SES and excluded for having a different set of norms. Conversely, those with a lower SES did their best to hide their financial troubles through overspending or lying to their friends in order to not reveal a hardship, basically to prevent the perception of being seen as “less than.”

Intragroup dynamics go beyond SES, however, and into the spectrum of “Blackness” people ascribe to in a new environment. In terms of intragroup dynamics, Carmen mentions not understanding some of the lingo or references made by her peers in conversations during PCSP. Within the spectrum of Blackness are the complexities of ethnicity and racial identity within intragroup dynamics. For instance, Lalah’s Nigerian heritage mixed with her culture as a woman born in an America that sees her as Black created intragroup tensions in both high school and college with her peers. Jules struggled with finding a community that she could identify with as a Muslim Black woman, which oftentimes made her feel like she had to pick her Blackness or her Islamic identity depending on who she chose to spend time with on campus.

Implications and Recommendations

The stories of these 10 girls brought to life a lot of interesting themes around college socialization: ethnicity versus race, SES versus culture, and campus life, just to name a few. While the literature review began the conversation about adjustment as it relates to socialization, the research has just begun to scratch the surface of how social interactions or the lack thereof can contribute to the isolation and thus the failed adjustment of AA women at PWIs. Kennedy and Winkle-Wagner (2014) introduce the concept of ethnicity versus race when discussing the need for alternate studies that control for students who are first-generation American from an African country, as opposed to African American students whose roots are in the history of the United States. In opposition to Astin's Retention Model, researchers Maldonado, Rhoades, and Buenavista (2005) propose that colleges and universities reflect on the ways in which they can provide more diversity in their programs and services, as opposed having students of color adjust to the dominant population's college-going norms. One study also supported the notion of diversity in programming and services by concluding that AA student were more apt to be successful when their culture felt validated (Brown, 2013).

The women in the study all found a space on campus that offered them a toolbox to re-shape and re-imagine what their lives at PWI could look like. In terms of the socialization to a college campus and adjustment, my best advice is to offer a course similar to the AA women seminar my colleagues and I offer. This course focuses on three major themes, community, self, and academics, as a way of providing community and validation to the experience of AA women in an oppressive, yet liberating educational

environment. Once validation is provided and community is created, tools and strategies to assist AA women with their navigation through West University are revealed. To date, this alternative socialization to the AA women experience is currently being taught to the fifth cohort. Out of the four cohorts who have already taken the seminar-style course, only 3 out of 120 women have dropped out of West University.

This type of course offering and/or similar programming has proven effective at West University. However, more can be done by PWIs and in particular offices and departments who serve minority populations. For instance, PCSP-type programs and high school pipeline programs should no longer assume that AA students are raised with the same set of socialization norms. With the diversity of environments and experiences AA students now experience by way of culture, media, and music, it is incumbent upon faculty and staff to consistently re-imagine their program structure to meet the needs of their students. Deficit thinking models need to be eradicated from programs and services created to serve first-generation and low-income families. Staff in particular cannot market to students a “one-size-fits-all” model and expect that all AA will feel comfortable in spaces when their home environments were predominately White and Asian.

The AA women in this study shared their struggles with intragroup and intergroup struggles in the first year, which should be used as a foundation for more research in this area. AA women suffer in silence at the hands of their peers’ preconceived notions about “Whiteness” and “Blackness”. It is institutions’ responsibility to validate individual experiences and create new pluralistic norms in which diversity is appreciated, not marginalized.

Collegiate Experiences with Academics

Discussion

When discussing K-12 schooling in the literature review, a study that highlighted how AA girls were perceived in the classroom was mentioned. According to an article by Morris (2007), teachers often felt that AA teenage girls were undermining their authority in the classroom. The literature review continues this discussion to show unequivocally how K-12 schools have socialized students in general and AA women in particular to become docile in their agency in order to succeed academically. Therefore, by the time they arrive at a PWI, this socialization is intact, but feelings of isolation persist in the classroom. Academically, all of the participants struggled to keep up with the quarter system during their first year. For most, academic success came last in relation to their social and familial interactions.

Those who had strong study and comprehension skills in high school tended to fair better academically than the participants who came to West University feeling underprepared academically. For instance, Angel felt ill-prepared to engage academically based on the courses she took in high school. As a result, she didn't ask questions in class nor did she attend office hours because she didn't want the teaching assistants, faculty, or her peers to think she wasn't qualified to be at a school like West University. Angel revealed that how others would perceive her was not the only reason she didn't engage academically. As a first-year student who was struggling financially, she found it more important to go to work to make money than she did to thrive academically. As a result, she endured a level of stress that caused her to not eat and lose weight at an unhealthy pace. On the other end of the spectrum, Lalah did well academically her first year. Based on her high school preparation at a private high school and Nigerian cultural norms,

Lalah didn't feel she needed help from faculty or peers. Although this worked well for her the first two quarters, as she began her third quarter, the same methods began to take a toll on her and she began considering new academic strategies.

In addition to the conversation about academic preparedness, many of the participants talked about feeling isolated from other races, which was new for those who had been socialized around White peers. Sarah provides an example of how being socialized with White peers in high school did not prevent her from feeling uncomfortable the first time she was in a college class with mostly White students. She provides context to her new reality as a student more closely tied to her African American roots. Similarly, Ciara was unprepared to deal with her peers' perceived stereotypes when she entered West University. She felt the weight of representing the intelligence of both her race and gender in the classroom, and it had a direct impact on her academic adjustment to the university. Janet also describes how community is created differently in high school than in college for AA students. In our initial interview, Janet shared how in high school students had passing periods and lunch together as a cohort, which led to community building over time. In college, however, with no passing periods and a variety of classes, it is harder to create community with the diversity of folks found in classrooms. Thus students tend to create community in their residence halls, clubs, and organizations, which for AA women can often be culturally based.

Academic adjustment, for all of the participants, was the part of their first-year experience they talked about the least. Only one student (Lalah) found the academic rigor of the university easy to adapt to. While there were students who fared well academically their first year, most of the women struggled to feel confident in the classroom. Whether

they felt like they were in competition with their peers or were being asked to represent their culture, feelings of insecurity were paramount for all of the participants. Both Winkle-Wagner (2009) and Bank (2009) discuss how AA women struggle academically not because of lack of intelligence but due to the dominant narratives around AA women in mainstream society. In both media and sports, the dominant narratives suggest that AA women are not well educated, thus the participants found it hard to engage with their peers and faculty inside the classroom. Moreover, they found it difficult to ask for assistance when needed because of the ways in which they felt marginalized in the classroom.

Implications and Recommendations

It is clear from the stories of the participants that academic adjustment, while difficult to persist through, was not impossible. The theme that continues to arise from this study, however, is a need to belong and feel validated in the spaces these women are introduced to in the first year of the college experience. Without a stable community, these women suffer academically. Thus, one could posit that academic ability or intelligence are not in question for AA women at PWIs. What should be addressed is how to create opportunities and expectations for how educators interact and build relationships with AA women in ways that allow them feel like the rule, not just the exception. The issue with the reality of this ideology is that it identifies more issues with the current state of our society than there are realistic solutions for in the near future.

Looking at the current educational landscape of America, we can see that we need major reform in K-12 schooling, starting with teacher compensation and benefits. The way teachers are treated and paid is a disgrace given what entertainers and athletes are

paid. Our society does not value education, thus they do not value the diversity of student experiences that exist in educational settings. Until we have a government that values the basics of education, it will be impossible to equalize the playing field of the experiences student have at institutions of higher education. Colleges and universities across the country talk about creating more diverse, egalitarian communities using deficit thinking practices. These cookie cutter programs for faculty do not translate into libertarian teaching practices within the classroom. Minority students in general and AA women in particular will not feel comfortable to speak and/or interact with their peers in the classroom or ask questions outside the classroom. Also, faculty should be held accountable for their oppressive practices within the tenure process. Until research is conducted and practices structured with regard to the treatment of all students fairly, placing expectations on faculty, staff, and administrators at PWIs will continue to create “crooked rooms.” The goal of this work and the work to follow it is to adjust the room to a less crooked state.

Adjustment

Both BFT and CCW provide a framework to help deepen our understandings of how race, gender, and other intersections of identity have implications for the marginalization and oppression of certain experiences and the urgent need to re-write these narratives to bring to the center these experiences. Black Feminist Thought posits that the life of AA women can only be expressed, taught, and thoroughly understood by other AA women. In a similar fashion, CCW asserts that the intangible types of capital POC receive from their communities can be just as powerful and useful as the tangible

capital of White people. The merger of these two frameworks when discussing AA women helps to set a framework for why adjustment is important at a PWI.

To date, PWIs have not made AA women a focus of conversation or research, as they have for their AA male counterparts. When discussing student populations who can benefit from more focused resources or programming, AA women rarely, if ever, come up as a specific population. Some may argue that since the AA women populations at PWIs are typically no larger than five percent, any resources and/or research should be spent on AAs as a whole. However, there is a complexity added by the intersection of race, gender, and SES that are not addressed in the current literature, campus programming, or new student orientation programs. When these identities are not addressed and validated in high school pipeline programs, PCSP, or during the first year, AA women suffer in silence. It is silence that leads to isolation, and isolation that leads to the inability to adjust to environments that fail to realize AA females exist outside the “crooked rooms” they are socialized to fit into. This is what is meant by adjustment—not adjustment to a problematized academic environment, but adjustment to a new set of norms in which AA women learn to create agency for themselves in relation to their family, social circles, and academics. An adjustment through which they understand that while the educational system should change to meet their needs, they still must persist through ugly stereotypes, family issues and responsibilities, and academic standards dominant cultures have not changed to meet the changing landscape of AA women entering PWIs. Adjustment, simply put, is the absence of isolation which alleviates the pressure to never fail and, the promotion of self-care in ways that help AA females to not just survive but thrive at PWIs.

Concluding Thoughts

The journey to complete this study was not an easy one, but it was all worth it. Never in a million years would I have thought I would be at an institution like West University teaching first-year AA women while working with parents and families of undergraduates, but I couldn't be more grateful for this opportunity. The privilege of telling these women's stories is something I will treasure for a lifetime. Sharing their triumphs and insurmountable challenges is my greatest work to date. Their stories are AA women's story of enduring the hardships and joys of life while pursuing a higher education. They are complex, beautifully layered, and offer a glimpse into how we as AA women soar through adversity, climb over obstacles, and jump into the promise of a future better than the past of our mothers, with new hope for our future daughters, that the conversation will change from one oppression to one of acceptance, tolerance, and most of all love. Peace.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPLICATION



REQUEST FOR IRB VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

If you believe your study meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review, complete the following form and upload this document to the online IRB system in Mentor.

COMPLETE ONLY ONE EXEMPTION SECTION BELOW BEST DESCRIBING YOUR RESEARCH

<p>EXEMPTION 1: FOR PROTOCOLS INVOLVING ESTABLISHED OR COMMONLY ACCEPTED EDUCATION SETTINGS AND NORMAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES [CFR 46.101(b)(1)]</p>
<p>1a. What type(s) of activities will be used? <i>(Check all that apply.)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Research on regular and special education instructional strategies <input type="checkbox"/> Research on the effectiveness of instructional techniques, curricula or classroom management methods <input type="checkbox"/> Research comparing instructional techniques, curricula or classroom management methods <p style="text-align: center;"><i>If the research involves other activities, it is not eligible for this exemption. Do not proceed.</i></p> <p>Provide, in lay terms, a detailed summary of your proposed study by addressing each of the following items.</p> <p>1b. Clearly state the purpose of the study.</p> <p>1c. Describe the research procedures and who will be included in the study as participants.</p>

<p>EXEMPTION 2: FOR PROTOCOLS INVOLVING TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR [CFR 46.101(b)(2)]</p>

2a. What type(s) of instruments/activities will be used (*Check all that apply.*)

- Educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement)
 Questionnaire/survey
 Interviews
 Observation of public behavior

If the research involves other activities, it is not eligible for this exemption. Do not proceed.

2b. Will information be recorded in a manner that participants can be identified (e.g., name, social security number, license number, phone number, email address, photograph)? Yes No

2c. Would disclosure of information obtained put participants at risk for civil or criminal liability or damage to

their financial standing, employability or reputation (e.g., drug or alcohol use; criminal or other illegal activity)?

- Yes No

If the answer to 2b and 2c is "Yes," the research is not eligible for this exemption. Do not proceed.

2d. Will your participants include anyone under the age of 18 years old? Yes No

If the answer to 11 "d" and 11 "c" is "Yes," the research is not eligible for this exemption. Do not proceed.

Provide, in lay terms, a detailed summary of your proposed study by addressing each of the following items.

2e. Clearly state the purpose of the study.

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of research that delves into the experiences of African American (AA) females in college environments by not only highlighting the challenges they face but by capturing their stories of how they leverage social interactions, academic attainment, and familial relationships as they navigate the normative terrains of predominately white university settings. Currently, both scholarly literature and educational practice are lacking depth and scope for this population of students. In recent years, the research on African American males has increased and the issue of their education is being addressed all the way to the White House. While the experience of African American men is being highlighted in this way, African American (AA) females are rarely discussed in the scholarly literature nor strategically programmed for in social spaces on university campuses.

2f. Describe the research procedures and who will be included in the study as participants.

The research for this study will be conducted in two parts. In part one, nine females will be selected based on a call for participants. The selected females will be asked to write a three to four-page reflection paper based on a prompt asking them to reflect on specific areas of their first year. The second part of the study will involve semi-structured interviews that will be conducted individually with each participant. The interview will involve a standardized set of questions asked of all participants and individualized questions to delve deeper into their reflection paper. These two parts will allow the researcher the ability to extract rich data to support the claims made around the experiences of AA females in their first year of adjustment.

2g. For studies using questionnaires, surveys, and interviews, provide a description, example questions, and/or upload as additional documentation the tests, questionnaires, interview questions, etc. that will be used.

Narrative Inquiry:

Using your first year in college as the timeline for your personal narrative, write the story of experiences in this year. In this piece discuss your transition from home to the residence halls, changes in your relationships both family and friends, academic and social interactions on campus. You will need to keep your narrative to four pages, but try to share the most salient experiences from the areas mentioned.

Once the narratives have been collected, I will follow up with individual interviews with each participant. Although I will create participant specific interview questions unique to each participant, all will be asked the following questions:

1. What would you identify as your socio-economic status?
2. Did you decide to stay close to home for college or explore a different environment further away from home? Why did you make this decision?
3. Was there a reason you chose a PWI over a HBCU?
4. What has been the easiest area for you to adjust too? Academics, social activities, or new relationships with family members and friends from home?
5. Academically do you feel like you were prepared to be at a research one institution that is predominately white?
6. What social activities did you get involved in your first year?
7. How often did you go home your first year?
8. How did you feel isolated and/or included in classroom discussions and/or projects?

EXEMPTION 4: FOR PROTOCOLS INVOLVING THE COLLECTION OR STUDY OF EXISTING DATA, DOCUMENTS, RECORDS OR SPECIMENS [CFR 46.101(b)(4)]

4a. What will be collected or studied? (*Check all that apply.*) Existing data Existing documents
 Existing records Existing pathological specimens Existing diagnostic specimens

If the research involves other types of data, it is not eligible for this exemption. Do not proceed.

4b. Is this information publicly available? Yes No

4c. Will information be recorded in a manner that research subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects? Yes No

If the answer to 4b and 4c is "No," the research is not eligible for this exemption. Do not proceed.

4d. Clearly state the purpose of the study.

If you believe your research qualifies for any of the other exemption categories (3 [public officials], 5 [public benefits and services evaluation], or 6 [consumer taste and food quality evaluation]), fill out the section below.

EXEMPTION 3, 5, or 6: FOR PROTOCOLS INVOLVING PUBLIC OFFICIALS, PUBLIC BENEFITS AND SERVICES EVALUATION, OR CONSUMER TASTE AND FOOD QUALITY EVALAUTION [CFR 46.101(b)(3, 5, 6)]

Provide, in lay terms, a detailed summary of your proposed study by addressing each of the following items.

- a. Clearly state the purpose of the study.
- b. Describe the research procedures and who will be included in the study as participants.
- b. Explain how your study meets this exemption criteria.

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Terence Patterson** <noreply@axiommentor.com>
Date: Mon, Jun 29, 2015 at 2:37 PM
Subject: Expedited Review Approved by Chair - IRB ID: 498
To: skoirala@usfca.edu

IRBPHS - Approval Notification

To: Maisha Beasley
From: Terence Patterson, IRB Chair
Subject: Protocol #498
Date: 06/29/2015

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your research (IRB Protocol **#498**) with the project title **ADJUSTMENT OF FIRST YEAR AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES TO PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICES** has been approved by the IRB Chair under the rules for expedited review on **06/29/2015**. Best wishes with your research as this looks to be an important contribution to general knowledge of this issue.

Any modifications, adverse reactions or complications must be reported using a modification application to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS via email at IRBPHS@usfca.edu. Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Professor & Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

University of San Francisco
irbphs@usfca.edu
<https://www.axiommentor.com/pages/home.cfm>