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Expectations and Experiences of African American Students at Two Predominantly White
Universities in Southern Appalachia

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

by

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August 2008

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Keywords: African American Students, Critical Race Theory, Expectations, Experiences,
Predominantly White Institutions, Southern Appalachia

ABSTRACT

Expectations and Experiences of African American Students at Two Predominantly White Universities in Southern Appalachia

by

Brenda White Wright

This study addressed the academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences of 20 African American juniors and seniors at 2 predominantly White universities in the southern Appalachian region of the United States. The participants described experiences revealed how institutional practices promoted or obstructed their persistence to graduation.

Qualitative ethnographic methodology with critical race theory as the conceptual framework guided the study. This approach allowed for the perspectives and lived experiences of the students to be voiced and heard. Data collected included their stories based on semistructured interviews, document reviews, and observations. The constant comparison method was used to analyze the data through the critical race interpretive lens of racism as the persistent reality of people of color. In combination, the data illustrated the positive and negative impacts of student-institution relationships and the campus racial climate on African American students' experiences at the universities under study.

Findings indicated a dissonance between the students' academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences primarily caused by unanticipated racist experiences in the classrooms, on the campuses, and in the campus communities-at-large. Positive relationships with administrators, faculty members, and staff emerged as the most significant contributors to the students' capability to safely and successfully navigate academic, social, and cultural

pathways leading to graduation. Recommendations based on the results of the study are provided for university administrators, faculty members, and staff who are committed to improving the college experience and persistence to graduation rates for students of color matriculating at predominantly White universities.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

Charles, Tamala, Shana, Jamil, Jeffery, Christopher, Jaisan, and Sean

With God, all things are possible

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

African Americans who choose to attend college today have numerous options to consider. Among these choices are public and private schools, liberal arts or technical colleges, single-sex or coed universities, community colleges, Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), and Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). These contemporary options symbolize a significant departure from the severely limited access to higher education opportunities afforded African Americans during previous periods in American history.

Until the 1960s, a defining decade in our nation's history, only a minimal number of Blacks were accepted into predominantly White schools (Burrell, 1980). Prior to that time, Negro or Black colleges were established to meet the educational needs for Blacks to become constructive and contributing members of American society (Clark, 1967). According to Allen (1987), Black students are choosing to matriculate at predominantly White institutions at significantly higher rates than at historically Black colleges.

Despite tremendous strides that have substantially changed the higher education landscape for African Americans, present-day choices are not completely devoid of academic, cultural, and social challenges. More specifically, African American students choosing to attend predominantly White institutions are consistently confronted with challenges to succeed in university and community environments primarily structured to meet the needs of the majority population. Different policies and practices are needed to educate and to serve these students (Stikes, 1984).

This study contains a collection and analysis of stories from African American students at predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia that gives voice to these challenges and a lens for viewing life from their diverse perspectives. Listening to their voices should increase understanding and inform the actions of a campus community that wants to improve the learning

environment for all of its students. Their stories might also help higher education administrators understand possible influences regarding African American students' retention and attrition rates.

Background of the Study

College experiences make a definite difference in students' persistence-to-graduation. According to Kuh (1999), the published research linking African American students' expectations, learning, and overall satisfaction with the collegiate experience has been limited; however, Allen (1987) pointed out that the racial makeup of a college campus does affect the college experiences of Black students.

The majority of the nation's Black college students continue to enroll in predominantly White institutions (Carter & Wilson, 1996). Researchers have reported that these students are often not prepared for the actual experiences they encounter (Malaney & Shively, 1991). Gloria, Kurplus, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) reported that at predominantly White institutions, African American students persisted or were retained at 66.3% of the rate for historically Black colleges or universities. This suggests a need for more effective persistence programs at predominantly White institutions.

This study focused on two antecedents of attrition: African American college students' expectations and experiences. Relative to previous research on this topic, Mow and Nettles (1990) pointed out, "Most [of the] studies stopped short of investigating how students' experiences, such as feelings of alienation and isolation, are related to persistence and performance" (p. 77). Expectations and experiences are important variables because they affect students' levels of social and academic integration (Malaney & Shively, 1991).

Experiences serve as a filter through which students evaluate and make sense of the information they encounter both inside and outside the classroom (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). The more integrative and validating their experiences at college, the more likely students will persist until degree completion.

Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson, and Mugenda (2000) contended that predominantly White institutions did not deliberately create learning communities that were insensitive and unresponsive to the needs of diverse student groups; rather, these institutions simply were not created with minority students in mind (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). They were implicitly created primarily for White students, and this racial preference was rarely interrogated. Given this reality, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has provided a theoretical framework for analyzing the expectations and experiences of the student participants in this study.

The Setting: Southern Appalachia

In contrast to monocultural stereotypes, the people of the Southern Appalachia region include Native American indigenous cultures, immigrants, and African Americans. Their histories and customs abound with legend, lore, myth, and misrepresentation.

Their independent and self-sufficient traditions are revealed through arts and crafts, music and foods, customs, and distinct dialects. Traditional foods include grits, biscuits and gravy, corn, assorted greens, potatoes, and beans with cornbread. Making music and storytelling are favorite pastimes that preserve the Appalachian culture of triumph over adversity and lingering sadness over lost loves, lands, and possibilities.

According to Turner and Cabbell (1985), Black Appalachians have historically endured the same kinds of racial problems that exist in other places. Even though they recognize their ties to the larger Black American population, they also have a unique identification with the region. Celebration of family heritage through the collection of family memorabilia and attendance at family reunions strengthens their separate identity as Black Appalachians.

Statement of the Problem

Students' success should be the primary goal of every educational institution. According to Astin, Tsui, and Avalos (1996), "The undergraduate years represent a major leak in the educational pipeline for students from underrepresented ethnic/minority groups" (p. 6). There is

a relentless gap between the graduation rates of White and Black students attending predominantly White institutions. With the goal of persistence to graduation, how might faculty, staff, and administrators at these institutions work collectively and effectively to hear and respond to the challenges, expectations, and experiences of their Black students?

Many of these students do not complete their matriculation because of the difficulties they experience while attempting to integrate themselves into the academic, cultural, and social systems of the institution. In addition to increased enrollment and retention rates of minority students, universities should focus on persistence as an expression of the quality of student experiences as an indicator of their future success.

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to detail and describe the academic, social, and cultural expectations and experiences of participating African American juniors and seniors at two predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia. The study was conducted to discover and describe expectations and experiences of the participants as they successfully attempted to navigate academic, social, and cultural pathways that could allow them to persist to graduation. Their collective stories should provide a better understanding of student-institution relationships and perceptions as to how their academic achievement and social success is promoted or obstructed by campus climates and institutional practices.

This study followed the recommendation of Littleton (2003) who examined African American students' persistence at small colleges in Appalachia and Harper (1999) who investigated factors associated with academic success among African American students at four predominantly White institutions in Northeast Tennessee.

Diversity at University A and University B

I chose to conduct this research at two universities: University A and University B because both were predominantly White institutions and were peer universities located in Southern Appalachia with policies, programs, and practices that express strong commitments to cultural diversity efforts and educational excellence.

Documents from both University A and B have revealed statements that illustrate a commitment to creating and perpetuating an environment in which the richness of human diversity and thought is valued, respected, and celebrated. Each university has vision and value statements that show a commitment to model equitable practices and promote a wealth of cultures, experiences, and perspectives that contribute to the growth and development of all members of the university community.

In addition, University A and University B have administrative offices that support the diversity vision of their institutions. The Offices of Equity and Diversity at each university are charged with developing, sustaining, and extending living, learning, and working environments that are fair, inclusive, and welcoming for all members of the university's community. Through programs and practices, the administrators and staff work within the milieu to establish an institutional environment where people honor one another as individuals, value differences, and respect the right of others as human beings inclusive of race, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, class, age, disability, religion, and national origin.

Each university is located in a community with similar demographics. United States Census Bureau (2006) data indicated that the African American population was 6% of the total population in the community surrounding University A and slightly over 3% in the community surrounding University B. University A had approximately 13,000 students, 4% of whom were Black. The student population of University B was approximately 14,000 with about 3% of those identified as African Americans.

Significance of the Study

This ethnographic study addressed how institutional practices impact African American students' social, cultural, and academic integration, achievement, and persistence to graduation at two selected predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia. The goal was to provide a narrative of the dissonance between students' expectations of and experiences with being an African American on a predominantly White institution's campus. Knowledge of

students' expectations and experiences could contribute key information to university administrators as they plan and implement student programs (Henry, Wills, & Nixon, 2005).

The results of this study should provide meaningful insights for assessing and evaluating the learning environments and social climates for African American students. An increased understanding about their academic and social experiences is fundamental to improving their college experience and their rates of degree attainment.

Although there are significant findings concerning retention of African American students at predominantly White institutions across the United States, research has been scarce regarding the experiences of African American students attending predominantly White institutions in Appalachia (Harper, 1999; Littleton, 2003).

Universities as well as the informants should benefit from these research findings. The findings should give a voice to the stories provided by the participants. The findings could assist University A and University B in developing their responses to the educational and emotional needs of this student population and the results might suggest potential improvements for the general climate of respect, safety, and acceptance that is critical to success for all students. In addition, the universities might gain access to information to help administrators more effectively design an educational environment that would implement programs, policies, practices, and services that more effectively address the needs of their African American students. The results might provide implications for improving institutional support systems that lead to enhanced minority student recruitment, retention, graduation rates, and overall campus quality of life issues directly related to the universities' diversity goals and objectives.

Based on this study, the participating students should receive satisfaction from knowing that their stories, concerns, struggles, and suggestions for improvements were told, heard, and reported not only to their specific universities but also to a national and global academic community. Their voices could potentially serve as guides in creating more effective diversity initiatives, pedagogies, and practices. Sharing their expectations and experiences might provide

a satisfying opportunity to assist future African American students to gain tools for success in higher education.

This study should contribute to the body of knowledge relative to race in higher education and potentially affect the ability of future minority students to make better-informed decisions about their university of choice.

Key Terms and Concepts

“All of our vocabulary is inadequate and frustrating. There is much to learn from attempts to use accurate and respectful language. We need to pay attention to the words we use because language itself is used to maintain racism” (Kivel, 1996, p. 75).

1. *Academic Achievement*: This is a measure of knowledge gained in formal education, usually indicated by test scores, grade point averages, and degrees attained (Volkart, 1986).
2. *African American or Black*: These racial and ethnic labels are applied interchangeably in this study. Dependent upon author preference and historical context, each is synonymously used throughout the literature. Generally, these names indicate feelings of inclusion and connection to distinct cultural communities (Kivel, 1996). According to the United States Census Bureau (2006), 12.9% of all Americans are of African descent.
3. *Affrilachian*: The credit for coining the term, *Affrilachian* goes to Black poet and educator, Frank X. Walker (Walker, n. d.). A native of the Appalachian foothills, Walker was born in Danville, Kentucky, and graduated from the University of Kentucky. After reading Webster’s definition of an “Appalachian” as a *White resident of Appalachia*, he felt disconnected from the image around which he had created so much of his self-identity. As a way to define himself, and as an exercise in literary license, he decided to combine his African heritage and the experiences of his Appalachian life in a poem entitled “Affrilachian.” What began as a very personal

- way for Frank Walker to honor both his Appalachian and African heritage, has broadened to include any Black Appalachian who feels a similar connection. Affrilachian is now an entry in the *Oxford American Dictionary*, second edition. The word is also referenced in *The Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, a sign that Walker's gift to the English language is serving its intended purpose (Affrilachian Poets, 2008).
4. *Appalachia*: According to Stuckert (1987), a singular agreement on a definition of Appalachia does not exist perhaps, in part, because of its diverse geographic and demographic characteristics. The Appalachian geographical area extends from the border of Mississippi and Alabama in the south to Pennsylvania, New York, and the tip of Canada in the North. Appalachia also includes parts of the states of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Maryland, and the entire state of West Virginia.
 5. *Campus Climate*: For the purpose of the study, this entails students' perceptions of the campus atmosphere created through behaviors, procedures, practices, and interactions between students, faculty, and staff (Littleton, 2003).
 6. *Critical Pedagogy*: The fundamental principle of critical pedagogy is that there is an unequal social stratification in our society founded upon race, class, and gender. It is a fusion of critical theory with teaching and learning practices that are designed to raise learners' critical consciousness regarding oppressive social conditions (Jennings & Lynn, 2005). Keesing-Styles (2003) pointed out that critical pedagogy was concerned with social injustice and examined and promoted practices that have the potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations, largely through educational practices.
 7. *Critical Theory*: According to Keesing-Styles, critical theory concerns itself with issues related to the socialization of people into society, usually a society defined by dominant discourses. Critical thinking calls for an analysis of situations and arguments to identify defective or unreliable assertions or meanings.

8. *Critical Race Theory*: For the purpose of this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a theoretical framework to illuminate and enhance understanding relative to the subtle persistence of racism and discrimination in higher educational settings. Yosso (2005) explained that CRT offers a means to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways that race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses. CRT challenges conventional accounts of education and other institutions and the processes that occur within them (Powers, 2007).
9. *Culture*: Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2007) defined culture as an invisible web of behaviors, patterns, rules, and rituals of a group of people who have contact with one another and share common languages. It is the sum of the historical, artistic, economic, and spiritual aspects of a people's lifestyle (Asante, 1980). Culture is the way that a group of people defines, creates, celebrates, sustains, and develops themselves (Karenga, 1966). In addition, it is the way of life of the people in a certain geographic area, particularly their ideas, beliefs, values, patterns of thought, and symbols (Coleman & Kerbo, 2002). Culture includes processes of learning, knowing, and perceiving ideas, knowledge, symbols, standards, and values. It consists of what people process cognitively and how the cognitive processes are reflected in human behaviors and in the artifacts or objects that people create (Lenkeit, 2004).
10. *Diversity*: This umbrella term includes characteristics or factors such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, and socioeconomic status. It refers to all of the characteristics that make individuals different from each other and that contribute to perceptions of differences.
11. *Ethnic Group*: This can be defined as a body of people who share a common set of cultural characteristics or a common national origin and a belief that its members share a unique social and historical experience (Coleman & Kerbo). Banks (1992)

- described an ethnic minority group as sharing a common ancestry, culture, history, tradition, and sense of identity.
12. *Ethnography*: One of the approaches to qualitative inquiry and research design, an ethnography is a field study that focuses on detailed, thick descriptions of a culture (Babbie, 2002). Fieldworkers study the customs of groups of people in the spaces they inhabit (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater). An ethnography addresses the explicit and tacit cultural knowledge that members use (Neuman, 2004). Through indepth interviews with research participants and detailed fieldnotes, the ethnographer attempts to capture, analyze, and describe the stories and environmental realities of a specified group (Wollcott, 1999). Ethnographic researchers are interested in examining shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language (Creswell, 2007).
 13. *Expectations*: This study examined students' expectations of their universities. As defined by Krallman and Holcomb (1997), *expectations* refer to a set of preconceived ideas. These ideas reveal what students believe will occur in their college-going experience and how their perceptions might affect academic, social, and personal achievement and satisfaction with college (Miller, Bender, & Schuh, 2005).
 14. *Experiences*: In his seminal work, *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) defined experience as the continuous transaction or interaction between humans and their environment. Experience, according to Dewey, included thoughts and feelings, doing, suffering, handling, and perceiving. All experiences, as argued by Dewey, influence one's future for better or for worse. This study examined the participants' academic, personal, and social experiences through their personal connections to and involvement with formal and informal university programs and activities.
 15. *Historically Black College or University (HBCU)*: An HBCU is determined by the Secretary of Education as meeting the requirements of 34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 608.2. Generally, these are institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal missions were, and are, the education of Black Americans.

16. *Persistence and Retention*: For the purpose of this study, persistence is a continuous process to create, maintain, and support ongoing strategies for meeting the academic, cultural, and social needs of students to ensure their academic success and graduation. Persistence also refers to those students who are continuously enrolled full- or part-time in pursuit of a college degree. Retention rates commonly measure the percentage of freshmen who re-enroll the next academic year as sophomores and often serve as indicators of academic quality and student success (Arnold, 1999). The student participants in this study were juniors and seniors.
17. *Predominantly White Institution (PWI)*: This is a college or university whose student populations are typically and traditionally White. The predominantly White institutions in this study are regional research universities with a student population that is primarily composed of students of Caucasian descent.
18. *Racial Prejudice and Discrimination*: Although closely related, these words refer to distinctly different social concerns (Coleman & Kerbo, 2002). Racial prejudice refers to holding rigid beliefs or negative feelings that people in certain racial or ethnic categories are inferior (Schwalbe, 2008). Racial discrimination, on the other hand, refers to *acting on racial prejudice* by restraining or attempting to subordinate a person or group who possesses (or is perceived to possess) a particular racial or ethnic identity. Carrying out racial discrimination requires the power to act out prejudicial beliefs. Consequently, members of racially oppressed groups generally do not possess the power to discriminate against members of the dominant group (Schwalbe). Educators should be aware of attitudes, language, and stereotypical expressions that reinforce and perpetuate prejudicial beliefs. In addition, educators should scrutinize behaviors, structures, policies, and practices that contribute to educational inequities (Hidalgo, McDowell, & Siddle, 1990).
19. *Racism*: This refers to systematic “beliefs and practices that a dominant group uses to keep another group of people down” (Schwalbe, p. 113). Instead of reducing our

understanding of racism to the acts of lone individuals, critical sociologists argue for “a broader definition of racism that includes but goes beyond the personal. Racism is the patterns of privilege and oppression themselves and anything--intentional or not--that helps to create or perpetuate those patterns” (Johnson, 2001, p. 112; Wellman, 1993).

20. *White Privilege*: According to McIntosh (1988), white privilege can be understood as a corollary of racism. Where racism involves systematically putting racial and ethnic minorities at a disadvantage, white privilege systematically puts White people *as a category* at an advantage.

Research Questions

This study details and describes the expectations and experiences of participating African American juniors and seniors at two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia. The questions were derived from the literature relative to African American students’ academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences at predominantly White institutions. The collective stories of the participants could provide valuable insight through exploration of the following questions:

1. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their academic expectations and experiences?
2. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their cultural expectations and experiences?
3. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their social expectations and experiences?
4. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White

institutions in Southern Appalachia describe institutional practices that promote or obstruct their persistence to graduation?

Scope of the Study

The central phenomena under study were limited to the expectations and experiences of African American juniors and seniors in good standing at University A and University B. Altogether, 20 students participated through personal interviews and a focus group; nine were from University A and 11 were from University B. Of the 11 from University B, three students participated in a focus group. In addition to personal interviews and a focus group, the study included observations, document reviews, and artifact analyses.

Statement of Researcher's Bias and Perspective

My cultural roots and life experiences are African American and Southern Appalachian. I was born and reared in Northwest Georgia where three rivers and seven hills converge in close proximity to the state of Alabama. During my youth, *de jure* segregation was the norm from grades 1-12 even though *Brown v. Board of Education* was passed in 1954, the year I started first grade. Following graduation, I attended a historically Black university in Southern Appalachia. Later, I received a bachelor's and master's degree from a predominantly White institution in Southern Appalachia.

All of my adult life has been spent in Northeast Tennessee with a majority White population and mountain culture similar to that of my native home. With much less stability over time, my racial and ethnic classifications have included Colored, Negro, Black, Afro-American, African American, a person of color, and Affrilachian.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a form of oppositional scholarship that challenges the experiences of Whites as the normative standard and establishes its conceptual framework in the

unique experiences of people of color (Taylor, 1998). Founders of the CRT movement include legal scholars Derrick Bell, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw (Taylor).

Using a lens of CRT, I attempted to fill a gap in the literature relative to the expectations and experiences of African American students at two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia. CRT allows researchers “to consider new ways of thinking about approaches to the intractable, insoluble issues around race in this country” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi). Central to CRT has been the premise that the social construct of racism is central to the alienation and despair experienced by people of color.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, background, setting, statement of the problem, significance of the study, a definition of terms used in the study, research questions, a statement of the researcher’s bias and perspective, and the theoretical framework for analyzing participants’ data. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature that includes ethnographic studies, critical studies, critical race theory, Blacks in Appalachia, Blacks on White campuses, and the influence of campus environments on African American students’ graduation rates. The methodology is discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 includes the students’ stories and analysis of the data collected. Chapter 5 presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The U. S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation in public schools with the landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954; subsequently the U. S. Congress passed the *Civil Rights Act* in 1964 and the *Higher Education Act* in 1975. These decisions dramatically changed the landscape for higher education opportunities for Black Americans and set the stage for diversifying college campuses across the country.

This literature review addresses the history of Blacks on White campuses based on the college environment, racial climate, social interactions, campus culture, student engagement, institutional practices, and student retention with a focus on African American students' social, cultural, and academic expectations, including how those expectations were or were not met by actual experiences.

The review is organized into eight sections including expectations and experiences of African American students, African American college enrollment and graduation rates, experiences of Black students on White campuses, Blacks in Appalachia, Critical Race Theory, institutional practices, campus environment: effects on student engagement, and persistence: the color of success.

The preponderance of literature regarding African American students at predominantly White institutions focused on their perceptions, experiences, issues of access, adjustment, and achievement (Allen, 1988; Bradley, 1967; Burrell, 1980; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Centra, 1970; Chavous, 2002; Guiffrida & Douthit 2006; Haralson, 1996; Lyons, 1973; Malaney & Shively, 1991; Wallace & Bell, 1999). In short, the research illustrates that Black students on White campuses reported persistent challenges in adjusting to a culturally different, academically demanding, and socially alienating environment. Consequently, these

studies showed that Black students on these campuses did not experience high levels of cultural acceptance, academic success, and social engagement.

Because of the ethnic nature of the study, it is important to note that the literature synonymously references the terms Negro, Negro American, Black, Afro American, African American, students of color, and minority (Allen, 1992; Bradley, 1967; Clark, 1967; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Malaney & Shively, 1991; Wallace & Bell, 1999). Similarly, the term White is synonymous with European-American (Love, 1995).

Mertler and Charles (2005) asserted that it is important for a literature review to accomplish three primary objectives: (a) to conduct a search for similar studies, (b) to establish the significance of the investigation, and (c) to develop a platform or framework on which to build complementary research. To that end, this review includes studies relative to African American students at predominantly White institutions, confirms the historical and contemporary importance of the research, and develops a theoretical framework for further studies on this topic.

Expectations and Experiences of African American Students

Students who are involved and feel valued are more likely to be retained (Furr, 2002). Braxton, Hossler, and Vesper (1995) found that when expectations and experiences were fairly well aligned, students were more likely to be satisfied with their college experience and persist to graduation.

Conversely, Tinto (1987) found that reductions in social and academic integration resulted in incongruence and isolation suggesting a greater probability of departure. He further noted that incongruence is a consequence when there is a “mismatch or lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution” (p. 54). The match between student expectations and actual experiences plays an important role in determining students’ satisfaction with their institution (Malaney & Shively, 1991). Tinto (1987) defined isolation as “The absence of sufficient interactions whereby [academic and social]

integration may be achieved” (p. 53) suggesting little if any involvement with the campus community.

According to Allen (1988), Black students enter college and experience higher rates of dropping out, lower levels of academic performance, and lower likelihood of graduating. Hults (1999) argued that racism is a foundation that potentially lowers educational achievement by Black students. Other researchers (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Davis, 1994; Davis & Lasane, 1994; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Nettles, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987; Turner, 1994) have suggested that contributing factors to the unfavorable experiences of African American students at predominantly White institutions are: racial discrimination both inside and outside of the classroom, social isolation, alienation, institutional abandonment, lack of congruency between the institution and the student, and poor interpersonal relationships with faculty, peers, and academic staff (Holmes et al., 2000).

Administrators at predominantly White institutions who are interested in reversing such adversities should include in their policies and practices, as Corson (1970) suggested, substantial efforts to minimize racial hostilities and promote Black students’ acceptance as full-fledged, equal members of the campus community. Saddlemire (1996) asserted that African American students have continued to perceive predominantly White institutions as hostile, unsupportive, and unwelcoming. Whereas some students have experienced traumatic racial encounters, still others have had positive and affirming experiences (Stikes, 1984). Contentment with social and academic experiences is important to students in general; however, students of color, particularly those attending predominantly White institutions, have faced the additional challenges of racism and discrimination (Allen, 1985; Pascarella, 1985; Suen, 1983).

As pointed out by Mow and Nettles (1990), African American students at predominantly White institutions “are forced to make considerable cultural and social adjustments” (p. 78). Allen (1987) asserted that the choices African American students make are rooted and grounded in society’s history of institutionalized racial discrimination. These students are expected to

adjust in an intellectual and social community that is often unprepared to accept them and their cultural differences (Allen, 1988; Fields, 1991; Jones, 1997).

African American College Enrollment and Graduation Rates

According to Furr (2002), there continues to be a disparity between the graduation rates of African American and White students. College completion rates for African American students have remained at about one half the rate of White students for the past 20 years (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007).

Douglas (1998) reported that the majority of students, both Black and White, who leave institutions of higher education do so during or immediately following their 1st year of study. A number of retention reports have suggested that African American students attending predominantly White institutions have a difficult time persisting in their attempts to obtain a college degree (Nettles, 1990; Porter, 1990). Additional findings have revealed that in comparison to majority students, African American students experience higher attrition rates and less persistence to graduation (Allen, 1992; Mow & Nettles, 1990; Nettles, 1990).

The first revolution in minority access to higher education occurred with the passage of the first GI bill for educational benefits in 1945 (Wilson, 1994). The landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 had a profound effect on the educational landscape for African Americans by dismantling the legal basis for racial segregation in schools and other public facilities. Since that time, other significant societal and legal changes have occurred enabling subsequent generations of Blacks in America to have increased access to educational settings and become the first in their families to attend college. Prior to 1954, the majority of Black students were enrolled in historically Black colleges or universities; by 1973, three fourths of Black students were attending predominantly White institutions (Benton, 2001). However, enrollment is only the first step toward the crucial goal of degree attainment and generating academic and professional achievement and success.

The significance of becoming a college freshman pales considerably in comparison to completing requirements for graduation. By most accounts, a college degree opens doors of opportunity to professional careers and higher future income and increases the overall probability for personal and professional success. There is a definite correlation between the level of one's educational attainment and labor force participation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Researchers have contended that those who obtain a college education are more likely to increase their potential to achieve social and economic mobility than are those who lack a college education (Lin & Vogt, 1996).

According to Day and Newburger (2002), a report issued by the United States Census Bureau in 2002 entitled *The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings*, over an adult's working life, a high school graduate earns an average of \$1.2 million; an associate's degree graduate earns \$1.6 million and those with a bachelor's degree earn \$2.1 million. Those obtaining a master's, doctorate, or professional degree will earn on average \$2.5 million, 3.4 million, and 4.4 million respectively (Day & Newburger). This leaves little doubt about the direct correlation between educational attainment, increased earnings, and future economic success.

Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003) reported that Black students represented 11% of college enrollment in 2000 compared to 9% in 1980. Further, their report related that during the 1999-2000 academic year, Black college graduates earned 9% of all bachelor's degrees, 8% of master's degrees, 7% of professional degrees, and 5% of doctoral degrees. By 2002-2003, 8.7% of the bachelor degrees awarded went to Black Americans, a decrease of .3% over the previous 3 years.

Recent studies of admission and retention-to-graduation rates of African American college students conveyed both anguish and optimism. In the fall of 2002, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Cross, 2002) issued a Special Report, "African American College Graduation Rates Intolerably Low and Not Catching up to Whites." Citing figures from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I colleges and universities, the

writers reflected that between 1995 and 2001, the nationwide college graduation rate for Black students was a dismal 38%, 22 percentage points below the rate for White students at 60%. However, a report on college graduation rates conducted by Astin and Oseguera (2002) at the University of California's Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute cited results that were more positive. The study by Astin and Oseguera of 262 colleges and universities, "How Good is Your Retention Rate," revealed that 49.5% of all Black (African American) students entering colleges in 1994 graduated within 6 years compared to a White student graduation rate of 58.8% within 6 years.

Experiences of Black Students on White Campuses

Over the past 40 years, numerous studies have been conducted on college campuses across the country relative to African American and other minority students' expectations and experiences at predominantly White institutions. The body of literature on this topic exposes the challenges and opportunities inherent with diverse student populations.

One of the earliest studies, Hedegard and Brown (1969), focused on Black freshmen who entered the University of Michigan in 1966. Epps (1972) addressed the problems of Black students in White colleges. The adjustment of Black students on predominantly White institutions in the northeastern, southern, midwestern, and western regions of the country was the topic of a study conducted by Lyons (1973). Loo and Rolison (1986) examined alienation of ethnic minority students in a study at a campus of the University of California. Kraft (1991) conducted a qualitative study with African American students at the University of Delaware concerning their academic experiences. D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993) performed research about successful African American students at a large mid-Atlantic predominantly White state university on the role that racism plays in influencing students' collegiate experiences.

Fisher and Hartmann (1995) examined the impact of race on the social experience of college students at a predominantly White institution in Southwest Missouri. Their study primarily concluded that race was a far more significant issue for Black students than it was for

White students. Black students at predominantly White institutions are consistently reminded, overtly and covertly, that they are a minority and that those universities are marked as *White spaces* (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Douglas (1998) used the setting of a predominantly White Midwest Carnegie Research University to examine the impressions of African American freshmen. Similarly, the students who participated in the Douglas study stated that the issue of racism was salient on their campus and that the university needed to address negative feelings relative to the campus climate and environment. Wallace and Bell (1999) described the experiences of three African American males at a predominantly White institution in the Midwest. Their study highlighted the various range of challenges facing these Black males that mainstream students never experienced including racially motivated incidents on campus and in the community-at-large. The researchers concluded that faculty members, having closer relationships with students than do administrators, have a distinctive responsibility to advocate for educational equity and social justice in higher education.

The University of Michigan conducted a longitudinal study, *The Michigan Student Study: Students' Expectations of and Experiences with Racial/Ethnic Diversity* (Matlock, Gurin, & Wade-Golden, 2002) that was a comprehensive examination of the impact on students of the university's commitment to foster campus diversity efforts and educational excellence. The report stated, in part, that African American students placed a greater focus on institutional commitment to diversity than did White students, that African American students expressed considerable feelings of alienation toward the campus community, and that many faculty members and students did not respect them intellectually (Matlock et al.).

Research conducted by Chavous, Rivas, Green, and Helaire (2002) involved African American undergraduates attending a predominantly White institution in the southeastern United States. They found that African American students' beliefs and experiences were linked to their self-concept, satisfaction, and performance. In addition, they reported that noncognitive indicators (such as self-concept and satisfactory) were more important predictors of performance and retention for African American students than they were for mainstream students.

Montgomery (2004) explored African American students' perceptions at a predominantly White institution in North Carolina.

Whether a student reports a positive, negative, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory educational experience is often affected by the predominant racial composition of his or her campus (Allen, 1987). Research by Sedlacek (1987) revealed that Blacks on White campuses demonstrated difficulties with self-identity, segregation, marginalization, racism, and hostile environments, developing a sense of community, and negative stereotypes. Smith (1981) found that "Black students attending white universities are caught in a whirlwind of confusing racial identities" (p. 301). They are expected to mask their cultural differences and assimilate or acculturate into the majority culture (Anderson, 1988; Pound, 1987).

Chavous (2002) stated that a considerable amount of research on African American students at predominantly White institutions revealed that they face difficulty with not only social but also academic integration. Turner (1994) suggested that a significant aspect of academic success for African American students was their ability to find a positive level of comfort on campus. Becoming comfortable and involved in the life of the campus community might make a considerable difference.

Blacks in Appalachia

The *L'il Abner* stereotype that the hills and valleys of southern Appalachia are solely comprised of poor White hillbillies continues to persevere. In his book, *The United States of Appalachia*, Biggers (2006) stated that literature and the mass media are responsible for an image of Appalachia as a mountain region of "poor white backwards hillbillies" (p. xiii). An absence of illustrations from its indigenous, immigrant and African American inhabitants perpetuates this false representation. In addition to ethnic myths that are not based in reality, Drake (2001) acknowledged an Appalachian duality of cultures that were at once rich and powerful as well as poor and powerless.

Stuckert (1987) wrote, “Most historians have stressed the northern European origins of the people in the Appalachian area and have neglected its ethnic and racial diversity” (p. 141). Consequently, the myth of Black invisibility in the mountains relieves scholars, journalists, researchers, legislators, and analysts of the responsibility to focus on the existence, needs, and cultural experiences of Black Appalachians (Turner & Cabell, 1985).

With a history dating back hundreds of years, according to Guillebeaux (1985), the Black Appalachian was not acknowledged until the Council of Southern Mountains annual meeting in 1969 when the Black Appalachian Commission was established. Its mission was to help Black Appalachians understand their relationship to the region and their role and responsibility for making regional unity a reality and no longer a myth.

Since the 1960s, African Americans in Appalachia have continued to be impacted by myths and stereotypes that deny their historical and cultural roots. The reality also affects the (mis)perceptions of those outside the Appalachian region. The region is extremely vast and complex so that almost any viewpoint can find some verification (Drake, 2001). Stuckert (1987) found that the Black population of Appalachia became highly urbanized with a shift from 1870, when fewer than 10% of them lived in towns and cities of 2,500 or more people, to over 75% by 1980.

Critical Race Theory

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a theoretical framework for this research as well as a lens through which the data can be analyzed. According to Carspecken (1996), critical qualitative research investigates social structures, power inequities, and cultural realities with a desire for positive social change. Among criticalists, there is a shared value orientation toward social justice issues. Creswell (2007) explained that critical theory has variants in the social sciences with central themes such as transforming social structures, historical problems of domination and oppression, transcending discriminatory constraints, and visioning new opportunities

As pointed out by Jennings and Lynn (2005), critical theory is an attempt to comprehend the development and process of “repressive social structures” as an assessment of domination (p. 15). Critical studies include critical ethnography, ethnic and feminist research, action research, and narrative analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Critical research is also found in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women’s studies literature (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Criticalists reject perception models of truth and develop theory from human experiences in relation to social and communication structures (Carspecken, 1996).

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was one of the first criticalists to align critical theory with educational research (Jennings & Lynn, 2005). In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire denounced oppressive structures that sought to dominate minds and lives across class, race, and gender. He encouraged and empowered the oppressed, especially illiterates, to become proactive agents of change to improve their quality of life.

The origins of CRT are found in the legal challenges to civil rights setbacks emanating from decisions made by the United States Supreme Court, federal, and state officials (Jones, 2002). As explained by Delgado and Stefancic (2000), critical race theorists sprang up in the mid-1970s from a cadre of civil rights attorneys who felt compelled to address the “slow pace of racial reform in the United States” (p. xvi.).

Educational researchers of color developed CRT as a theoretical construct that offers “a critical analysis of race within the context of pedagogy” (Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p. 23). According to Powers (2007), CRT attempts to challenge traditional accounts of educational institutions and the social processes that occur within them.

CRT allows the researcher to view policies, practices, and programs through a lens that acknowledges the realistic struggles and conflicts faced by people of color (Gilborn, 2005). Lynn (2006) concluded that CRT in education is helpful to frame the conditions under which Black students are being educated.

Critical race theorists most often use a storytelling approach to scholarship and pedagogy in articulating and describing their worldview (Jones, 2002). Researchers Solórzano et al. (2000)

studied campus racial climate through the lens of CRT. They found that the stories of their participants demonstrated that “Inequality and discrimination still exist--albeit in more subtle and hidden forms--and the cumulative effects can be devastating” (pp. 71-72).

Critical race theorists increasingly are challenging the higher education community to consider more fully policies, practices, and processes that form and promote persistent racial inequalities in education, industry, and the broader society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). These theorists are calling for “achievement gaps” in earnings, housing, employment, education, and graduation rates to be viewed as consequences of persistent racism. Systemic, institutional racism and discriminatory practices are often invisibly cloaked and perpetuated by silence, indifference, and inaction.

Institutional Practices

A fundamental goal of higher educational institutions should be to promote learning communities that minimize barriers to students’ success and maximize students’ experiences for optimal growth and development. One of the contributing factors to the academic, cultural, and social adjustment and success of minority students is the institutional context including faculty, staff, administrators, programs, policies, practices, and services (Holmes et al, 2000).

Relative to the institutional context of this study is the concept of what McIntosh (1988) was among the first to coin as *White privilege*: social and structural advantages granted to White persons that provide immunity from liabilities and burdens to which people of color are subjected. White privilege exercised at predominantly White universities shapes how people of color, particularly African Americans, are treated. Unearned advantages are awarded to White students, administrators, faculty, and staff that confer dominance to Whites and subordinate people of color. McIntosh further suggested, “White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (p. 109) representing unearned advantages that White people are largely unaware of, yet

benefit from, simply by virtue of being White in a society in which whiteness is viewed favorably.

In order to improve the opportunities for all students to persist to graduation, an unequivocal, explicit commitment by the highest levels of university leadership to enhancing student success is essential. This commitment must be operationalized in all units on campus, academic, as well as those dedicated to student life (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993).

There is an enduring perception that predominantly White institutions have not successfully integrated African American and other minority students into the mainstream of the educational system (Nettles & Perna, 1997). According to Holmes et al. (2000), the higher education community has struggled for many years with complex issues surrounding African American students enrolled at predominantly White institutions.

Among the challenges for increased minority persistence is for universities to hire more minority faculty members and administrators. This would help African American students, in particular, to feel that their culture is represented and respected on campus (Richardson & Bender, 1987). These students might have increased comfort levels if they could see people who look like them in key administrative and faculty roles.

Benton (2001) asserted that because predominantly White institutions possess the ability to empower individuals through education, the people they employ should recognize their power to facilitate or frustrate students' success.

Campus Environment: Effects on Student Engagement

All students should feel valued and welcomed within an institutional setting. In addition to instructional sources, schools are social, political, and cultural institutions (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). Researchers have consistently cited the importance of a positive racial climate in the social and academic adjustment of African American students at predominantly White institutions (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

A student's experiences with events in the college environment can differentiate his or her college experience and shape his or her college outcomes. According to Kuh et al. (2005), when expectations closely match the reality they encounter, students appear to "fit" better within their college environment. Most often, predominantly White colleges and universities constitute vastly different environments from African American students' prior home and school experiences (Hall & Allen, 1989).

Conyne and Clack (1981) claimed that the campus environment includes physical, social, and institutional components. The physical environment shapes students' behavioral patterns and social choices dependent upon the amount, locations, and arrangement of physical spaces; the social component represents students' demographic characteristics; the institutional components reflect the standard procedures, policies, practices, and traditions of the campus community (Moneta & Kuh, 2005).

Studies that include measures of the college environment have shown that the institutional environment both directly affects students' satisfaction and persistence and indirectly affects learning outcomes (Baird, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). A consistent thread throughout the research on the educational experiences of African American students at predominantly White institutions has been the campus environment (Davis, 1994). Creating campus environments and communities of learning that promote social and academic success are crucial goals for any university (Santos, Ortiz, Morales, & Rosales, 2007).

The importance of maintaining a supportive academic environment and campus involvement through social and emotional experiences for all students was discussed by Fries-Britt and Turner (2002). According to Allen (1987), Black students on White campuses experienced substantial difficulty adjusting to a culturally different, academically demanding, and socially alienating environment. Alienation refers to the feelings of students of color on White campuses that they are in an alien world that makes them feel they do not belong, does not share their values, and does not validate their life experiences (Matlock et al., 2002). African American students have reported that the environment of predominantly White institutions can

be more alienating than that of a historically black university (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Steward, Jackson, & Jackson, 1990; Suen, 1983).

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement suggested that students who spend their time and energy in the learning process and are involved in the social and academic life of the campus community are more likely to enjoy their college experience and complete their degree programs than are students who are not involved (Holmes, et al. 2000). This involvement includes both in-and out-of-class experiences and assumes that, perhaps erroneously, students will take the initiative to take part in the life of the academic community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Examination of the literature reveals that several researchers (Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Schuh, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993) are in agreement with Astin's (1984) theory of student development and involvement. Mow and Nettles (1990) found that 92% of Black students in their study who attended but did not graduate from predominantly White universities identified feelings of alienation and loneliness as reasons for dropping out. The research elucidates the quantity and quality of energy, both physical and psychological, that Black students invest in their college experiences at predominantly White universities.

Student engagement includes participation in extracurricular activities, interaction with faculty and other institutional personnel, and attention to academic work. With this in mind, all institutional policies and practices can be designed and evaluated in terms of the degree to which they contribute to student involvement and a more effective learning environment. Similarly, all university personnel can assess their own levels of commitment to encouraging students to become more engaged in the college experience.

Persistence: The Color of Success

Higher education is an increasingly important route to social, familial, professional, and financial gratification. The primary goal of a college education is not just matriculation but

persistence to graduation. According to a report in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (“The Nation’s Colleges,” 2006), only 43% of Black students who enroll in college actually graduate compared to 63% of Whites who graduate.

Loo and Rolison (1986) found that sociocultural alienation, ethnic isolation, and feelings of cultural domination were greater from minority students than from White students at predominantly White institutions. According to Wallace and Bell (1999), mainstream White students never face the persistent challenges inherent with being visibly different from the majority of people on campus and in the community.

Historically, predominantly White institutions have not fully addressed the issues related to the retention of African American students (Furr, 2002). Brayboy (2003) argued that without an institutional commitment to incorporating diversity strategies in their research, teaching, and service missions, efforts to implement diversity would be doomed.

Adjustment to college can be stressful for any student but could be especially challenging when the predominant culture differs from one’s own. Chavous (2002) found that many minority students at predominantly White colleges and universities have to negotiate through the domain of their own ethnicity as well as adjust to the values and requirements of the dominant environment. Guiffrida and Douthit (2006) suggested that African American students might require assistance from counselors to prepare them for the academic and social-cultural challenges they face when transitioning to a predominantly White institution.

Hinderlie (2002) found that support from friends and faculty as well as involvement in campus activities were associated with positive college adjustment. Townsend (1994) claimed that one of the keys to improving graduation rates was “a strong dedication of the faculty to the education of students” (p. 86). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that faculty had one of the strongest impacts on student involvement and persistence both in and outside of the classroom setting. According to Kobrak (1992), some faculty members viewed their roles as researchers and being academically oriented rather than as retention agents or facilitators for success. The lack of African American faculty members and staff are additional contributors to the challenges

that African American students face at predominantly White institutions (Allen, 1992). The success of African American students at predominantly White institutions has been the result of both in-and out-of-class experiences (Holmes et al., 2000).

Student engagement on and off campus are important activities for all students. Smith (2006) found that minority students at predominantly White institutions did not want to remain on the periphery of the mainstream. These students needed campus communities that were welcoming and conducive to the learning styles of culturally and ethnically diverse student groups (Curry, 1992; Fleming, 1984).

Institutions should fully embrace cultural diversity in the academic community if they are serious about helping African American and other students overcome the barriers that prevent many of them from successful integration into the mainstream campus culture (Holmes, et al., 2000). The saying, “It takes a village” (Downing, 2006) to successfully retain and graduate African American students is much more than a “politically correct” axiom; it is reality. Cultural diversity is a permanent fact of life in the United States and in its institutions of higher learning.

Conclusion

This literature review uncovered issues and concerns that are residues of our nation’s long history of racial tensions and race relations. Many of these are motivators that influence African American students’ decisions to remain in college and graduate. Researchers have identified several factors that influence African American students’ experiences and persistence including institutional variables, environmental issues, campus climate, faculty-student interactions, student engagement, and the presence of minority faculty and staff.

One conclusion drawn from the review of literature is that African American students are repeatedly reminded, overtly and covertly, that they are not equal to those in the mainstream. Universities are microcosms of a society that remains challenged with the realities of a multicultural society. Faculty, administrators, and staff on predominantly White campuses need to pay close attention to how Black students describe their experiences and their thoughts and

feelings about them (Feagin & Sikes, 1995). Colleges and universities must eradicate any institutional barriers to students' success and develop and fully support initiatives that value and celebrate the richness of the diversity and potential success of their students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Feminist poet Lorde (1979) wrote a poem titled, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” This was her literary interpretation about how the oppressor and the oppressed have starkly different interpretations of reality. Using the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this qualitative ethnographic approach provided the best framework for this study to increase understanding about the everyday world perceptions and realities of the African American student participants.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an inductive process and the research method evolved with the study. This process allowed the researcher to acquire thick, rich, detailed information; to uncover shared meanings; to be an active participant; and to hear suppressed voices (Creswell, 2007) as the stories, activities, needs, concerns, challenges, and interests of the students dictated. Riehl (2001) added, “Qualitative research continues to generate rich, contextualized, process-sensitive understandings of phenomena that have sociological import” (p. 128).

Ethnography

From the five traditional qualitative approaches, I chose ethnography, which is more of a process than a product (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) and is an effective tool for those researchers with the desire to understand and potentially improve the environmental circumstances faced daily by the participants (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999).

Triangulation (Creswell, 2005) was used with stories and thick descriptions of behavior through a combination of interviews, document analysis, and observations. To enhance the

validity of the research constructs, member checks with the participating students provided opportunities for transcript corrections and elaborations.

Critical Theory

Ozman and Craver (2003) pointed out that critical theory was applied first to the work of the Frankfurt School in the early part of the 20th century. Drawing particularly on the thought of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, critical theorists maintain that a primary goal of philosophy is to understand and to help overcome the social structures through which people are dominated and oppressed. Believing that science, like other forms of knowledge, has been used as an instrument of oppression, they cautioned against a blind faith in scientific progress, arguing that scientific knowledge must not be pursued as an end in itself without reference to the goal of human emancipation (Ozman & Craver).

Critical theory is a theoretical lens through which a researcher examines, illuminates, and interprets social systems and social interactions. Carspecken and Apple (1992) found that in general, critical researchers were politically minded individuals who, through their research, spoke out against inequality and domination. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian philosopher and educator, incorporated critical theory in his view of an educational approach that helps learners see how they live and exist in the world (as cited in Ozman & Craver, 2003). Learners come to see themselves and the world as becoming a dialectical relationship with the world through which the learner can exert some influence on surrounding conditions. Ozman and Craver pointed out that Freire believed critical consciousness leads to critical action.

Critical Race Theory

The research incorporated Critical Race Theory (CRT) to develop and increase understanding of the emergent data and findings. Taylor (1998), defined CRT as “an eclectic and dynamic form of research that insists that the social and experiential context of racial oppression is crucial for understanding racial dynamics, particularly the way that current

inequalities are connected to earlier, more overt, practices of racial exclusion” (p.122). Viewing this study through the lens of CRT acknowledges the persistent and contentious impact of racism underlying American society and culture. CRT increases understanding of how students of color, and Black students in particular, are positioned within a predominantly White campus community structure.

Initially used in legal studies, CRT offers insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that help to identify, analyze, challenge, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in educational structures, practices, and discourses (Solórzano et al., 2000). CRT grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color (Taylor, 1998). CRT was used in this study to analyze narrative data that illustrate racist incidents and behaviors and practices inside and outside of the classroom.

The five principles of CRT as outlined by Solórzano (1997, 1998) for the field of education are (a) the connection of race and racism with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective. This study focused on the centrality of the participants’ experiential knowledge regarding their respective institution’s impact on their academic performance and progress. My underlying assumption for applying CRT as a theoretical lens for this study was because the university community is a microcosm of a society-at-large that has entrenched racism into its culture and lived experiences.

A Storytelling Approach

Stories are powerful expressions of peoples’ lived and perceived experiences. At once, they can describe what was, what is, and what should be. According to Taylor (1998), CRT scholars often use storytelling to challenge and engage the dominant mindset that perpetuates shared negative stereotypes, beliefs, and understandings.

CRT emphasizes the use of storytelling by people of color providing them a voice while legitimatizing their experiences as scholarly references for the impact of racism on their lives (Johnston, 2006). Stories have the potential to not only challenge the status quo but can help create a more honest understanding informed by the actual conditions and experiences of Black people in the United States.

The research results were presented in a storytelling style that Creswell (1998) cautioned might challenge those readers accustomed to approaches that are more traditional to research. The use of narrative or storytelling gives power to voices of groups that have been denied power and status, access to resources, and privilege in American society (Johnston, 2006). The voice of the author is included with multiple stories from the participants.

The CRT framework acknowledges that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical for understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. As such, CRT draws explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling and narratives (Yosso, 2005). The stories of the participants were woven into one overarching story of their collective expectations, experiences, and recommendations for improving the campus and institutional climate and practices affecting academic success and persistence to graduation.

Site Selection

This was a two-site study at predominantly White institutions in southern Appalachia. The campuses are approximately 50 miles in proximity to one another with similar campus and community demographics. These universities were selected based on several factors including the potential applicability of the research (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990).

Merriam (1998) suggested that using a multi-site design, especially one that maximizes diversity in the research goals, would allow the study to have greater external validity.

Administrators on both campuses expressed interest in this study and provided access to key informants and support for developing cooperative rapport with various gatekeepers across the

university-at-large. Interviews and observations occurred in public venues that provided a transparent and confidential process.

Researcher as an Instrument

As an African American doctoral student matriculating at one of the predominantly White institutions under study, I had several concerns about conducting this study and presenting the data collected. Because I am intimately and inherently connected to the subject matter, would I be able to balance detachment and involvement, subjectivity and objectivity, insider and outsider positions? Would my own racist and discriminatory experiences distort the data collection and analysis process? During the interviews, would I impose my own values on the students? How could I best present sensitive and potentially threatening information without jeopardizing the integrity of the data collected?

These concerns were continually acknowledged as I conducted this project. The advantages of having a shared culture with the student participants allowed us to have a very good rapport and they demonstrated a high level of comfort and confidence during our discussions. On two occasions, I stopped recording in order to hear “off the record” accounts of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse incidents that occurred on campus and in the communities-at-large. These students entrusted me with their stories and I trust that their voices will be heard and heeded by administrators, faculty members, and staff who express a commitment to valuing their presence.

Recruiting Protocol

To begin the purposeful sampling process, the critical selection criterion for the study was Black juniors and seniors “in good standing” with their universities. I chose this specific demographic because of their decisions to remain at University A and University B beyond their freshman and sophomore years. Douglas (1998) showed that more than 50% of freshmen leave college during or immediately following their first year.

Using purposive sampling, the targeted population for this study consisted of 20 Black juniors and seniors. The solicitation process was extremely stressful, challenging, and time-intensive. The initial strategy for student identification and recruitment was through administrators in the university Offices of Student Development, Equity, and Diversity obviating the need for the researcher to seek access to confidential student records. Following approval by the Institutional Review Boards from both universities, mass e-mails were generated by these offices to over 300 students in the targeted population with my solicitation letter attached that outlined the research project goals and objectives (see Appendix E).

After several weeks with limited response from the students, the researcher and university administrators sent additional e-mails to the targeted student group. As new participants were identified, they helped to recruit other students from among their acquaintances. The researcher learned from the students that they rarely read unsolicited university e-mails and that their primary method for communicating was by text messaging or Facebook. Because neither of these strategies was considered, I determined this to be a generational issue.

Once the number of participants needed for the interviews was reached, the second challenge was to schedule the interviews. These students were extremely busy with campus activities, family responsibilities, work schedules, graduate school and job applications, homework, final exams, and graduation preparations. All interviews were conducted and recorded over a 3-week period.

Ethical Protocol

Throughout the course of the research process, the ethical guidelines established by the University A and University B Institutional Review Boards (IRB) were followed to ensure maximum safety and minimal risk for research participants. Prior to conducting the interviews, an Informed Consent Document (see Appendix D) that clearly detailed the special purpose of the research, the research method, and recording instruments and goals, was distributed to each

participant. The document emphasized their right to refuse participation, to withdraw from the study, or to extract their words at any time without impunity.

Privacy and confidentiality were reinforced using pseudonyms chosen by the students. During the course of the interviews, the purpose of the study and their consent were continually reaffirmed. The participants were allowed to review their personal transcripts for accuracy and potential changes. Students had the opportunity to receive a completed copy of the dissertation. Any possible identifying characteristics other than race, gender, majors, and age were carefully monitored and screened out in order to protect the participants' identities.

Data Collection

Fundamental to qualitative research is extensive collection of data from multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). The three categories informing this ethnographic research were interviews, observations, and document review. Patton (1990) pointed out that multiple sources of information are best because no solitary source of information provides a comprehensive perspective that validates and cross-checks findings.

Interviews

Central to this study were stories collected from the students. The interview process strengthens the interpretation of the data, their trustworthiness, and their credibility (Johnson, 2006). The overarching research questions directed the development of the interview guide and scripts. In addition, informal interviews were conducted with university staff and administrators including those in executive leadership positions.

Personal one-on-one interviews and a focus group were conducted and audiotaped of 20 students for approximately 1 hour each. Interviews included open-ended questions (see Appendix A) designed to gather detailed responses leading to in-depth understanding of the students' thoughts, feelings, concerns, perceptions, expectations, and experiences. Questions were adapted to address any emerging discoveries. Following the interviews, the tapes were

transcribed for accuracy and attention to detail. Each student received a copy of the transcription for review and to make corrections as needed.

The original intent of the researcher was to conduct two focus groups on each campus in addition to individual interviews. However, because of scheduling challenges, only one group of three was able to meet at the same time. The first interview was conducted with this group at University B. This initial process helped the researcher test and refine questions for future interviews. The focus group allowed for interaction and response from members of the group with opportunities for corroboration and debate. Further, the guided group discussion generated a wealth of understanding about participants' experiences and beliefs about the topic under investigation (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Bandura (1994) found that students of color were more comfortable sharing their perspectives in focus groups than they were in individual interviews and that the dialogue that occurred in focus groups better reflected students' real world dialogue than in individual interviews. The focus group interview lasted for about 2 hours. This process allowed me to develop key skills and insights to develop the open and honest dialog necessary for obtaining meaningful information from the students. One-on-one interviews were conducted with the remaining 17 students in offices and conference rooms on their respective campuses.

Students read and signed an informed consent document prior to data collection giving them assurance that their participation could be discontinued at any time. None of the students alerted the researcher about any distress during the interviews nor did any of them express their desire to discontinue participation in the study. Each student chose a pseudonym for use during the discussions and inclusion in the typed transcripts. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Although a list of questions was prepared for the interviews (see Appendix A), during the course of the conversation other questions emerged. At a minimum, the researcher asked the students to describe their academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences. In addition, they were asked to provide critical, constructive feedback for improving practices, programs, and services for Black students at their universities.

Initial fears about the age or generational gap between me and the participating students were unfounded. Because I am also a Black student matriculating at a predominantly White university, our shared culture and similar experiences mitigated the age difference. In this regard, during the interviews I was a participant observer.

Observations

Because of the inherent insider and outsider nature of ethnographic fieldwork, the study provided the researcher with opportunities to assume dual roles of an observer and, when appropriate, an active participant in social activities and events. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2007) suggested that during observations, fieldworkers combine an etic, outsider's point of view with an emic, insider's perspective. They also advocated for the researcher to focus on capturing the perspective of the insiders in the culture.

Observation site choices came from student, faculty members, and staff recommendations, researcher surveillance, student organizations, programs and event advertising, and announcements. Locations included student activity centers, libraries, cafeterias, student centers, and recreational and athletic facilities. I observed celebrity lectures on each campus, basketball and football games, plays, a Black Faculty and Staff presentation, Black Affairs Student Association meetings, and a presentation by Black Greek organizations.

Field notes reflected the physical settings, specific events observed, participants involved, interactions, activities, and my own experiences and reactions as outlined in the Observation Guide (see Appendix B). The observations were conducted to triangulate emerging findings in the interviews and to document and artifact analyses.

Document Review

According to Flick (2006), documents are produced to communicate specific messages and can be used to understand social realities in institutional contexts. They can come in written, visual, and physical form relevant to the study. This means anything in existence prior to the

research can be analyzed (Merriam, 1998). To that end, I looked for documents that addressed policies, procedures, practices, guidelines, values, and standards that helped me analyze the institutional climate and commitment to diversity.

During visits to the Offices of Admissions and Student Development, I obtained recruiting materials including brochures, pamphlets, magazines, university handbooks, and handouts. From other campus locations, I acquired newsletters and other publications. I also looked at the website for each university for executive leadership speeches and documents relative to strategic planning diversity objectives. The Document Review Guide (see Appendix C) helped me uncover valuable data and to compare and contrast words and actions.

A field journal documented my personal reflections, expectations, experiences, and emotions (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2007) as I spent time on both campuses. These field notes and observation data contributed to the study's findings (Merriam, 1998). In conjunction with the student interviews and observations, the document review triangulated the data to increase validity and ensure credibility of the study.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, detailed descriptions, stories, categorizations, and interpretations of the data collected were included. According to Glesne (1999), the data analysis process organizes observations, related documentation, and participant interviews with the intention of making sense of what was learned. Consequently, patterns and themes that characterize the data are emergent from and are not superimposed on the data.

Creswell (2007) described the process of data analysis as “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p. 148). This data reduction process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) assisted the researcher in providing meaning and insight to the words and actions of the student participants.

According to Glesne, (1999), the analysis process involves organizing the data to develop patterns, make meaning of the data collected, and link together the stories told. The final step in the data analysis process was to merge the patterns from each data collection tool into a cohesive theoretical framework. Bishop (1992) suggests that the analysis process transforms data into “stories that matter, journeys to be taken” (p. 155).

Interviews

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for line-by-line analysis by the researcher; it was a time-intensive process. Including the focus group, the interview times ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours with an average time of 1 hour. It took approximately 4 hours to transcribe 1 hour of tape. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher had compiled over 215 pages to organize, analyze, and condense into themes through a coding process.

Initial attempts with computer software proved to be enormously challenging and much more time-intensive than was hand-analysis. To obtain a general sense of the data, a preliminary exploratory analysis involved numerous readings of the transcriptions and an immersion in the details prior to separating specific comments.

Central to this research was the collection of stories from the participants. After listening to all personal and focus group interviews, I examined and analyzed the data using the Strauss and Corbin (1998) Constant Comparison method. The transcripts were examined using open and axial coding.

Initially, in order to obtain a full sense of each story, the transcripts were read without attempts at coding. During the second reading, I used an open-coding process and noted individual words, phrases, and sentences relevant to the research objectives. As each transcript was read, similarities and differences were examined and compared. From this examination, themes and patterns emerged. Finally, an IRB certified internal auditor verified the analysis process to ensure the internal validity of final reporting (Perry & Franklin, 2006).

The open and axial coding processes involved segmenting the text, highlighting significant comments, and assigning a numerical value to redundant statements that the researcher thought to be of significance to the study. This resulted in 100 codes and descriptions that were eventually narrowed into broad themes that consistently emerged from the interviews. These broad themes are presented as family matters, transitions to the university, college choice factors, academic expectations and experiences, cultural expectations and experiences, social expectations and experiences, and institutional practices. The data reduction process gave the researcher additional insight and meaning to the words of the students. Figure 1 illustrates an example of how codes were merged into themes.

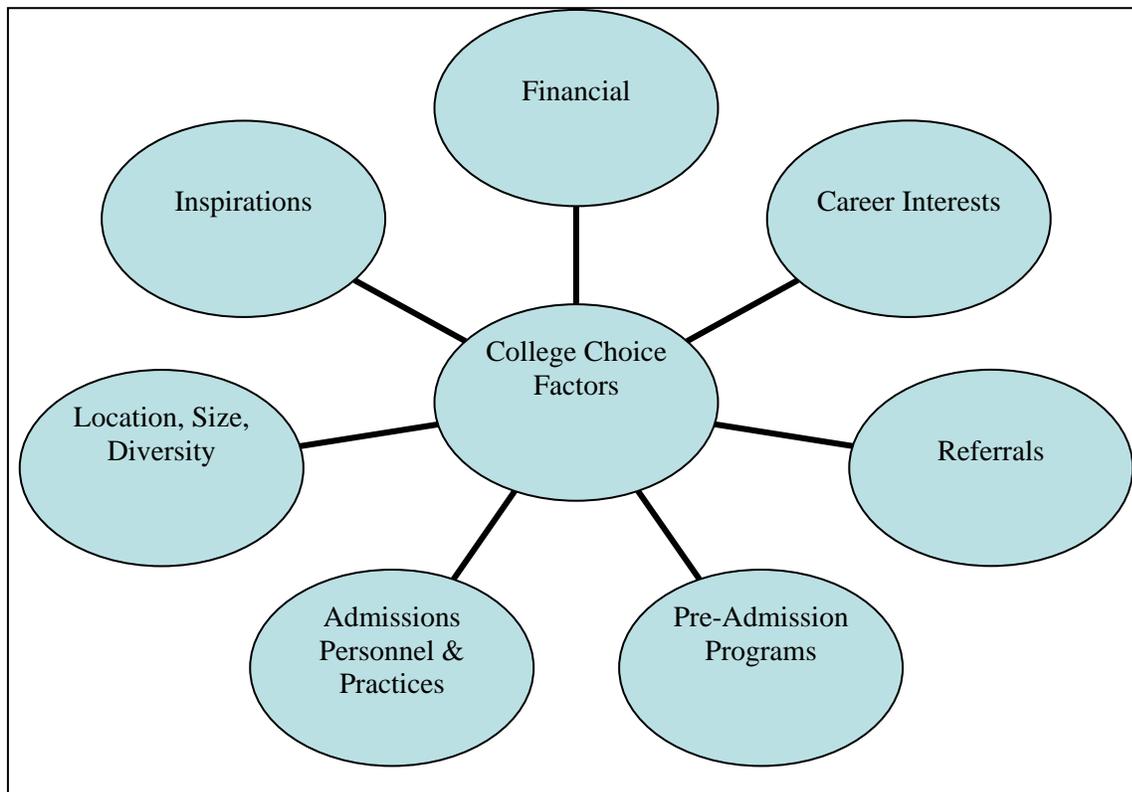


Figure 1. Example of the Coding Process

In addition to the Strauss and Corbin (1998) method, I analyzed the interview data using the lens of CRT to interpret the narratives. Critical race theorists emphasize the use of storytelling as a form of analysis (Powers, 2007). “The data collected in a narrative study need to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies” (Creswell, 2007, p. 155). CRT provided a theoretical framework in selecting open and axial codes for this study.

Observations

In analyzing observation data, I used the perspective of the CRT. As a theoretical framework, CRT considers the historical implications for Black Americans and positions experiences within existing social constructs. Using the CRT lens, I wrote a detailed, thick, description of all physical settings, events, activities, and participants observed. The observations were analyzed for themes and patterned regularities. In addition to description and analysis, “making an ethnographic interpretation of the culture-sharing group is a data transformation step as well” (Creswell, 1998, p. 162). The researcher interprets the data, probing for possible meanings behind the sights and sounds in the observations and uses critical theory as a structural lens for analysis.

Document Review

After determining the authenticity and accuracy of the documents discovered in the data collection phase of the study, I used ethnographic content analysis that Merriam (1998) defined as “a systematic procedure for describing the content of communications” (p. 123). Through the CRT lens, university-published documents and websites were analyzed for perceived messages in support of diversity or that might be interpreted as racist or discriminatory. According to Flick (2006), “Documents represent a specific version of realities constructed for specific purposes and should be seen and analyzed as *methodologically created communicative turns in constructing versions of events*” (p. 249).

Participant Demographics

The researcher conducted interviews with 20 Black and African American students; nine were at University A and 11 at University B; these represented 15 seniors, 5 juniors, 15 females, and 5 males. Although most represented the traditional demographics for college juniors and seniors, the oldest student interviewed was 52 years of age and a few participants were married with children. Two of those interviewed were military veterans. Five of the 20 were transfer students: three were from community colleges and two from 4-year universities. One of the students graduated from Job Corps and received a high school equivalency (GED) degree.

Most of the students came from urban areas in their respective states including Knoxville, Charlotte, and Chattanooga; these are cities with much higher populations of African American residents than are their university communities. Only one student was from out-of-state (New York). All of the students received different types of financial assistance including Pell grants, student loans, and scholarships.

The participants' major areas of study were healthcare administration, computer information systems, music industry studies, recreation management, sociology, English-creative writing, athletic training, political science, psychology, Spanish, nursing, philosophy, surveying and mapping science, broadcasting, and history. Two of the students were pursuing a second bachelor's degree at the same school from which they received their first undergraduate degree. Several of the students planned to attend graduate and other professional schools following graduation.

Conclusion

For African Americans, higher education, more than any other social institution, is a liberating force against social, political, and economic oppression and opposition. Across the United States, many African American students are choosing to study at predominantly White institutions. When choosing to matriculate at a university in Southern Appalachia, these students were making a decision to be analogous to a fly in buttermilk or a tadpole in an ocean. The goal

of a college education is not only to adjust to the environment and survive the challenge but also to experience academic success and persistence to the elusive goal of graduation.

Through this ethnography, I hope to make a positive contribution to the existing body of knowledge relative to race in higher education and to affect the ability of minority students to make better-informed decisions about their university of choice. In addition, I hope to stimulate more interest in understanding African American student expectations and experiences on the part of higher educational administrators at both universities.

Copies of the final report are available to each student participant and University A's and University B's administrators and student development staff. In addition, I plan to submit findings to national journals with audiences interested in higher education diversity issues. Presentations to related association conferences are also possible.

As noted earlier, pseudonyms chosen by the students in this study were used to protect their identities. Verbatim quotations were chosen to represent the voices of as many students as possible. Welcome to the academic, cultural, and social world of Corbin, Steven, Tamica, Francesca, Queen, Boogie, Elizabeth, Linda, Ace, Miriam, Tia, Stranger, Stephanie, Andrea, Ken, Sasha, Shawn, Benson, Gabrielle, and Zahara.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The data analysis involved meticulous reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts, documents, and observation field notes identifying meanings, patterns, and themes. Critical race theory was used as a lens of analysis to examine academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences of Black students at two predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia. The participants' stories illustrated in rich detail how they experienced the racial climate of their university campuses. Increased understanding of these students enhances the likelihood of successful interventions to assure their academic success and persistence to graduation.

Vast amounts of financial and human resources are expended on diversity and multicultural initiatives in higher education. However, limited information is available regarding how effective those initiatives are in achieving their desired results. With the changing cultural composition of many communities across Southern Appalachia, increased awareness and a heightened understanding of the issues and challenges faced by minorities on majority campuses is no longer an option but a mandated call for action.

What are the factors leading Black students to choose a predominantly White university? What are the students expecting from such an experience? Do their academic, cultural, and social expectations align with their experiences? What do these students say that universities need to do to improve institutional practices? These are among the questions addressed in the analysis of the research data collected.

In search of an indepth understanding of Black students' expectations and experiences on predominantly White campuses, the research process involved continuous contact with Black, White, and other minority students over an 8-month period on the two campuses under study. During this time, I attended and recorded observations at several campus events, conducted interviews with university administrators and students, and collected institutional documents and

artifacts. This triangulation process using multiple data sources provided additional insight, accuracy, and credibility to the findings. In addition, the interview transcriptions were sent to each participant for his or her review.

The students' voices and stories are the heart and cornerstone of this analysis. In their own words are the positive and hopeful as well as the painful and horrific descriptions of their college experiences in and out of the classroom and campus environments. It is my belief that their collective stories provide implications for institutional planning, policy, and practice.

Narrative Inquiry and Critical Race Theory

Understanding experience as lived and told stories or narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) allowed the researcher to capture personal and cultural dimensions beyond numerical, quantifiable data. The students' stories and examples of prejudice, privilege, power, and oppression illustrate and evaluate the effectiveness and inefficiencies of resources allocated to increasing the presence of minority students on predominantly White campuses.

Critical race theory (CRT) provides a theoretical framework to illuminate and enhance understanding relative to the subtle persistence of racism and discrimination that is endemic to American life and in higher educational settings. Solórzano (1997) recognized the centrality of experiential knowledge of the oppressed as one of the key principles of critical race theory for the field of education. Critical race theorists often use a storytelling approach to scholarship and pedagogy in articulating and describing their worldview (Jones, 2002).

Through the lens of critical race theory, the data analysis process focused on the subtle and blatant ways that race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact academic, cultural, social and institutional structures, practices, and discourses at the selected two predominantly White universities. Intentional and unintentional discriminatory practices affect students' academic, cultural, and social confidence and competence. Their collective stories shed light upon critical changes that need to occur and suggest improvements for successful educational outcomes.

Participants' Profiles

In this section, profiles of the 20 student participants are presented. A brief description of each participant is presented so that the reader may have some degree of familiarity with these students and develop a connection with their stories.

Corbin, a graduating senior from an urban area of Tennessee, attended a predominantly Black high school. He was one of six children in a single-parent home and a first-generation college student. A healthcare administration major, Corbin, a resident assistant, was active with several campus organizations including his fraternity, the Black Student Association, and Gamma Beta Phi Honor Society.

Steven was a senior from rural Tennessee living with his father and stepmother. His mother passed away when he was 16. Steven's major was computer information systems. The high school he attended was predominantly White; however, Black students made up about one third of the population. Steven was involved with the Black Student Association, the Council for Cultural Awareness, and the Association for Information Technology Professionals.

Tamica, a senior majoring in music, lived with both of her parents in rural Tennessee. She had a younger sister who was graduating from high school. At Tamica's high school, 4 out of 10 students were Black. At her university, she was very involved with the Gospel Choir.

Stranger was a graduating senior majoring in sociology with a minor in African and African American studies. She was a first-generation college student who transferred from a community college in an urban area of North Carolina. In addition to being a wife and mother, Stranger was actively involved with her sorority, the Black Student Association, as well as several honor societies.

Francesca was born in Haiti, moved to Miami, Florida, when she was 8 years old and to Tennessee as a teenager. There were no White students at her high school. As a first-generation college student, Francesca was a wife, mother, and senior majoring in recreation management who transferred after marrying her high school sweetheart. She also was very active with her sorority.

Stephanie was a first-generation college student from an urban area in North Carolina where she attended an all Black high school. A senior majoring in Spanish, she was a resident assistant, an officer with the Black Student Association, and sang in the Gospel Choir. She said she planned to work as a hospital medical interpreter.

Queen was a senior from an urban area in Tennessee who was majoring in sociology. Both of her parents were college graduates as well as her siblings and grandparents. She broke a generational tradition by being the first member of her family not to attend an historically Black college or university. Queen was active with her sorority, the Council for Cultural Awareness, the Gospel Choir, the Black Student Association, and the Admissions Diversity council.

Andrea was a junior pursuing a second bachelor's degree from her university. She was a native of a rural community in North Carolina who said both parents were college graduates. Andrea attended private schools and was one of only three Black students in her class from kindergarten through high school.

Boogie, a former collegiate athlete, was a senior music major who was a first-generation college student. He had a younger brother who lived at home in rural Tennessee with both parents. Boogie worked at the child development center on campus and was involved with the Audio Engineering Society.

Ken graduated from the Job Corps where he received his GED. He grew up in a major metropolitan city in the northeast. As a senior majoring in philosophy, he aspired to be a college professor. Ken was also a military veteran.

Elizabeth was one of the five juniors who participated in the study. An "Air Force kid," she claimed home as an urban area of Tennessee where she graduated from high school. Elizabeth was majoring in English and creative writing. She was active with the Black Student Association and the Council for Cultural Awareness.

Sasha attended a predominantly Black high school. She was a senior and first-generation college student. Her major was surveying and mapping science. Sasha was active with the Black Student Association and the Gospel Choir.

Linda was a senior from an urban area in Tennessee who attended predominantly White schools from kindergarten through high school. Her major was athletic training and she said she planned to pursue a master's degree in health administration after graduation. She had an older sister and an older brother, both of whom were college graduates. Linda was very active with her sorority, the Peer Mentoring Program, and the Black Student Association.

Shawn was a junior from an urban area in North Carolina. She was an English major with a minor in African and African-American studies. Both of her parents were college graduates and her mother had a master's degree. As a Dean's List student, Shawn was active with the Black Student Association and wrote for the campus newspaper.

Ace, a senior political science major, was pursuing a second college degree from the same university. She was from an urban area in Tennessee who had a 1-year old brother and another brother and sister who were 17-year-old twins. Ace was involved with a sorority, the Black Student Association, and she was president of a community service organization.

Benson was a graduating senior majoring in broadcasting. He was a military veteran, a transfer student from a community college, and a first-generation college student. His mother was also a veteran of the military. He attended a predominantly White high school in a rural area of North Carolina.

Miriam grew up in Houston, Texas and moved to rural Tennessee. She was the baby of her family with two sisters and a brother who were older and married. She was a senior majoring in recording and engineering. Miriam was active with the Black Student Association but she said her passion was Urban Legend, a campus break-dancing group.

Gabrielle was from an urban area in North Carolina and graduated from a predominantly Black high school. She was a graduating senior and a first-generation college student majoring in history. Gabrielle was very active with a local church and she sang with the university Gospel Choir.

Tia was a junior from an urban area in Tennessee who shared an apartment with her older sister. She was a junior psychology major and a first generation-college student. Tia was active with her sorority, the Gospel Choir, and the Sexual and Gender Alliance.

Zahara was a junior who graduated from a private high school in an urban area of North Carolina. Her mother was a college graduate who was raised in Africa and came to the United States to attend a university in the northeast. In addition to being a wife and mother, Zahara was a nursing student who said she enjoyed salsa dancing.

Success Stories

The students I interviewed, 15 seniors and 5 juniors, were all successfully persisting towards graduation. At the beginning of the interviews, I explained to the students that I wanted to talk with them because they were beating the odds against Black students graduating from college and that each one of them had a success story to tell. They were successful in surmounting the obstacles that were the catalysts causing other Black students to leave during or after their freshman or sophomore years. This positive affirmation set the stage for a fascinating dialogue as each student provided a description of his or her academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences. The quotes were chosen to represent the voices of as many participants as possible.

For data analysis and organization, the students' stories were categorized into themes as they emerged from the data collection. The themes illustrate the students' academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences including institutional practices that contributed to or prohibited their persistence towards academic progress and graduation.

Family Matters

As consistently illustrated in the literature, family support and education as a family value have been positively related to students' persistence to graduation (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Moore, 2000; Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995). Family members can provide guidance,

encouragement, and reassurance about college challenges and the student's potential for success. Hrabowski and Maton (1995) established that parents and other family members were instrumental in helping African American students adjust to college life at a predominantly White institution.

The Black students in this study brought with them a diverse combination of family backgrounds, family support, and family values particular to education. Following initial introductions for the interviews, my first inquiry to each student was, "Tell me about your family." As the comments below illustrate, higher education was a family value for several of the students whereas others shared that they were raised to believe that graduating from high school was the ultimate educational goal.

In Linda's home, education was vitally important and staying home from school was not an option. She elaborated:

In my family I was brought up to believe that education was very important; that education was the key to a good future, a great future, and we took it very seriously you know. My Mom...when we came home from school, it was homework first, play later.

To illustrate her mother's commitment and dedication to education, Andrea shared about the award she received at her high school graduation for perfect attendance:

I had never missed a day of school all through high school. Two guys and myself got an award...we had not missed a day since kindergarten! My Mom was a teacher and we went to school. My Mom would say, "I don't care if you're sick. Get in the car."
[Laughs]

Similarly, Boogie attributed his collegiate success to family values regarding education, honesty, and hard work:

I've always been raised on hard work and dedication...and you be honest...and you can do whatever you want to do...and like that's another thing...in that area...[his home town]...like my Mom was talking to a young lady and she asked if I had come home to see my friends and my Mom told her that all my friends are off at college and our breaks are different so we don't really get to come and see each other but about once a year or something like that...and she was like, "All of his friends are in college?" And that's kind of like how I feel that the Black community is...they don't think...they're not taught by their parents or by other mentors that they can go to good schools or they can go and do something more than work at Shoe Show or sit on the corner...hang out with the boys.

Almost all of the participants were first generation-college students. Stranger, graduating in the spring, emotionally shared how she was discouraged by everyone in her family and community from even attempting to go to college:

They were like, "Where do you think you're going? You ain't going nowhere. You'll be right back here in six months." Even my Mom...because we've never had anyone in the family to attend college so she didn't even know what a college means...and she was like, "Where do you think you're going? How are you going to get there? How are you going to pay for it?" She didn't even want to hear it. "Girl, go somewhere and sit down." I heard so much of that from everybody. You get through high school...you have accomplished the ultimate goal. Go work at Burger King. Go work at McDonald's and help your Mama pay the light bill. But I knew it was not the end of me...just graduating high school...no way. I always saw myself beyond that. I just knew that was not my life...that was not where I wanted to be.

Several of the students had parents and siblings with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, most often from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Queen broke away from a long-term family tradition of going to a historically Black college. She shared:

My father went to a predominantly Black university. My mother graduated from an HBCU that one of my sisters now attends. Another sister graduated from a different HBCU. Both of my grandparents were teachers who also went to HBCUs. I broke the tradition.

Most often, these students indicated that they were the first in their families to attend a predominantly White university (PWI). Linda explained that her mother was very upset about her decision to attend a PWI:

My mother was like, "This is not right. You can't go there. This just does not feel right." She's a Christian woman and she was like, "God does not want you to go there." That's between me and God, Mama--not you, me, and God. And so...I just felt in my heart and in my spirit that this is where God wanted me to be...where I could do the best to my ability.

Linda was scheduled to graduate in the spring and reported that she had no regrets about the decision, and now that she was headed to graduate school, neither did her mother. In summary, all of these students were on track to graduate within the next year.

Transitions to the University: A Different World

Transitioning to college can be a stressful period for most students (Lafreniere, Ledgerwood, & Docherty, 1997). Fifteen years ago, Tinto (1993) found that many African American students had difficulties making the transition from a secondary school environment to college. The participants in this study reported that for some of them, this change has remained a challenge. Their transition challenges of attending a predominantly White university often depended upon their high school's racial and ethnic demographics, social relationships, and academic preparation and performance.

According to Tatum (1997), high school is a critical predictor for collegiate preparation and, for minority students, the shaping of racial identity and an awareness of academic, cultural, and social issues that will accompany them to college. Most of the students interviewed graduated from high school with honors. Their educational experiences prior to college ranged from remedial studies to gifted programs, public and private schools, and 100% Black student populations to one student being the only Black student in her school. Accustomed to good grades prior to college, most of the students found themselves far more challenged than they expected to be. The difficulty of transitioning to the university was succinctly expressed by one student who said, "It's a completely different world of thinking."

Zahara, the only Black student at her high school, was an exceptional student in high school who made As and Bs. At the same time, she said she felt she was not taught how to be a critical thinker and this had caused her grades in college to drop significantly. She explained:

You go from memorizing in high school...your whole education is about memorizing...taking facts and you apply them. But just going from that whole...not necessarily even just memorizing...but it's a whole different format of asking the question. And then the answers, instead of having one right answer, like you're used to, you have two good answers but they want the best one. Here, the key thing is critical thinking. It's a completely different world of thinking that takes basically...it can take one person that maybe can grasp it within the first semester or it can take somebody their whole college career. So that's been the hardest thing for me. It's very challenging...retraining your thoughts, not necessarily really late in life, but still late in your education. So it's like now I have to learn how to think and answer; it's all completely different from what I've been taught and learned.

Andrea took college classes while still in high school and graduated with a 3.875 GPA. She admitted she felt like she was an exceptional student before she came to college. At home, her time was structured by her parents and she had to learn to manage her time and take responsibility for her actions. She described:

Before college, I felt like I was an exceptional student. I turned out to be a very average student. I think that coming to college was a big smack in the face as far as...it was like...you're not the smartest person in the class anymore. I was really used to As ... I had never made a B until high school. When I got here...there was nobody to say...you need to go to class at 8:15 so you might want to get out of bed and go to class. I started out as a pre-med major but my parents said I discouraged myself because I kept saying I just don't know if I can do this. That little defeatist attitude slid its way into the door and I changed my major to psychology.

Gabrielle said her high school emphasized parental involvement in school activities, social responsibility, and student preparation for work in a global, diverse, and green society:

My high school focused on our global and ecological future. They wanted us to be prepared for the global world when we got out of high school. To get into the school you actually had to interview. The child interviewed separately from the parents; the parents interviewed separately from the child. I have three other siblings and we all interviewed in separate rooms.

Ace attended a predominantly White high school that was transformed by busing initiatives into a predominantly Black high school where her collegiate academic success was forged. Each setting might be viewed as integral parts of the current sociopolitical milieu. Ace commented that she "saw the best of both worlds." She commented:

Because of busing, I ended up going to a predominantly Black high school. At first when I went there it was predominantly White, so I saw the best of both worlds I guess you might say. I was in the National Honor Society...all the academic clubs that you had to have a certain GPA for...I was in all of those. My parents have awards all over the house for things that I have done academically in high school. Here, I've been on the Dean's List for about 3 or 4 years in a row.

Linda attended a predominantly White high school where she excelled academically and athletically. She explained that her parents were strict and severely limited her social activities:

My mother and father didn't let me go out when I was in high school. I was very into sports. I played basketball, I played softball...basketball in the winter, softball in the spring...and then in the fall, I would do athletic training for the football team. So I would go to school, go to practice, go to work, and come home...go to school, go to practice, go to work, and come home. That was my Monday through Friday routine. Saturday, I

would just be at home. Sunday, I would go to church and go to work. No, I take that back. I wasn't allowed to work on Sundays. My Mom was very adamant about that being the day of rest. And I hated them for it in high school. I hated them for it. And I was like, when I get to college, I'm going to be able to do whatever I want to...go out when I want to...do what I want to. So when I got to college and I got invited to my first college party, I don't know what I was thinking ... I had a lapse and my mind just shut off...I called my mother to see if I could go to the party.

Corbin reported a different type of experience at his predominantly Black high school:

Well, I was a really poor student in high school. I didn't really care about school, my grades, or anything of the sort. Being at my high school, being around that many Black individuals, you know you had your stereotypical individuals...you had your thugs, your drug dealers, you had the Black students who were really active on student government and all that...I mean it was all good. We would sit in the cafeterias and we had televisions and stuff playing many, types of programs...BET, MTV, and all that...and radios, rap music, and all that.

In an ideal world, the transition from a community college to a university would be seamless. However, real world challenges were described by two of the students interviewed.

Stranger said she stayed at her community college as long as possible:

Actually, I spent 4 years there. It wasn't because I was incompetent. I had such a great family feeling while I was there and I didn't want to leave. Basically, they had to kick me out. [Laughs]. They were like..."You're done. Why are you still hanging on?" I guess I was afraid. I quickly learned that there was a difference between a community college and a university. I had none of this knowledge prior to coming to the United States. I knew nothing about college. All I knew was that I wanted to go and I would do whatever I needed to do to get there. But I didn't know what the logistics were. I didn't even know how to apply...anything! Once I learned the difference and that this was a University and that... you weren't sort of cradled along once you got here. I think I was a little bit intimidated.

Benson, another transfer student from a community college, said he continued to be upset about being put in remedial classes in middle school. He explained how that experience carried over into high school where he struggled to pass his classes:

In middle school, they put me in like a...what's it called...remedial classes. They didn't think I was smart enough. I said, so why are you holding me back...and I was mad. In high school, I was a C and D student. My parents wanted me to do my best but I was struggling because my mind was not focused on school. I wanted to be a football star. I was being hard-headed. I wanted to do football because that's what all my friends were into. You know where your friends go... you kind of go there because you don't want to stand out. You don't want to be alone. Later on a friend told me, you have a better

chance of going to jail than to finish college. I said okay, I'm going to make my choice to finish college to see what statistic I will be in, just to see.

As Benson related, a challenge from a friend caused him to change his study habits leading to him becoming a Dean's list college student who was scheduled to graduate in the spring. However, he admitted he had a difficult adjustment when he first started at the University and considered quitting. He explained had it not been for his father, perhaps he would have:

I came over here...I was kind of nervous. I was scared. I was scared. There were so many people and I didn't have anyone really to talk to. When I got here, I was nervous. I didn't know anyone. And that was a big thing. I didn't know who I could turn to, to help me keep on going. And so I was ready to quit. I was ready to quit that first semester.

I then asked Benson to explain what kept him from doing that. He answered by saying, "Dad was telling me, 'Keep on doing it, son, you are almost there. You almost got it over with. Don't give up, you are almost there, you are almost there.'"

College Choice Factors: The Fork in the Road

What is important to prospective African American college students and their parents? What are the factors that influence their choice of college? When considering an HBCU or a PWI, what are the factors that influence these choices?

Based on this study's interviews, the primary reasons for Black students to choose one college or university over another do not appear to have changed significantly during the past 15 years. Sevier (1992) conducted a national survey that examined institutional selection factors among college-bound African American students. Those students rated reputation of the college, availability of a specific major, estimated total costs, and the availability of financial aid as being factors most important to them in their selection decisions.

There was consensus among the students interviewed that they chose these specific universities because they offered superior academic programs in their major areas of interests, attractive financial aid packages, and caring admissions personnel. For example, Tia said, "I

came here for the music program because I heard they were the best.” According to Queen, “The decision was strictly a financial one.” Steven said, “I think tuition played into it a lot. The tuition here was lower than a lot of the other bigger schools.” Gabrielle had similar thoughts, expressing, “My parents can’t afford to pay for me to go to college, and I don’t want to go on loans. Here, I had a full financial package.” Tamica said she also limited her choices to in-state schools:

Well, I chose University B because I wanted to stay in the state for the lower tuition and there were only about three or four schools that had my major so it was not too hard of a decision to make.

For financial reasons, Andrea was all set to start classes at a community college in her hometown. However, through “divine intervention,” she visited University A for a summer enrichment program that changed everything. She elaborated:

My parents and I would take weekends and look at colleges. We finally decided that I would stay at home and go to a community college for a couple of years...we don’t have crazy money to pay crazy tuition. So I came up here the summer before my freshman year of college and took summer school classes and I did the pre-med/med program and I just fell in love. I fell in love with this campus...I fell in love with the people. They were very, very generous. I didn’t pay a dime from that first year...so thank the Lord for divine intervention. I was very blessed. Money was not an issue.

One of the roles of the people who work in admissions is to market their schools to potential students. The students interviewed frequently mentioned admissions staff members' recruiting efforts as a deciding factor to attend one of the two universities under study. Elizabeth pointed out:

I hadn’t really heard anything about University B when I came up here. When I called University B, I started getting phone calls from someone in the admission office. I know they make a point to call minority students to make sure that they’re interested in the school; that really got me, because I felt like somebody cared about me here so I came here.

Ace’s parents were very involved in her college selection. She said she had received several college scholarships but a campus visit to University B sealed the deal:

Actually, my parents chose this school for me. We visited a lot of schools and I had gotten a lot of scholarships...but when we came here, the atmosphere was really inviting

and they had a lot of different things that seemed to kind of be along the line of things that I was interested in.

Benson said he chose University A for financial and family reasons. After returning home from the military, he decided to stay and help his parents, explaining:

My parents...they were in a financial burden and I had money saved up so I decided to stay here and help them out. Going to school here saved me money because in-state was cheaper and I knew that I wanted to get my degree in Tennessee. The cost of living was lower and there are not too many distractions around here.

Why Not an HBCU?

There are 17 HBCUs located in the same states as University A and University B. The literature has illustrated that African American students at HBCUs are more engaged and satisfied and enjoy a more comfortable and less isolating environment in which to pursue their academic coursework (Allen, 1987; Sedlacek, 1987).

In the discussions about college selection process, the students offered unsolicited remarks about why they chose to attend a PWI rather than an HBCU. Their comments demonstrate that individual considerations regarding financial circumstances, family influences, academic aspirations, and concerns regarding social distractions were among the factors that influenced their PWI enrollment decisions. Stephanie contributed details:

I was accepted to two HBCUs and the only reason I did not go was because of the cost...because of higher tuition and stuff like that but I really wanted to go. I figured that I will be more focused at a predominantly White school than an HBCU because I kind of get distracted easily.

Steven added:

I didn't want to go to an HBCU because I thought it would be hard to stay focused...socialization I guess...always wanting to hang out...I mean I do that now but...I guess I feel like I would have more control of it up here since people don't go out a lot. Everybody's always cooped up in their rooms so it gives me more time to go to the library and do work and I find time to do what I need to without a lot of distractions.

Linda and Boogie discussed their concerns that an HBCU would not offer them "real world" experiences to help them work with diverse populations. Linda commented:

I didn't want to go to an HBCU because that's not how the real world is. It's not...you know...just Black people...you know what I'm saying...it's diverse, it's mixed, and I didn't want to have that kind of experience for 4 years and expect to go out into the work world and just be like another person the same color as me as my boss or as my co-worker. I wanted to be at a school that was very diverse, that promoted diversity in its all-around package that they sold to incoming freshmen.

Boogie added:

This is a good school. It has good people. I mean...you can sacrifice 2 to 4 years of partying. You can do that whenever. So, come and get your education. I mean it's really a character builder kind of situation. I found a way to make it make me stronger. There are plenty of HBCUsI guess they could prepare you for the real world in some aspects but...like...let's just say that when I get out there...most of the time my bosses are going to be middle-age White Americans...they're going to be the ones calling the shots until I can be at the point where I'm calling my own shots...and I mean you have to learn how to deal with that.

There has been a lingering belief, or internalized oppression, among some Black people in this country, particularly from older generations, that "White is right" inferring that when comparing something "White" to something "Black," then White is better. The assumption that PWIs provide a superior education to their HBCU counterparts was illustrated in Tamica's comments:

I didn't want to go to an HBCU because... just based on the things that I heard, I decided that I just didn't want to go that route and I just felt that my education would be better, it's kind of sad to say, but I felt that my education would be better going to a predominantly White university than going to an HBCU.

Over time, empirical evidence has disputed this conclusion. Fleming (1984) and Allen (1992) revealed that Black students' intellectual gains are higher on Black majority campuses. Additional research by Allen (1985) and Nettles (1988) illustrated that often Black students' academic needs are a poor match with White campus academic expectations.

Academic Expectations and Experiences

This section addresses the first research question: How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their academic expectations and experiences? The themes were: (a) academic expectations and

reality: grades and GPAs, (b) classroom-program demographics: one of a few, (c) proving yourself, (d) faculty-student interactions and relationships, (e) faculty classroom behaviors: racist or insensitive?, (e) stereotypes: representing the race, and (f) White student behaviors: racist or insensitive?

Academic Expectations and Reality: Grades and GPAs

The students were asked to describe their high school academic achievements, the grades they thought they would receive in college, and what their academic performances turned out to be in reality. Most of the students described themselves as having consistently received As and Bs during their high school years. Several of the students commented that they expected to duplicate those achievements as college students. In some cases, they did better than expected and in others, they did not. Because they were all juniors and seniors, they had figured out what they needed to do to avoid academic failure.

As Linda pointed out, parental expectations can make a difference:

In high school I was in the International Baccalaureate Program, which is a little bit higher than AP courses...it's really college-g geared courses to help you get ready for college. So it wasn't like when I came to college that I was like, "Oh my God, a five-page paper!" I was like "Oh yeah, I can do that. I did that in high school. I'm used to this. So I would always push myself to be better than just average. I wanted to be better than that. My parents had high expectations of me. I had high expectations for myself.

Corbin was the exception to those who had excelled in high school. However, as a graduating senior headed to graduate school, he found a way to turn things around. He explained:

Well, I was a really poor student in high school. My freshman year here I really tanked out and bombed and I had to work my sophomore, junior, and senior year to bring my GPA up to where I could be accepted...but I was very active, so academics haven't always been my main focus. I got into college and luckily, I've never dipped below a C plus and it's paid off. It got me into grad school. But, at times, I do sacrifice academics for my involvement because I feel like being a well-rounded individual is more marketable than being just book smart.

Steven confided he likes to have a good time at school. He admitted he had taken a few detours away from his studies that extended his time at the university but he was back on track.

He noted:

I expected to be a pretty good student. I kind of expected it to be like high school like...Bs were easy in high school for me but...I think the aspect of making choices for myself is where I struggled and there would be times when I made choices to do something else other than studying when my parents weren't there to be over me to be like, "You need to do this or that." So I think that's what kind of hurt my academic standing a lot and made me be here for 5 years instead of 4 when I would choose to maybe go out instead of staying in and doing what I had to do....but coming in, I felt that I would be a good student.

Boogie was an A-B student in high school but had difficulty in passing a university biology class. He said he started to question his intellect but ultimately decided that he needed to find a different teacher. He explained:

Well, all through grade school I was either an A or an A-B student and... I've always been the type of person who never really had to study too hard. Stuff has always come easy to me. For the most part, it turned out great. Science and stuff always came real easy to me but when I got here I took biology and I had never made under an A in biology and I got a D...and then I took the second biology and I got another D and I was like...Wow, maybe I'm just...I mean I had never done bad in science. Since those experiences in my freshman year, I've always tried to find...to make sure I find professors that are more dynamic so I can do better.

Gabrielle and Miriam realized that making good grades in college was largely dependent upon focus and discipline. Miriam shared:

[In high school] I did average on grades. My freshman year was very good. My sophomore year was just OK. My grades were kind of all over the place. I thought I would be the same type of college student that I was in high school. But I'm probably a little bit better college student. You know as you grow, you become more disciplined.

Gabrielle pointed out:

I've always been a good student but it's just you decide what you want to do and how far you want to go and how focused you are going to be. I can do the work. I was expecting to get good grades. I never enjoyed getting bad grades. On occasion, on some subjects I just found were really difficult for me, I did get bad grades but for the most part my criterion is an 'A' or 'B'. I don't like 'Cs, I don't like 'Ds and I especially don't like 'Fs because I mean you have to repeat them. I have been a dean's list student. I have been invited to various honor societies. But for the most part yeah, I'm an 'A' or 'B' student. Occasionally a 'C' slips in there when it's something I'm having difficulty with or just throwing up my hands.

Zahara had attended a private school from kindergarten through high school and had always made good grades before coming to the university's nursing program. She began finding the nursing program a bit more difficult, as she explained:

I was a good student – until I came to nursing school. [Laughter] As and Bs. The majority were As but Bs in math. I am not a math person, at all. But other than that, pretty much As. [Here] At first, I thought I would continue with As and Bs. That's not the case in nursing. I would thank God if I ever got an A again. And so pretty much Bs and Cs.

Andrea came to the university with the goal of going to medical school and becoming a doctor. However, she allowed a fear of success to change her mind. She admitted to me later in the interview that a mentor would have made a significant difference: She shared details:

I graduated [from high school] with honors...a 3.875 or something like that. I took college classes while I was in high school. I was accepted into the pre-med/med program but I dropped out and changed my major to psychology. My parents would say that I discouraged myself...I kind of probably did...as I got to those classes, I started like...oh my gosh...I just don't know if I can do this. I just don't know if I can do this. And I think that defeatist attitude slid its way into the door of my mind and I was like...no, I'm not. I'm not going through it. I think it was the fear of not being successful that kept me from pushing forward. I turned out to be a very average student. I think that coming to college was a big smack in the face as far as...it was like...you're not the smartest person in the class anymore.

Shawn was the only student interviewed who discussed an expectation of a diversity infused curriculum:

So I came in expecting to be challenged...and to improve in areas where I wasn't...you know...because you can always learn something and I came with that expectation...to be taught and to receive that. I expected to get...to learn from curriculum that was diversity infused...and I expected...in my history classes to learn about something other than the civil war...just the basics you know that I think that most critically-thinking college students come into the experience with.

I then asked Shawn if that expectation had been met. She replied:

No. No, not at all. I mean...I think that some instructors do better at it than others...but even they don't necessarily get it to the full extent that they could... but no, no it hasn't been met and it's really disappointing...especially in classes where it should be so easy to do. It's pretty frustrating.

How do I tell Francesca's story without telling her *whole* story? Although she was not the only student I interviewed who was a wife and mother, her life story, at once, reveals the

academic, cultural, and social challenges and fears of numerous Black students on predominantly White campuses. In her words:

My high school was all Black. When I went to college, I was shocked because I had never seen so many White people before in my life. I was not used to that and it scared me when I was in class because I was like...Am I as smart as them? Are the professors going to expect more out of me than out of them? Sometimes it scares you when you're a Black kid.

I asked her if she felt physically threatened and to share further details as to what scared her. She elaborated:

I was scared that I wasn't as smart as them. That's what scared me because I was coming from a lower class where we speak a lot of Ebonics and stuff growing up. I felt like the school where I went didn't prepare me as well as a lot of those other kids who had private educations... They went to private schools and I went to one of the poorest schools in Miami. The kids knew more than I did. The professor would speak about something and they would actually know what he was talking about...like about the presidential election...they could tell you who was in a debate and I'm sitting in class hearing about it for the first time. It was a learning class for me, whereas for them it was more of a review. So when the professor would ask a question, I just sat there. In classes, the professors would ask questions and if I spoke up in class, the whole class would get quiet. It was like, "she spoke." Now, I tend to speak up a lot in class just because...now when I speak they turn their eyes towards me. I speak up just to show that I do speak and I can have an opinion.

Classroom-Program Demographics: One of a Few

African Americans, when they are the "only ones" in a majority environment, have added challenges not experienced by their White peers. When this occurs, there is an invisible but very apparent laser beam that focuses directly upon "the only." For many African Americans in this situation, experiences are constantly filtered, screened for racism in every moment, and appropriate responses are prepared in advance that will not get you failed or fired.

Not surprisingly, many of the students in the study were the only, or one of a few, Black students in their classroom or program majors, making them hypervisible to their professors and other students. Some students viewed this as an opportunity "to shine" while others described the experience alternately as frightening and shocking. Linda told a story about a White professor

who changes her professional demeanor when she's around. As someone who has lived this experience most of my personal and professional life, I concur with each account.

I asked the participants to describe what it is like being the only Black students in their classes or programs. Gabrielle responded:

I have continuously been one of very few in class. I am not a number. I heard people say that they come to college and they sign the roll book. There is no way I can be a number because I'm the only one in class, so they know when I am not there, when I come in late, when I'm tardy.

Tamica shared:

There is usually a handful...actually not even a handful, maybe one or two African Americans or minorities, period, in most of my classes. I mean I'm used to seeing White people at home...I'm used to being in class with Asian or whatever...but it is truly a culture shock for many people, especially if...I think if I was from an inner city or if I grew up in a mostly Black community, and I came up here...it's a shock when you're the only Black person in your class.

Steven added his perspective by saying:

I don't know...it was weird at first being the only Black student I guess I came from a high school where there were maybe 10 Black students out of 30 in a class to being like the only one who was...it was kind of intimidating but over time, I learned to deal with it.

Sasha added in a positive vein:

Well, for the most part I think me being a Black student was kind of more or less beneficial in the sense – in the fact that me – most of your classes you are usually one of the only Black students or the only Black student. So it was a way for me to stand out. My lecturers will probably learn my name first because, you know. So it's easier that way.

Linda recounted:

I'm the only African American in the program. It's about 22 of us and I'm the only African American in my major as of right now...and I've been discriminated against...by one of my White teachers...she tends to change her demeanor when she's around me and then when she's around my White counterparts.

I then asked Linda, "How so?" and she added:

Well, she's get like, "Hey, what's up" and gives me a high five and stuff like that...and then you know with "the [stereotypical Black] walk" and whatever...and if a White person comes up she's like, "Hello. How are you doing?" and you can just see the change and I'm sitting there like...OK...I'm still in the room you know. You don't have to change because of the color of my skin.

Francesca observed:

There are three African Americans in my major but I'm the only Black female. I'm almost always the only Black female in my classes. Most of the time, I'm the only Black person in all of my classes. In classes, the professors would ask questions and if I spoke up in class, the whole class would get quiet. It was like, "she spoke." Now, I tend to speak up a lot in class just because...now when I speak they turn their eyes towards me. I speak up just to show that I do speak and I can have an opinion.

Elizabeth recalled feeling a sense of "strangeness" when certain topics were discussed.

She explained:

I feel like in certain classes there are expectations of me to talk about things...I was the only minority in [a] class and I felt like I was supposed to talk about things because no one else had the experiences I guess...when we had certain topics about racism or prejudice or anything like that, everyone kind of looked to me to say something...I don't know...It was kind of strange because I had never been the only one in a class to have had those kind of experiences.

Tamica's story pointed out the anger that some White students feel about affirmative action and also revealed an underlying suggestion that the only reason Black students are admitted to some PWIs is to meet a quota. Tamica further explained:

And so my class... they're having this whole discussion [about affirmative action]... and I was the only African American there and one of the guys, he says, "Well, I don't like affirmative action because my brother didn't get into...or whatever school because they said they had already met their quota of Caucasian students and they needed a certain number of minorities and so he was just, he was angry and mad and upset and everything and they're having this whole conversation so finally at the end they say, "Well, Tamica's Black. Let's ask her what she thinks. So, I say, "Well, I didn't get into [this university] off of Affirmative Action I don't believe. I had a 4.2 GPA and I did fairly well on my SAT. That's how I got into this school and not based on anything else."

The White student who made this comment to Tamica obviously believed that affirmative action is a program for the sole benefit of (unqualified) people of color as opposed to an institutional advantage consistently afforded to White people. This is another example of the invisibility of white privilege and systemic inequality.

Proving Yourself

A shared cultural experience for many minorities in this country is a never-ending cycle, internalized and realized, of having to prove their intellectual competence (Bonner, 2004). It is

often expressed as “having to work twice as hard to get half as far.” Often we feel that we must prove that we are more than an “affirmative action duty” that is tolerated more than accepted or wanted. Even though the students were successfully persisting towards graduation, they were still confronting daily challenges that threatened to erode their academic confidence and competence. Corbin described it this way:

I feel like my professors, at times, look at me as if I don't know as much because they dumb some stuff down when they talk to me. I bought a calendar with a word a day just so I could go to class and prove to them that I'm not inferior as they think. So, I mean, other than that, I try to talk with my professors and they'll help me out but I don't feel they treat me as an equal compared to my White cohorts.

Francesca spoke at length about her need to prove or validate her intellectual capability and credibility to her White faculty and peers as she expressed self-doubts by saying, “Am I as smart as they are?” However, she then added:

I learned that you have to prove everybody else wrong. You have to show them that you are as smart as they are. Now I make sure that I study, that I read ahead of time so I can participate in class lectures so people don't stare. And if they do stare, I think they're saying, “OK. They're just as smart. They want this as much as we do. They didn't get a free ride. They're working just as hard as we are.”

In order to garner more information, I asked, "When you say that you want to prove them wrong, what do you mean by that?" She answered by saying:

I want to prove them wrong because I think a lot of...I remember one time during my sophomore year when a White girl made a comment in a U.S. government class. We were talking about Blacks getting into colleges because they're a minority and how sometimes they will lower the standards so they can get more Blacks into predominantly White schools. This White girl said they shouldn't do that because she works just as hard but we're getting in easy. She made a comment just like that and it came out blunt. It came out where Blacks shouldn't need aid, that slavery was a long time ago, that discrimination was a long time ago and it's time for them to start working just as hard as my father did and my grandfather did and just like I am because they're getting a free ride and I'm not. When she made that comment...it was just like...I've got to prove these people wrong because the mentality that they have...I'm just as hard working. And, to be honest with you, slavery was not that long ago and yes, Blacks can now get into schools but it's just been recently that we've been able to go to the same schools as White people and receive the same types of education as them. Their fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers were probably doctors and lawyers. I'm the first one in my family to actually attend college. Really, we are not on the same level. You know, for her to say that, it made me mad, and it made me cry. I spoke up about it in class and a lot of the kids--they even clapped when I got through saying what I said. They couldn't

believe that she made a comment like that. Even my professor...his face...he was just shocked. He was like, she went too far.

Experiences such as Francesca's can take a significant toll on Black students in terms of finding the strength to respond to racist comments from White students without alienating other White students and faculty. Like Francesca, Black students in similar situations who choose to speak out against racist comments are in precarious and potentially dangerous situations that White students never experience; this is another example of White privilege.

Faculty-Student Interactions and Relationships

According to Allen (1992), academic achievement is highest for students who have higher educational aspirations and positive faculty relationships. As pointed out by Watson, Terrell, and Wright (2002), establishing a relationship with faculty is one of the most effective predictors of student outcomes and the most central factor in ensuring a student's successful college experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that faculty members were the greatest socializing agents of the university. The students in the study expressed a range of positive and negative faculty influences, interactions, and relationships.

A CRT analysis revealed that despite the prevalence of racism and racist incidents in and out of the classroom, most of the students reported that the majority of their instructors were friendly, helpful, and supportive. In response to the request to "describe your general relationship with faculty," 17 of the 20 students had favorable depictions of faculty who shared of themselves with their students and took a personal interest in their academic success. Fischer (2007) asserted that Black students with more ties to professors rated their college experiences more positively. Queen described her relationship with faculty members by saying:

Most of my relationships have been wonderful. I have several instructors that when I pass them in the hall, they say, "Hey, if you ever need a recommendation...I know you're probably applying for jobs so keep me in mind." They do try to support you but you've just got to ask for it. If they don't know that you're struggling, then they can't help you. I probably spend more time in the offices with some of my professors than I do in the classroom because not only do we have a professional relationship, but we're friends. So, for the most part, I have some outstanding relationships with my professors. I have

had more positive relationships than I've had negative relationships. I've had more good to happen to me here than bad.

Stephanie also reported a good relationship with her professors: She elaborated:

I think I've had pretty good relationships. I don't think ethnicity had anything to do with it because I've had some people who have really worked with me, as far as help me get through the class and like give me extra stuff to help me on my tests. Sometimes I had test anxiety and they would work with me. I would go in and talk to them about my test and kind of where I went wrong and they would tell me how to improve next time, as far as doing homework and stuff like that.

Steven added:

I've always had pretty good instructors. Like for my field of major, like my CS instructors were pretty good...they would meet with me, help me, I just had to meet them half way and do my work. I guess generally they were good. I had good relationships with them. I can meet with them anytime like I just got through meeting with a professor today who, he's not even my instructor but he helped me with my resume and I finally got to finish that up and send it off.

Boogie contended he had a very good relationship with the professors in his area of study:

Well, actually, if I just focus on like the professors in my area of study, they're real great. You can call them. I have their personal phone numbers. I can call them anytime. We can talk to them about anything. They are really understanding. I had a personal issue last semester and they really worked with me and helped me through that. I mean...they're good people

Elizabeth pointed out the benefits of small class size, stating:

One of the things that I do like about University B is that there are small classes. With most of my professors, I was able to have like...have one-on-one relationships. I feel like I can go to their offices and talk to them and stuff like that. The professors really try to make a point to be there for their students when they really need them. So, it's been really comfortable in that way.

Gabrielle was very pleased about her relationship with professors. She explained:

My professors...they don't have a choice but to kind of form bonds with me because I am a person that I want you to know who I am. If I need help, I'm going to come and talk to you. So my professors have been very, very, very nice and concerned and they show their concern and I'm not one of the ones – I am not a number. I heard people say that they come to college and they sign the roll book. There is no way I can be a number because I'm the only one in class, so they know when I am not there, when I came in late, when I'm tardy... for the most part all my professors have been very caring, really kind, they work with me on some issues that I've had and they've been just really, really wonderful to me.

Linda detailed some of the steps she took to maintain a good relationship with her instructors:

Oh, I have a great rapport with faculty. I befriend all my teachers. Some people call me a “brown noser” but it’s because I love having that one-on-one relationship with my teachers just in case I need to go and talk with them about something; a grade...you know what I’m saying...if I just want to stop by and say hello...you know... just that...I think I do a great job with getting a good relationship with teachers because I know...you know in the future I might need a recommendation from them, a reference, or anything like that...so I make it a point for the teacher to know me. After the first day of class I will go up to them and introduce myself, “I’m [NAME]. How are you doing? That’s how it starts and that just how I was brought up. Go and make yourself be known. Let the teacher know you. Get to know the teacher. So I have great rapport with faculty... So you get to know your major teachers in a good capacity within this major so I would say that I have a great relationship with my teachers.

Miriam conceded that her experience with professors exceeded her initial expectations.

She explained further:

It’s surprisingly very good, professional, and sometimes exceeds concerns. Professors are very personal...they care about you...and they try to work with you in a lot of areas. If you feel like something may be too challenging, they let you know what you can do...so the expectation of professors actually turned out to be a lot better than I thought it was going to be. But I expected it to be a very strict, professional relationship...it’s been much more personal than I thought but without crossing the professional lines...just very helpful professors.

During the discussion about relationships, Ace included her concerns that White

American history instructors might choose to teach it from a biased perspective: She added:

About the White teachers...I’ve had a lot of good ones...I’m not going to say that I haven’t... some of them are really willing to help. Some of them show that they are very biased. So sometimes when you’re in the classroom...supposedly learning about yourself...when you have a White teacher...you tend to not get the whole story...you get the kind of politically correct story...about slavery and stuff like that. But they’re nice people and I feel like they want to help Black students succeed but there are some of them that kind of water down the truth so they don’t look as bad to Black students.

Faculty Classroom Behaviors: Racist or Insensitive?

One on the last places one might expect to find ignorance, insensitivity, and intolerance is in the university classrooms of highly educated faculty members. The classroom is one of the

primary places that sets the tone for how students make sense of their college experience (Watson et al., 2002). According to Powers (2007), the way that people are treated in institutional settings is the result of deeply rooted racialized, gendered, and classed social practices that shape their view of themselves, the world around them, and how they act in the world.

Students' sense of institutional alienation is influenced more heavily by their experiences in the classroom than by the general campus climate (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Thomas et al., 2007). Acts of racism can be overt and subtle and the student participants experienced both from faculty who are supposed to be role models, mentors, and academic leaders on campus. Among the most astonishing stories of ignorance and insensitivity told by the students came from Ace who stated:

In one of my history classes where I was the only African American student, I had a teacher who actually asked me to step outside of the classroom one day so that people would be honest with how they felt about Black people. She asked me to take my notes outside of the classroom so that they could talk and discuss how they really felt about Black people. By the end of class...I can say that I was actually in tears. I really hated that I sat outside of that classroom because now it's like you don't know who said what or how they really feel about you. I thought that some of those students were my friends. No one spoke up for me.

After Ace told this story, I had to turn off the tape recorder in order to give both of us time to regroup and continue. I asked her if she had reported this to anyone and she said no, but that the instructor was no longer there. She said she did not know why but was glad that she did not have to be in her classes anymore.

Andrea revealed an instructor with whom she associated a "weird vibe" and described an incident showing he had low expectations of her capabilities:

We had a professor in a class where there were three of us [Black students]...but there was kind of this weird vibe.... I kind of felt like he was mad at the world...or mad at Black people...I don't know. One time when he was reviewing his requirements with the class for a paper...he came up to me and he actually said, "If you don't feel like you're able to write as much as required you don't have to worry about it." I was kind of, like...I'll give you 20 pages for that one buddy...and you're going to grade them. I was real mad...and like...oh my gosh...what just happened?

Similarly, Stranger talked about an instructor who she thought was “weird” and made her very uncomfortable:

There’s this teacher who I just think is a bit weird. I’ll just say he’s different. I don’t know and I don’t want to speculate about why... he’s just not personable. I withdrew from his class last semester because I wasn’t comfortable with him and as a result, I don’t think I was grasping what he was teaching. And so I went to his office to speak one-on-one with him and again I grasped that even worse in his office. He wouldn’t give me eye contact and he looked down the whole time. I don’t know if he was uncomfortable with me. I was the only Black in the class. So like I said, I don’t want to speculate however, I just got a cold response from him. I didn’t like it. And I wasn’t learning from him so I withdrew.

Benson shared a different experience from a teacher who pointed him out as a user of “Black English” during a discussion about different accents:

One teacher said something like--we were talking about accents--and so she looked at me... and she said I don’t understand Black English. I was like I couldn’t tell you about Black English because I only speak what you speak.

In addition to discussing negative actions on the part of faculty members inside the classroom, Shawn shared hearing a faculty member’s rants about having to attend university-mandated diversity training:

I’ve worked in several departments on campus... and so I’ve obviously been in contact with a lot of professors there...and have heard things...that they know I heard which I didn’t think were appropriate...not based just on my race but on my gender. For instance...I was working in the [Name] Department my freshman or sophomore year...I don’t know if this had been implemented before it was when the Mandatory Diversity Trainings really started to go hard core and a professor in the department, who teaches Ethics and... in literature, came in and was going off about how he had to go to this Diversity Training and about how no one needs to teach him about how to tolerate Black people and women...just going off...he knew I was in there....and even if he wasn’t saying anything that was racially charged--which he was--he knew it would have made me uncomfortable. Also, he has done some things in some classes where my friends were....even this semester he has done some things that are causing some trouble...and some legal actions might have to be taken...

I asked Shawn to give me an example and she continued:

It’s common knowledge that he’s a racist and a sexist so it’s no big deal but...a friend of mine, she’s a White feminist...her and her fiancé, a pro-feminist...they’re both in this class and he showed...he showed several movies throughout the semester...one of the first movies he showed was “Deliverance.” Before he showed the movie, he made this big spiel about... if you don’t feel comfortable seeing a male rape scene, you don’t have to be here on this day. Well, cool...I respect that...he went on and showed the movie; I

still haven't figured out how it had to do anything with that particular class, but whatever. Later on, he shows movies with female rape scenes with no spiel about it, with no thought process about how this might negatively affect the emotional state of women or male sympathizers in this class. He uses words like, "black blood," and I think he used the words, "colored" or "Negro" or something at a particular time. There are African American females in this class. He's just said and done things that were just totally inappropriate...that were racially and sexually charged.

I found Shawn's remark that "it's common knowledge" that this faculty member is racist and sexist to be alarming. Equally disturbing was her remark, "It's no big deal." No student should believe that or find it acceptable. All of them deserve respectful, competent faculty and the students interviewed said most of their faculty members were. However, all it takes is a few faculty members who exhibit racist, sexist, insensitive behaviors to undo the goodwill of others.

Stereotypes: Representing the Race

Many of the factors that contribute to the academic success of Black students are often the same characteristics identified for all college students. However, Black students on predominantly White campuses must cope with the additional burdens of racism, discrimination, and pejorative stereotypes confronting them in the classroom. In addition, these students are often asked to speak as the expert on all things related to the "Black" experience in this country. Such practices common to Black students are another example of *white privilege* as White students are rarely if ever asked to speak or act for their whole race.

The idea of stereotyping is not new to Blacks in general and to Black college students in particular. The proliferation of negative stereotypes of Black people are reinforced in the media and other contexts making it more likely that Black students will confront them in all aspects of their lives (Hrabowski et al., 1998). Blacks are consistently portrayed in the media as being the perpetrators of violent criminal activities including drug- and gang-related crimes. As Queen illustrated, such negative stereotypes often enter the sphere of the academic environment:

You are the only Black person in most of your classes. A lot of your professors single you out and think that you represent an entire population of people. Most recently, a couple of weeks ago, in one of my classes we were talking about gangs and gang

violence. We were talking about Monster Cody who was one of the founders of the Eight-Tray Crips Gang and how he was in prison and my professor had visited him and he had tattoos all across his neck that said Eight-Tray and how he had the status of original gangster because he killed someone to get that status in his gang. So, the professor asked the class, who do the police chase the most often...and I'm the only Black person in that class and everyone said, "Black people." And he said, "Do you know why?" They said, "Why?" And he points to me...and goes...points at me...like jabbing...and said, "Because you Black people have stuff like Eight-Tray written across your necks." And I was livid! I was livid you know number one because I expected more out of that academic discipline...And I'm like you should know better. You should number one know better for making over-generalizations and stereotypes. You should also know better than to single out a Black student because you should know that I'm not going be able to speak for an entire population of people and neither is Monster Cody. He does not represent the norm of the African American people, which is what he suggested.

I asked Queen if she had confronted this professor. She answered by saying, "We most definitely had a conversation." I then asked if it was in class or after class. She explained:

Well, we started to have one in class but he dismissed class like...class dismissed because he could tell that I got mad or whatever. And then when I talked to him about it, he wrote me an apology letter that, to me, was almost equally offensive. His apology letter almost suggested that I was a phenomenon of Black people like, "You're such a contrast to them," them...like...you know...it baffled me. He stated that gangs were pretty much the domain of minorities...and just saying things like that...like I'm such a contrast...and I'm like, you know I'm sorry but I don't see my Eight-tray tattoos. None of my friends has Eight-tray tattoos. They're not in gangs. It is just really crazy to me that he made that over-generalization. But one thing ...and our situation is not over. I've taken my situation with him to the Equity Office because I think he's a sexist too. He has said lots of things to me in class. If I say, I have a question or I don't understand this, he'll say, "It figures." He'll make comments like that to me. So, you know I've taken this to another level. I've taken it to the Equity Office. I'm still dealing with it now. I think that the students also have that expectation that you're the only source of information for the minority world and that you can speak for all African-Americans and you're supposed to know every single thing about whatever...so that's where it gets interesting.

Tamica's story pointed out how the power relationship between faculty and students can prohibit a student from disagreeing with a false assumption or pejorative stereotype. Tamica shared additional details about the same teacher who she had indicated earlier as being helpful, by stating:

That same teacher--the first few weeks of class, he talked about...he was doing some statistics, and he said how African American women would have problems finding a mate because of the fact that many African American men are going to jail and this and that

and aren't going to college so it would be hard for me to find someone on my level. And so, he's just one of those teachers who speaks his mind and he doesn't really care and a lot of people in the class...they all turned around and looked at me like what is she going to say and I would just....it was weird but....it turned out that the next class he said, you know, I was just giving a statistic and I hope that didn't rub you the wrong way or offend you in any way and I said, no, I understand what you were saying...

For Black students, learning to manage the stereotypes and stresses of being a minority on a predominantly White campus is critical to their academic success. In addition to dealing with negative stereotypes, they are invariably expected to take on the role of spokesperson for the entire Black race.

Gabrielle offered that she felt a sense of responsibility to “represent the African American community” and counter the negatives with a more positive image. She elaborated:

And what I've learned while being on this campus, especially, is that I have to pay attention to my actions because I represent the African American community like every other Black student on this campus. Any stereotype that you might have had prior, I'm not going to live up to that. I am a different person, not everybody is the same. I need to represent correctly. I don't need to be that stereotypical person. People decide on their own if they are going to live up to the stereotypes. I've never been that stereotype person. I will never fit into any kind of mold. So I'm going to be Gabrielle 24/7 and if I speak properly, if I whatever, then you know that's just me. You can't group people in stereotypes. I think that's my thing. When I go into a classroom, you need to know that, yeah there are people who do get loud and whatever and whatever, but that's their choosing. That doesn't mean I'm going to be like that.

The pressure to “represent the race” and counter negative stereotypes are added pressures to Black students whose number one goal is academic success. When these issues come up, the Black student is faced with the choice to be silent, risking the perpetuation of the stereotype or to speak up and risk alienation by their peers or worse, to be perceived as hostile and disrespectful by their faculty. More often than not, students are cautious about confronting professors who have the power to pass or fail them. In either case, the decision takes an emotional toll on Black students that is foreign to their White peers. The energy expended in the rejection of negative stereotypes or the justification for more positive viewpoints causes Black students to sacrifice time learning and forging ahead academically. Many students do not have the time or energy to engage in this type of classroom activism.

White Student Behaviors: Racist or Insensitive?

Racist tensions on a campus exist because of racist behaviors that, of course, are not exclusive to faculty but also exist between Black and White students. Although some are more overt than others, Benson admitted that sometimes it's difficult to tell if someone is treating you adversely because "you're Black or because they just don't like you." He explained:

In my own department...in my major...they seem not to help me out. They like want me to fail. I was like am I mean or something? I try to work with them. I said I know that there are times I am hardheaded and stubborn and mean and ill tempered, all the words you can think of. I admit that, and I apologize...but then again I am trying. They were just like "Oh, I don't want to help you." And they had this, it seem like a buddy, buddy clique. I said this is a good old boy clique. There is a thin line between racism and just not liking somebody. Sometimes I can't tell the difference.

No setting is immune from a racist incident. For minority students at a PWI, such an episode can "pop up" when least expected. In the case of Ace, it occurred when she was merely walking on campus with her roommate and it carried over into the classroom. Ace shared her story that illustrates the emotional management required to handle awkward and mortifying racial situations:

When I was walking across campus with my roommate one day...this boy came up to us and said, "What are ya'll doing here?" And I thought that maybe she knew him or something. We were like, "What do you mean?" He was like, "What are ya'll doing here? Shouldn't you be over in the Caribbean somewhere dancing and stuff all day instead of being at school learning?" He ended up being in one of our classes...so we had to draw like a comic strip up on the board based on this book that we were reading...and he drew a Black man and a blatant Aunt Jemima-type character and he drew like the little comment bubbles...and it was like, "Take the trash out woman," and she was like, "Yes sir." Then, all of a sudden she was cursing him out over to the side...and it was like just a whole bunch of stuff going on as the comic strip that he put on the board progressed... and I was sitting there thinking ... that's not my household. My Dad doesn't talk to my Mom like that...so I don't know who told you that's how it is. But I feel like...a lot of times I try not to show out...I sit down and talk to them because people are not very receptive if you're screaming and hollering...because they don't really hear what you're saying because you're mad...instead of trying to educate somebody.

One of the more subtle forms of racism that the students discussed was the apparent "surprise" of White students that a Black student might be their intellectual equal. Zahara's story summed up their experiences:

I feel sometimes if I get the same grade as them, it comes as a surprise or the fact that I will have surpassed or am still in the program, you always see this look on people's faces like, oh really, and I think that's somewhat of that whole just prejudice...like wow, they're still in the program with the rest of us...African American students with the Caucasian students. So, I feel that more from the students than from the faculty just the fact that maybe...and even...and then if I get a higher grade than they do, it's really, you know, comes like a surprise or a shock. And I think sometimes I feel it may be subconsciously but you can still read it on people's faces or if they ask you how you did and stuff like that.

As Sasha pointed out, racist comments and behaviors are not limited to White students.

The story she told was about a student who was also a minority but one who nonetheless had obviously adopted racist beliefs:

I remember one time in my calculus class...there was this student who wasn't White. He was Indian...an Indian student who was born here but from Indian descent...and he made several comments, like around Black history month, saying that Martin Luther King day, saying he wished that they killed another one so we will have a whole week off...The White students that were in the group with me...they were afraid to react or they didn't know how to react to the things he was saying.

Stranger was very astute about this nation's politics. She shared the following incident with a White student in class. The confrontation jarred her emotions and affected her confidence to speak up in other classes:

I think it was my first semester...in my political science class...we were discussing elections or something of that sort...there was a Caucasian gentleman...he was very outspoken and voiced his opinion on everything...he would argue with the teacher...because he really was smart. I learned a lot from him too. But one day in class, we were talking about President Bush and I raised my hand...and he just flipped...he went off...he hit the desk real hard and said, "You...you have no rights to speak about my President at all. You are not from this country and you should have nothing to say." He got very, very angry and I hadn't even asked a question yet. I guess just the fact that I raised my hand to speak about it...he shut me down immediately like...don't even think about it...do not talk about my President... and he told me straight up, "You have no right because you're not an American."

I asked Stranger, "What did the teacher do?" and she replied:

Well...you know...he said to him, "This is a political science class and she has just as many rights to speak as you do." So he got upset and left the classroom. He didn't return to class for the next four class periods. I had assumed that he withdrew from the class. He showed up about 2 weeks later...we were standing outside the classroom door waiting to go in because there was a class in there. I was afraid at first. I had called my husband and told him about it and told him that I was afraid this guy was going to do something to

me the way he carried on. I was really paranoid for the next few days around campus. I would always be looking over my shoulders to see if I could see him because I had heard of the shootings and this and that that happen on campus. My husband would always be like, "You need to be careful what you say because some people are prejudiced, and some people are racist or whatever." So when he came back, I wanted to feel him out and see if he was just having a bad day that day...so I said to him, "Welcome back." The look that that young man gave me...if looks could kill, I would be dead. He didn't respond...he just looked at me like don't you ever speak to me again. The whole day I was like...tight...sitting in class I was uncomfortable around him.

Stranger continued with more details of how this incidence affected her:

I've not had any that were as much of a direct outburst as that one...but what it did was...semesters after that...I remember in a...class the semester after that...not that I was afraid to speak out...I guess I was cautious. The professor would say to me, "Miss [Stranger] what do you think?" I would always say, "I pass," or I didn't want to speak up. After a few times of her asking...and I know that interacting in class was a part of my grade...I'm like...I'm not going to get a bad grade because I'm not speaking up...we spoke about slavery, reconstruction, all that stuff so one day I decided to stay back after class and speak to her. I told her why I wouldn't speak up and she was very, very upset. She was like, "Who did this? Did you take it further? Did you take it to the professor? Did you report it?" I told her I left it alone because I was afraid that if I had pursued it, maybe he would come after me. I explained to her my concerns and she assured me that her class would not be that way and that she wanted me to become more vocal in class and she encouraged me. So after that, I started speaking out.

Cultural Expectations and Experiences

This section addresses the second research question: How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their cultural expectations and experiences? The themes were: (a) the campus culture: myths and realities; (b) culture shock: more than expected; (c) campus cultural climate: inviting, indifferent, or hostile?; (d) racial insults: the "n" word; (e) the noose incident; (f) segregation on the campus: segregation or socialization; (g) town and gown: the good, the bad, and the ugly; and (h) campus and community police issues.

The Campus Culture: Myths and Realities

As stated by Wallace and Bell (1999), all entering college students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, or sexual orientation are likely to face some acculturation challenges. Nonetheless, Black students on predominantly White campuses are challenged differently from their White peers. They have to deal with racially motivated incidents because of their minority status and visible differences from the majority of the people on the campus and in the community.

Responses to the reality of being Black on a predominantly White campus were as varied as the individual student's cultural expectations and experiences. To a person, they admitted that they enrolled at their universities despite concerns, doubts, and fears relative to their adjustment, coping, engagement, and educational outcomes. Despite their best preparations through campus visits, orientations, and institutional assurances of an affirming, welcoming environment for all students, their realities of life on monocultural campuses in the setting of monocultural communities shaded the true campus climate.

As a reminder of an earlier story, Queen broke a family tradition when she chose to attend a PWI instead of an HBCU and her family teased her mercilessly as she explained:

I received a lot of jokes about how I was going to “*Lynchville...*” How I was going up there to “those mountains with those mountain people...and all kinds of ignorant crazy comments that I heard from members of my family. And I started thinking a little bit like, what am I doing going up there?”

Stephanie visited the school with her mother because her parents had heard some “crazy stories” about the university. What they neglected to do on their visit was to spend some time in the community. Stephanie supplied the details:

Before I started school here, I came with my mom to visit, to the campus beforehand. My parents had heard some crazy stories about the campus being something that it's not. But I actually came and took a campus tour and everything and I actually liked the campus. I was like this is something I can work with. It's small and I can't get too distracted. But the community reaction to my being here came as a surprise. I expected it to be different.

Elizabeth learned that racism is equal to “blatant ignorance” and that it does not discriminate based on race or ethnicity. She added:

I didn't expect so much blatant ignorance and... I know that there are racial issues and that's not gone but I expected it to be from older people not the students...I feel like we are so encouraged now to care about each other regardless of what we look like.

She then broke into tears and we needed to stop and take a break.

From Tamica's summer preview experience prior to enrollment, she said she was expecting a positive, friendly campus but found a different entity upon arrival. She summed:

Well, just from coming up in the summer for Summer Preview, things like that, everyone was very friendly so coming up here for school I expected friendly faces, nice people, and helpful people, nothing that I was not used to from home. When I actually got up here, everyone is not that friendly...but maybe that's everywhere.

Linda attended a predominantly White high school so her expectations were more aligned with her experiences. She recognized that there would be cultural challenges but she was prepared to find her niche and fully engage herself in the experience. She offered some suggestions:

I expected a predominantly White campus and it wasn't a shock to me at all. It was what I was used to and definitely what I expected and I just kind of had to find my niche. I think when you find your niche where you can be and you know your different resources where you can pull from, the cultural experience is great. But if you're the type of person who just sits in a room, watches TV all day, doesn't really get to take the full cultural experience, the real experience of college, then your cultural experience can be skewed. So I think it's all finding your niche and really getting out there, getting involved, and really stepping outside of your shell.

I asked Andrea to describe the culture at her university. In doing so, she summed up the students' cultural descriptions of their predominantly White campuses where all minority students are tolerated more than accepted. She also noted, as did the other students, that they were aware that the universities' efforts to portray a diverse, welcoming, integrated environment were not in sync with the reality:

It's very Caucasian! The culture here is just overwhelmingly White! . I feel like we're diversified as far as the diversity of people goes...but of course there are more Caucasians than there are anything else. There are also a lot of international students here, a lot of other ethnicities on this campus... but as far as respect for diversity and acceptance of other cultures...I just don't think that goes on as much as we say it goes

on...like..."Diversity! We're so loving!" It looks great on commercials...and how they pull those kids out of classes to take pictures...but when you're here and you're seeing it everyday...you see subgroups staying in their own little subgroups. There's a lot of racial and ethnic segregation on this campus and very little cultural integration.

Culture Shock: More Than Expected

Even though the students knew they would be attending a predominantly White institution with a significantly low percentage of Black students, several of them expressed their shock and surprise to find more Black students on campus than they expected. Andrea shared her reaction:

There were only a total of three Black students in my class...like all through school...kindergarten through high school...the same little Black kids that were there all the time. Here...I was just like...I remember calling Mom after maybe a Greek event or something like that...and I was like...Mom, it's like a 100 Black kids here...I was like...you don't understand...they're everywhere! I remember her laughing and saying, "I knew this would happen and I hope it's a good experience for you."

Francesca also expressed surprise, saying:

To be honest with you, I did not expect as many Black people up here as I saw. I was shocked because when I thought about the mountains, I thought of mountain people...I thought of White people only. When I saw how many Black people were here, I was just shocked.

Zahara agreed, stating:

I was surprised at how many Black people there actually were. I wasn't expecting that. I've always been like no matter what, if it was something that was the best for me, then I was going to go. This school is known to have one of the best nursing schools in the country. It didn't even phase me like, OK, this is Appalachia...this is not a historically Black college...I was like I can go and get the best nursing education just like anybody else. I had heard some things...places not to go...be aware of certain cities and counties in the area...so I knew a little bit about that but I was caught by surprise with the number of Black students who were here.

Campus Cultural Climate: Inviting, Indifferent, or Hostile?

For this study, campus cultural climate refers to the overall racial environment of the university setting. Understanding and analyzing this environment in light of Black students' experiences is a significant part of examining their retention and persistence to graduation. As

reported by Carroll (1998), Guinier, Fine, and Balin (1997), Hurtado (1992), and Hurtado et al. (1998), when a campus racial climate is positive and inviting, there are positive academic outcomes for African American students. On the contrary, a negative, hostile, or unsupportive campus climate can be associated with poor academic performance and high dropout rates among African American students (Allen et al., 1991; Carroll, 1998; Hurtado et al.).

Only one of the students interviewed, Linda, stated that her campus climate was inviting and enriching, placing the responsibility on the students to make it a positive experience. Zahara shared similar feelings about a student's responsibility to make it the best. The remainder of the students gave varying degrees of campus climate descriptions including positive, negative, and outright hostility.

I asked the participants if they felt welcomed and embraced by the majority community on their campus and if the experience was what they expected. Linda gave a very affirmative answer to this question:

I do. I think it is very inviting. It opens its arms...it invites you in...it really doesn't shut any doors in your face. You shut the doors in your face. University B tries to open them up as much as possible but you have to walk through it. So I think it's a great campus as far as that goes. The atmosphere here is great. The people here are great. I've never been on a campus where people just say, "Hey. How're you doing?" I have to say, "Hey" at least a 100 times before I get to class. It's like, "Hey" or a smile or a wave or something from somebody I don't even know. And this is like at 8:00 o'clock in the morning when people are just like, "Ugh! I don't want to talk to you," and they're just like, "Hey...Hey...Hey." I love that feeling. And it's a very enriching campus filled with so many different people from so many different backgrounds and you know what I'm saying...we're all here on this one campus really...you know...spreading our wings to the best of our ability and hoping that we're able to fly and I think that University B really gives us that extra push....the extra foot in the door. So I think it's an inviting campus

Zahara's opinion differed:

I'm like I can make any place inviting. It's not even are you making it inviting for me but I have to make the initiative and go out there and so...I guess from the standpoint, as the whole Black campus community, I would say it's probably not inviting. So for students who may have come from an inner city high school and came here, it's a completely different world. In February, you don't see anything about Black History Month around the campus so I don't think it's inviting at all.

Andrea had attended predominantly White schools from grades kindergarten through 12 and always had lots of White friends and great relationships. She confessed that her expectation for a positive campus environment did not match the reality and it caused her to question her self-esteem. She explained:

No. That's real easy. No, I don't think this campus is inviting. It's not due to a bad experience...it's just due to the fact that it didn't happen the way I expected it to happen. I guess that sometimes I have great expectations about how things should go... Now it was weird for me coming from all my White friends at home...and then coming here and I wasn't as embraced...and I never experienced any sort of blatant racism with anybody saying any foul names or making any comments...but I just thought...I'll make all these friends...it will be great...it will be like home...and that didn't happen at all...it was kind of just like...I guess I was expecting all these White people to be like, "Hey!" ...but that wasn't the case at all. It was like...you're here but I'm not going to talk to you...that kind of thing. I was like...OK...I'm by myself.... I started to experience those things and I was like, wow...this is crazy....why don't you like me?

Queen said her friends referred to her as the university's "token Negro" because her face appeared in several of the university's promotional materials, sometimes without her knowledge. This caused her to question the motives behind those who made her feel "so warmly welcomed and accepted" in an environment that is not always inclusive or welcoming. Queen acknowledged:

I go to some places and I feel so warmly welcomed and accepted. A big part of that, I think is tokenism. A lot of my friends will pick on me and call me "University B's token Negro" because they put my face on the website or in a brochure and send it out to 65,000 people. They'll do something like that and half the time I won't even know. People will say, "There goes University B's token Negro." Sometimes I wonder if that's why I'm so warmly embraced...because they think I'm making a good name or just helping or something. That's a whole other issue but I've been embraced by a lot of people and I've seen some stuff that has really made me mad...things that I didn't feel were reflective of a good racial climate. I think that a lot of the racism on this campus is really subtle as opposed to blatant or hostile. I don't know if it's racism or one of those things that makes Black students feel unwelcome or unwanted but it's an inclusion issue. When we don't feel included, the racial climate starts to rise.

Elizabeth expressed disappointment that the campus did not turn out to be the inviting place she had hoped for--one where she would easily find acceptance and a fit with her personality. She also pointed out that even a Black student organization does not meet the needs of every Black student. She shared:

I don't know that it's particularly inviting because I didn't see a lot of things for me to get into other than the Black student organization. I don't feel like I'm unwanted on this campus. I don't feel that way but I don't feel like I'm more wanted than anyone else on this campus if that makes sense. When I first got here, I was really hoping that this would be that big, warm, inviting campus where I would be able to find other places to be with people like me...who shared my interests. But even within the Black student organization, I didn't find what I was looking for so for me personally, it was a challenge to feel welcomed here. We are few and far between and it's hard to find common interests and it's hard to find common ground sometimes because we're all coming from really different places. You might think that because we have strong common likeness we would find solidarity but it's really hard. I mean there are African American organizations for African American students to join so I guess in that way there is a welcoming environment.

Because of the refusal of some White students to acknowledge her greetings to them, Miriam questioned whether those experiences happened only to her or to her White friends as well. Her White friends' responses caused her to question her level of safety on campus. She elaborated:

For the most part, I do feel that it's an inviting campus. But I've asked my White friends, if you walk past someone and they say hello to you and you don't even look at them, I hate that and I say has that ever happened to you? They say, no, that's never happened to me before. ... But a lot of times when I speak to White people...they won't even look at me. So you just say that's something they'll have to grow out of... but then I can see why some Black students may be kind of hesitant or even afraid on campus because that kind of makes me edgy sometimes.

Stranger shared that her decision to choose the particular university was because of a positive phone conversation she had with the admissions office as opposed to a negative reception at a different university. However, she added that the "lack of warmth" she experienced, especially from non-Africans, once she was enrolled was unexpected:

I chose this university because of the warmth that I thought was here primarily because of the admissions person that I spoke with on the phone. However, since I've gotten here, there is a group of people that is really, really, good in trying to make Black students feel welcome...but they're African Americans so I won't count them because they're one of us. As far as the Caucasian side of it...I really don't think that I've felt that warmth or that welcome. It's like...you're here and I'll give you what you're here for...then you go on your merry way. They're not....they're not that kind...in my opinion. I don't think there's hostility ...but I think that the Caucasian students get more of a preference here.

Gabrielle described a campus racial climate where students from different cultures segregate themselves giving her an impression of exclusion rather than inclusion:

The general climate on this campus I think universally is people are reluctant to interact with each other, regardless of race. Now race, when you are thinking of race, a lot of the diversity or the minority cultures on this campus, they interact with each other. Like the Indians will share with the Indians and then the African Americans will share with the African Americans and most Africans share, you know, everybody is a distinct group and they are all separate. It's very seldom that they all interact together but it is possible. The climate on the campus isn't that it is warm and inviting but it's not that it is cold. It's you make your choices of who you interact with and you decide, you know, what you are going to do or who you want to be with. There are some people who are just floaters, who are just universally known--so it's a decision on your part whether you are going to give socialization or just socializing a 100% or you are going to get 50% and just stay in your little segregated group.

Shawn passionately described her perception of a campus racial climate that was closer to hostile than welcoming and expressed her opinion that Black students were there specifically to meet university affirmative action and accreditation requirements. I asked her how she would describe the campus climate for Black students and she answered:

Hostile. Maybe hostile is too strong of a word. I think that more of us recognize that this university, a school of choice, is not living up to its expectations... and that affects its accreditation. We are only here so that they don't get closed down and that's the only reason they want to keep us. I think that's how a lot of us feel...that there are only a handful of upper ups that really believe in having us here because it's what's right...it's what's needed. A lot of us feel like we're just another number on the roll...that they have to keep us. I know that there's no quota system at this university but I think we all feel like we're only respected when we follow certain rules, when we hang out with certain people, when we're a part of certain organizations and otherwise, we're pretty much useless...you're expendable, you know? I don't think that anyone would want to stay at a university where they didn't feel like they were part of a community and I don't think any Black student here feels like they are a part of this bigger, prouder, university anything. I don't think that's the case. Is that changeable? Yes, absolutely. But this university is not going to be able to do just cosmetic things and expect that to get Black kids to be like, "I love this university." It's not going to work. We're way too educated...too motivated...way too progressive to accept cosmetic changes. It's going to have to be substantial. It's going to have to be hearts and minds changing. I think that's slowly but surely starting to happen. I think that definitely affects how Black students feel about this university.

Racial Insults: The “N” Word

As noted throughout this study, American society remains deeply affected and afflicted by racism. Well over a century after the abolition of slavery and a half-century since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the racial insult is still one of the most persistent conduits through which racist, discriminatory attitudes are communicated (Delgado, 2000). Racial labeling of any sort undermines the egalitarian phrase from the Declaration of Independence that “all men [and women] are created equal.” The person who chooses to use racist name-calling does so intentionally to inflict harm upon the victim; this is only logical explanation.

Arguably, no other word in the English language sums up the African American racist experience as “nigger,” often referred to as the “n” word. At its very mention, negative images are dredged up of the “compliant slave” put in his or her place by a dominating, life-threatening, racist overseer. The word remains alive and well in our society and on the campuses of the institutions under study. This was confirmed by Queen who stated, “During my freshman year, I had 'Nigger' written on my dorm room door a couple of times. That’s kind of common, unfortunately.” I questioned her as to whether she felt that was a common activity, and she affirmed by saying:

Unfortunately, I mean like in the residence halls you’ll come home and either a derogatory term, whether it’s...if it’s a gay person it may be “faggot” or something like that. It can be penises drawn on people’s doors...just stupid stuff. I would say it’s kind of common. I definitely think that there are people who are racist here and don’t even know it. It’s just how they were raised. They were raised so conservatively. They’re not used to seeing or interacting with people who are not like them. They just don’t know how to handle it.

Ace added:

I know there was a thing on Facebook that said that there was going to be a “nigger lynching” on campus and the Black students were really afraid because we didn’t know if it was really going to happen.

Tamica not only agreed, she also gave further details, saying:

The Black students here have been called nigger and also people have thrown stuff at them out of cars. These things don’t make me want to leave the school or make me fearful for my safety, but these are just things that never crossed me because where I’m

from is there was never this type of tension. There weren't these kinds of racist outbursts.

Corbin admitted:

We do have those instances...you have a side group of students who are bigots, and you know just ignorant, because they don't know anything about the culture but... we've all had our instances and I accept it. I've had students yelling down, "Hey Nigger" and doing raps with "nigger" and all that ...this nigger this and this nigger that. I don't back down though. I get in their faces and let them know that I will not accept it. After that, they leave me alone.

Sasha described a frightening incident:

My freshman year, my roommate - one of the girls in the dorm called her a nigger. And so my roommate threatened her saying that she would blow up her car. Well the girl that called my roommate that also had a knife. It was taken to public safety and the Dean and both of them got put on probation.

The Noose Incident

During the interview process, on one of the campuses under study, a "noose incident" occurred that, understandably, the Black students found highly upsetting. Adding to their frustration was their viewpoint that the response from university administrators was slow and communication was inadequate. At a student forum, the students were told that only a limited amount of information could be shared in order to protect the individuals involved in an ongoing investigation. As Tia related, "All of the Black students get mad and upset but there's nothing that we can really do about it." Linda provided more information concerning the incident:

There was a noose found a couple of weeks ago...and I was a little shocked because a lot of cultural, racial incidents haven't happened on this campus and so when I heard about it, I was very perturbed, I was angry, and I had to sit there and go like, "OK Linda...you don't know the full story... maybe it was a mistake." It turned out that it was actually a noose. All the multicultural students got an e-mail about two speak out sessions they were having about it where you could come and voice your opinion. I didn't really want to go and voice my opinion. I wanted to hear what other people had to say...what other campus officials had to say...university officials...so I just went and listened. A lot of people were hurt by it...you know some people thought it doesn't mean anything...and it was really discussed, what does the noose symbolize? Does it symbolize racism, oppression, you know? What does it symbolize? So I mean it was looked at from different perspectives. I think that's the most recent racial incident that has happened here.

Queen added:

Well, a press release was sent out recently about an incident of a noose being hung on campus. There was such limited public information given that a lot of people started speculating and making up stories because they didn't really know what happened. All we knew was that there was a noose found on campus or hung on campus or nobody really knew except the people that belonged to that department and had heard the rumors. So you really don't know. People are just making up stuff now. So that's one thing.

According to Tia, "There are a lot of racist incidents on this campus like a noose here or a confederate flag there." Likewise, Linda's story about a cafeteria incident illustrated again that racist, ignorant behaviors can never be predicted. Linda spoke:

My freshman year...I was eating in the cafeteria with some of my African American friends and there was a White girl sitting diagonally across from us. I noticed throughout when we were eating that she kept looking at us, and staring us down...and I was like, "Why is this girl looking at us?" I told my girlfriends that it's really irritating when somebody is staring you down when you're eating...so I said I'm going to go and say something. So after we finished eating...I calmly got up...I was taking my tray back and I went over to her and I said, "Is there something we can help you with? You've been staring at us, looking at us the whole time. What is it? I see that you've been writing things down...what's the problem?" She was like, "I just wanted to see how ya'll ate. It's a report I'm doing." And I was like, "What do you mean ya'll?" She was like, "Oh you know...Black people." And I was just like, "Black people?" And she was like, "Yeah...you know, you guys...you, you." And I was like, "I got that. I get what you are saying, but do you hear what's coming out of your mouth? You sound ignorant and very immature." She was like, "Well, I need to do it for a research project." And I said, "You're doing a research project on how Black people eat?" She was like, "Well, African Americans." And I said, "So now we're African Americans...but two seconds ago we were Black." And she was like, "I didn't mean any harm."

Linda concluded by saying:

It really hurt that somebody would want to do a research project on something like that and actually go through with it. So I just calmly said, "I'm going to pray for you" and I walked away. I put my tray back and I left. And that was the first racial incident on this campus and I went back to my room and I called my Mom and I said, "I hate it here. I want to come home" and I told her about it. She said, "[Linda], you're going to run into that all of your life. That was just one incident and it might even get worse. You've just got to pray for them and keep on moving." So I calmed down from that incident and I let it go.

Segregation on the Campus: Segregation or Socialization?

As a Civil rights activist who marched in public demonstrations in the 1960s, I was surprised by the racial segregation in social settings that I witnessed on both campuses. The students pointed out that two issues were occurring simultaneously: (a) there is little social intermingling among different racial groups and (b) some of them chose to self-segregate from other racial groups.

I learned that Black students on predominantly White campuses often self-segregate as a coping mechanism for persistent challenges to their self-worth and racial identity. Forming a community within the broader institutional setting, according to Hardeman (1983), can help minority students fight against negative stereotypes and increase their resistance to assimilate into the majority culture.

Andrea was accustomed to being in the minority during her kindergarten- through 12th-grade years, but her social experiences were always integrated. She acknowledged, “The segregation here is very apparent! You don’t see much mixture between the groups. No. Not at all. This segregation...it just wasn’t that way where I came from.” Stranger found the segregation on campus to be a shocking revelation. She expounded:

Here...on this campus...it is so bad. The minority population is so small...there’s a lot of segregation and you can see it everywhere you go. The Blacks are one way. The Whites are one way. I hate that. It’s very segregated here. You know, not many things shock me but I expected less of this in the 21st century...and I hate to see that it’s still occurring...and that all this stuff still goes on but it’s here, big time at this university. You can see it. The tension is so thick a lot of times. At any event you go to on campus...if there are both races there...you can see it. The Blacks are on one side of the bleachers or the benches and the Whites are on the other.

Stephanie agreed that ethnic diversity existed on campus but said that social integration was not a given. On the contrary, she pointed out, “We do have diversity as far as ethnicities here, but we don’t really mix together. Everybody is kind of separated doing their own thing.”

Tia contended that racial segregation was most apparent in the cafeteria, saying, “Segregation definitely still exists in the cafeterias...all of the Black people try to sit

together...then you have the White students together.” Boogie agreed that there were limited interactions between the Black students and others, especially during lunchtime in the cafeteria:

I think we interact with everybody but I think we tend to find our own little clusters. I mean like if you go to the cafeteria, all of the guys and girls will be sitting together or... Well I mean it's not really that extreme but you can tell that...because it's still mixed company... but it will be a majority of Black kids in one area, then there will be a couple of White kids in there in it...and then on the other side it will be a majority of White kids with a few Black people in that. You don't really see it in the classroom...you don't really see it like out in sporting events or when you're playing sports or in the training room or anything like that...but I think it's mostly during lunch time that it happens...like when we're eating...that's when I mostly see something like that.

For Sasha, hanging out with other Black students was a social issue as well as a safety issue. She reported:

Initially, it was more like when I first came here, you don't know anybody else, and you don't know how anyone else is going to accept you. It is a predominantly White campus, you don't know if someone is racist – so, you kind of go with what's safe and what's safe becomes like I guess, the norm. Like you become accustomed to doing what's safe.

As Zahara explained, sitting together with other Black students was not limited to the cafeteria but also to other campus and off-campus experiences:

You can walk into the computer lab and all the Black students have their own little section and then there are all the rest of the students. And, to be honest, I think that there has been segregation as far as the White students don't want the Black students around, it's just a matter of being in an unfamiliar place and going to what you know; going to what's familiar. So the Black students have kind of initiated this whole certain place in the computer lab and that's where everyone goes, it's where you see everybody, almost like a social place. You almost never see a Black student and a White student walking together...it's usually White and White and Black and Black and even Middle Eastern and Middle Eastern. If you go in the Main Meal cafeteria, you'll see Black students sitting together and the White students all sitting together. Within my major, it's even worse. All the Black students study together, they clean together, they shop together, they everything...anything outside of school they do together, they all sit together, so definitely. Nobody tells you to do it. Like I said, you flock to what's familiar and don't go out of that unfamiliar territory.

Shawn pointed out that segregation was not necessarily “a bad thing.” It's more about socialization than racial isolation that is most often initiated by the Black students as a way to survive the daily challenges of being a minority on a majority campus. Shawn explained:

Yes...and...you know, people talk about segregation like it's a bad thing. I see that it can be bad but I don't see all segregation as bad. But yes, I do see racial segregation

here...but let's critically think about that. If there are less than 500 of us on campus, then it makes sense that for the community to survive, they sort of bond together. It's not segregation as much as socialization. So, yes there is segregation on this campus...mostly student-defined. You can't in the classroom because there are so few of us. You can't really segregate yourself when you're the only person there. If you go in the Main Meal...I mean... there may be specific groups of Black students and specific groups of White students...but I mean they are usually intermingled so I don't know if I would really say that that's total self-segregation. People just feel comfortable around people who are like them.

In contrast to those Black students who most often chose to socialize with their Black peers, Ace took a more multicultural approach as she acknowledged:

There are not that many places where I walk on campus where I don't know somebody whether they be Black or white. I feel like...you know...in my mind I'm more of a multicultural student...I mean I hang out with everybody. My core group of friends are Black...I'm in a Black sorority...but I don't really limit myself to just African Americans because I feel like there's more to be offered from everybody. I have friends of all races, religions, and everything. I don't want to be secluded to just what I know.

During the course of this study, I found that in spite of several instances where Black students were making the choice to self-segregate, there were other times when I witnessed formal and informal interactions in social settings among diverse students. Several of the students reported that they were encouraged by faculty and staff to become engaged in multicultural activities. Corbin reported:

It's an inclusive culture. In a lot of instances you have a lot of professors around campus...especially in the sociology and psychology departments, they push their students to do projects and papers where they remove themselves from their environment and place themselves in a completely opposite environment...so these students will sit in on meetings in the Black Student Organization and other ethnic student organizations just to feel like a minority.

Tamica pointed out:

A lot of the clubs...they encourage not just that nationality to join...like with the Hispanics, the Asians, and the Jewish, they want other people to come to learn about that culture. A lot of clubs...in a lot of things here, you're going to find that just because a club is labeled as one thing, it doesn't mean that only those people are there.

Steven explained:

I have a lot of White friends and they say, "It's the Black Student Association and I can't come." I'm like, yes, you can come. It's all about spreading awareness to some of the things that go on. The Vice-President of the Black Student Organization is Caucasian.

Town and Gown: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

When a student chooses a college, he or she also chooses the town and surrounding community where the college is located. The following stories illustrate that as universities continue to focus on the recruitment and retention of minority students, in addition to the institutional racial climate, more attention needs to be paid to the receptions that these students experience in the community-at-large. I chose to characterize these stories as the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The Good. Ace began by pointing out the "good" aspects of the community:

I think that the administration has done a lot to try to see what Black students need and tried to meet those needs as much as is humanly possible in keeping with the community that they're in. I told my parents that after I get my law degree and start making some money, I'm definitely going to buy like a vacation home in this area...as are a lot of my friends....so that you can come back and visit with your family...and I guess basically see where you came from... to be where you are...to be financially able to actually live here if you wanted to. But I mean...I think it's a nice place. It's slower paced and I think this is the only place in the world where you've seen five funerals in six years. It just seems like nothing happens in[the city] and when it does...it's usually a story that's blown up to mass proportions when it's really like...not that big but I just feel like it's a laid back kind of a place where you just go with the flow and nothing bad will happen to you.

The Bad. Ace continued by addressing some of the "bad" characteristics of the community where her school was located:

There's not a real good relationship between the town and the university. With that being a problem...they do what they can do within the limitations and restrictions that they're under...enforced by the town. But I think that the area where we go to school...I think that for the most part they are inviting to Black students but I would say more to females than to males. You can really see the intimidation for a lot of them when Black males walk around.

Stephanie shared her perception, stating:

This is a good school but as far as the location, it's very not inviting to African Americans. For example, when White people see you in a store like Wal-Mart or at a restaurant you get these crazy awkward looks, like what are they doing here type of thing.

So it's odd. All White people are not like that ... but then you have those others who are just like, 'Where did they come from and why are they here?'

Elizabeth spoke of her experiences off campus:

I mean I definitely had to deal with ignorance from specific people...like you'll find ignorant people when you're up in the mountains so that's obviously going to be more prevalent here...maybe not in [this community] so much because [it] is more of a college town...I feel like I'm more around students all the time but when I go off campus and see heads turning when I walk into places just because of the color of my skin, that is weird. I don't want to sound bad but there are definitely locals, people that are from the community who don't want to see diversity but you don't really come across that a lot unless you leave the campus

Linda contributed some heartbreaking examples:

No. On this campus I feel very safe. I know that my color is OK. It's accepted. When I get off campus, and I go around the city, I can feel looks like, "It's a Black person coming," or when I'm at a restaurant and it would take them like 30 minutes just to get us a glass of water and the White couple right beside us [the waitress] would be like, "Can I get you anything else?" She would give us our food and sometimes it would be cold or she wouldn't come back to check on us but she would check with other White customers in the restaurant. So I mean you can definitely see it and I mean you know...we're African American and we're not accepted some places. We're accepted by some people and we're not accepted by some people. It just depends on where you are. But yes, I have encountered that several times...not being accepted in the community because of my color.

The Ugly. The stories then turned to the "ugly" as Ace recounted:

As far as in the town...I would say that...if we're in Wal-Mart, it's almost nothing to see White kids run and hide from a Black male student. My first day here, I went to Wal-Mart with a few guys and this little [White] boy...he was saw us and said, "Oh my God Mommie, it's niggers!" We were just stunned. He happened to be wearing [a university] athletic t-shirt and the guys went over to tell him that they played on the [sports] team at the university but he was terrified the closer that they got. The mother...you could tell that she was apprehensive about them coming closer. But she was fine with me as a Black female approaching the little boy. I tried to let him know that all of us were nice and friendly.

Boogie contributed:

Well, off-campus, during my freshman year...we were walking down the street and these two White guys came up to us...there were like four of us...and they came up to us and were like, "Get out of our town!" They called us "niggers" and pulled knives on us. Some neighbors called the police and the police were giving us a hard time the whole time. They were grilling us and asked us why we were causing a disturbance and a

ruckus and we were finally able to get out that “they” were the ones with the knives and then they turned to them and they handled the situation.

Zahara was a nursing student who shared some of her clinical experiences at one of the local hospitals. She said that nothing in the classroom prepared her for the treatment that she would receive in the community. She explained:

There’s stuff all the time...just because of where we are demographically and a lot of racism within the city... and just...you know, ignorance. It’s completely different from maybe what we experience in the classroom just because it is people that are out in the city and they have their own feelings towards African Americans. First of all, a lot of times they will automatically assume that you’re janitorial staff...not that you’re a nursing student or that you could even possibly be a nurse. Usually, if you have some tint to your skin, you’re janitorial staff and they will ask you, “Can you clean this,” or “Can you put that up?” That’s always the first thing. I have that coming and going everywhere. The program doesn’t prepare you for that type of experience.

Zahara indicated that racist comments and behaviors from patients were never discussed in the classroom. These types of incidents could be openly discussed as one of the aspects of the working world for minority professionals. In addition, this presents an opportunity for White nursing students to learn that in these situations they need to step up as allies for their Black peers.

Campus and Community Police Issues

The students inherited not only a community where discriminatory acts are prone to occur but also a local police force that they alleged demonstrate their bias against Black students. Ace, Boogie, and Queen told stories about such incidents. Ace contributed:

I think that local police are a little harsher toward African American students. I recently got a ticket, and at that same time, they had four other Black students pulled over in the same spot for the same thing. Yesterday, all of our tickets were due on the same day and when we got there, the people at the Court House would not talk to any of us. It was like we stood there for 10 or 15 minutes...there was nobody else in line...they refused to ask us what we needed and it ended up that they charged us \$180 for the ticket as opposed to the \$145 that was written on the back ...stating that the police officer had put the wrong amount. But he looked it up like three or four times to make sure that it was correct. So everybody ended up paying \$180 for a ticket that was supposed to be \$145.

Boogie shared his experience in a hair-raising encounter:

I mean like you get pulled over a lot for things that you really shouldn't be getting pulled over for. One time I got pulled over for no reason but when the cops saw my championship ring they would be nicer to you...so they would start letting you off with warnings instead of giving you tickets and stuff like that. So I mean it's kind of that playing favorites but it's also a racial thing. I have been chased up here. One time I was driving down the road and these two...it was a Yukon and another kind of like Jeep truck and they came out like...one on my back bumper and one came around the side...it was on a really curvy road so I mean like I had a car so it was easy to maneuver through the curves and I got away from them. But it was like they were hanging out the windows...banging, yelling, and screaming and all this stuff. When I got out in the clear, I called 911 and I told them about it and they were like, "OK. We'll send somebody out there and check it out." But no one ever came.

Queen also spoke of the local police department:

When there's nothing for the students to do, they end up throwing parties at their houses and inevitably they end up getting busted up by police for one reason or another. This happens quite frequently. Also, we've had several Black students to get tazered by police when they were not being violent. That's one of the racist issues that has also come up with one of our students. He was trying to break up a fight and the police tazered him. And that has happened more than once. That's another thing about the racial climate here with the police.

Shawn was adamant in saying that the Black students on her campus had no trust in their protection by campus security. She reported several incidents where the campus police demonstrated a lack of concern about the safety needs of Black students:

It's bad. It's bad. There's an overwhelming feeling among Black students that public safety does not give a damn; point blank period. For instance...a personal example...a young woman who's like a little sister to me on this campus has asthma and panic attacks. When she starts having asthma attacks she freaks out and she has a panic attack...to the point where she has to pass out in order for her body to reset itself to calm her breathing down...she has to blank out...so she hadn't had one in awhile...the weather starts to get crazy...she was walking in front of Governor's and had an asthma attack. When she starts to have an asthma attack, she can't walk anymore...she gets down on the ground and starts having a panic attack. There are several Black students surrounding her you know, trying to help out...Public Safety...two White officers drive by. The Black students start screaming for Public Safety to stop...Public Safety looks...they keep screaming for Public Safety to stop...Public Safety drives right past this girl. She could have died...like literally could have died. She has asthma to the point where she could have been dead. And they did not even stop.

Oh...one more example...a young Black woman, a freshman, was walking one night to her apartment from work and a Caucasian man in a pickup truck sees her walking and takes a bottle out of his car and hits her in the head...with the bottle. She goes and tells the cops...the cops don't even write up a report! So these are examples of why University of California, Los Angeles, students on this campus...I mean...I know Black

women who could get beat to a pulp on this campus and would not go to Public Safety...I know Black men who would let White men walk over them with stiletto heels and would not go and talk to Public Safety...there is nothing that Public Safety could do today to change that. Any crime that anyone would commit against a Black student...I don't know one...especially underclassmen...that would go and talk to Public Safety right now. They don't trust them as far as they could throw them.

The primary role of campus security is to provide help and protection. All students should feel comfortable calling campus police for assistance with the expectation that the response will be swift and responsive to the need. According to the students interviewed, this was not the case for Black students. On the contrary, their stories indicated, based on their experiences, that students have little confidence and trust that campus security will respond to their needs. This should be an alarming revelation to campus administrators and a call for action to investigate and eliminate behaviors and practices by campus security that were detailed by these students.

Social Expectations and Experiences

This section addresses the third research question: How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their social expectations and experiences? The themes were: (a) what social life?, (b) social engagement: involvement is the key, (c) spiritual connections, (d) Black student organizations, (e) Black Greek Organizations, (f) Greek Segregation, and (f) Black Greek-White Greek Tensions.

For many students, one of the things that they look forward to when going away to college is their independence from parents and the freedom to enjoy a more adult social experience. The social climate for Black students at the campuses under study was described by the students in the context of a "social life."

What Social Life?

According to Jones (2003), a feeling of comfort in the social context is a precondition for psychological well-being and successful scholastic performance. Black students who choose to attend a rural predominantly White institution will find the social experience especially challenging. There are very few outlets in these communities for social activities that appeal to Black collegians. As opposed to most of the students who described a social life that was “non-existent,” Linda illustrated her social experience as “enriching” because she chose to participate in what her Black friends called “White activities:” Linda elaborated:

So, I mean it’s enriching...you just have to get out there and look. You can’t just sit in your room and expect it to be handed to you. You have to be like, “OK. Where’s the party? What are we doing tonight? We’re doing this? OK...cool...spread the word...do the phone tree...you know what I’m saying? You have to really get out of your room and walk around campus and be like, “Oh that’s happening tonight.” I’ve done silly stuff. I’ve gone to barn dances...I’ve gone to karaoke night...I’ve gone to swing dance lessons...I really wanted to try everything while I was in college because I knew that once I got out, I wasn’t going to be able to. And people thought I was crazy. They would be like, “You’re going to the barn dance?” And I would be like, “Yeah. I got my cowboy hat and my cowboy boots and I’m ready to go!” And my African American friends would be like, “You’re crazy. That’s that White coming out of you.” They would always say that...and I hate it when they say that because I want to step outside my shell and do things that I guess that African Americans would not do according to them. I just don’t see anything wrong with doing it. And I would say that’s a really racist comment and we would get in arguments over whether it was racist or not. So they never say that anymore around me because they know I’m very passionate about that.

Tia shared that she was warned about going to an “all-White college”:

I came from a predominantly White high school so I wasn’t really worried about coming up here other than what people would tell me. They would be like, “Well, it’s an all-White college. You might want to be careful.” But I never thought that personally I would have any problems so I came up here with that attitude...that I wouldn’t have any problems and I haven’t. Like I said, I try to stay involved so I’m a part of the Black Student Organization. I have Black friends and I have White and Hispanic friends so I haven’t had many social problems.

Ace described the social life on her campus in the context of Black student comfort with “hanging out with the White students.” She shared:

This is still college and compared to high school, I expected it to be...you know...parties all the time...always having options and alternatives to a good time and it is not the case here. You have to make a way to have fun. You will find that if you don’t like hanging

out with the White students, you will not have a social life. You will be miserable and you can just chalk it up to that. If you want to just strictly hang out with Black people, you're never going to go out. Under no circumstances will you find an all-Black party. You will not find one. A lot of people who had not really been exposed to being around White students...I think it's been harder for them to be social here. But if you had been around White students and you were fine with people of other races, then you were fine.

Gabrielle recognized that students from urban areas would find the social experience in a rural area to be a "culture shock" and recommended that they select a different university:

If you are from a metro area, it's a culture shock when you come to this rural community. So if you are coming out here from a metro area, I will tell you there is nothing to do. If you are coming for social life, you need to pick another institution. This is not the one. This is not a playtime institution. This is a get your books, go to class, go home institution. If you want a social life then you need to leave here on the weekend and go somewhere else.

Ace added her comments about the social challenges of being Black at a predominantly White institution:

Just a lot of the racial things that go on at school that people don't really talk about; it's kind of under the table...like there's not really a lot of stuff to do that appeals to African Americans. You can't get your hair done here unless you know how to do it or somebody else knows how to do it. You can't go out. If there's a party with a large number of Black people, the police will break it up immediately as opposed to going to a party where it's predominantly White--it will last until four or five o'clock in the morning. It makes you wonder why.

Zahara confessed that she coped with the lack of a campus or community social life by returning to taking what she called "Black breaks" back in her hometown:

Home is not that far away but it's like I'm in a completely different world here. Even in the big city where I'm from, sometimes Black people will complain there's nothing to do. Now I tell them that if they go to where I got to school then they will be more thankful for what they have there. My whole life I heard that the city where I live has nothing for Black people. When I go back home and visit, it's like, Wow! I probably stare because I'm just like...Black people in every other car...whereas here, to see Black people is very scarce. Here, there are no Black festivals, no Black museums, no jazz, no blues...and I miss that kind of stuff. I take what I call my "Black breaks" just to get a breather away from all this. What a difference three hours make!

Boogie and Queen agreed that a social life that appeals to young Black African Americans was missing from their PWI experience. Queen began:

A social life here is very much non-existent. If it weren't for my clubs and organizations that are multicultural that we had to start ourselves, there would be nothing for me to do.

I would feel like I have no life. I get sad when I listen to my other friends at other college campuses and they talk about how they went out and did this or that and how they had so much fun. Everyone says that the college years are the best years of your life and you have the best experiences. But I haven't had that kind of fun like I wanted to have. Every now and then, one of the Greek organizations or a student organization will throw a party like maybe once a month and you can go to that. A social life, that's one of the things that I definitely feel like I missed out on in college because I haven't had one. Sunup to sundown I'm either doing schoolwork or serving on a university committee or something like that. It's like that stuff is good but I feel like all work and no play has made me a dull girl.

Boogie added:

I mean...if you're talking about socially like hanging out socially, then yes a social life doesn't exist. But I mean if it's talking about clubs, organizations, and things, there's plenty to do for that. But I mean if you want to party then there's really no place for a nightlife. I mean like all the nightlife is pretty much White. There's really no music that I can relate to like R&B, jazz, and hip-hop. And then there's no nightclub or anything. There are plenty of rock bands, folk classical or the more eclectic type music...and I like to listen to that sometimes but sometimes I just want to go somewhere and dance!

To address students' needs for an active social nightlife, one of the universities has a student-run campus nightclub that provides a weekly variety of entertaining shows, concerts, and events. Ace and Tia agreed that without this social outlet, the number of African American students, if not students in general, at the university would be significantly reduced. Ace described the campus nightclub:

That place is the world to African Americans. If they ever tore it down, I think that everybody Black should transfer...because that's your only opportunity to have anything that will not be broken up. They do have a lot of police officers there during the parties. They're just kind of randomly walking around but that's for security purposes, which is fine. But it is the place that you go if you're going to have an event that you don't want anything broken up, then it is your only alternative really. It is not a Black thing there either you know. But it's where we can go that we know that's a party that's guaranteed to not be broken up. That's our outlet for fun.

Tia added:

Without the nightclub, I don't think that anybody would go here. They would leave like within the first 2 weeks. That's where all the events go on...all the concerts...all the parties...so without it there wouldn't be any kind of entertainment on campus. That's where most of the Black events are held... a lot of the diversity events are all held there...big events like Greek shows, the Drag Show, and Black History month programs.

Social Engagement: Involvement is the Key

As noted elsewhere, the study's participants were successful juniors and seniors on track to graduate. They attributed much of their persistence to their involvement with diverse campus organizations including the Student Government Association, Black Student Organization, fraternities and sororities, academic and cultural councils, and honor societies. As one student said, "Being involved...it's the only thing that has kept me here," and Stranger wholeheartedly agreed:

Students who are involved in organizations...statistics show that their retention rates are higher. When you're involved, you're more likely to stay because you have something to stay for. If you feel like you belong to something, you're going to stay. So I do a little bit of everything. I try to anyway.

In spite of her disappointment at not being "loved by everybody" as she had been in grades kindergarten through 12, Andrea was involved in leadership positions with several organizations. She said it was important for her that others recognized that she was both Black and capable:

Oh gosh! I thought I was going to be Miss Personality at this university just like I had always been...everybody was going to love me...everybody was going to know who I was...Psyche! I was like the smallest person on the totem pole that there could ever have been. But I got real involved anyway. I was on SGA, joined a sorority, did any little club I could do on campus and I had great fun. I'm glad that I had those experiences. But I just thought it was going to be on a grand degree of things. I wanted to be the president of everything. I wanted people to know that, Hey, that girl can do stuff...yes, she is Black but look what she's doing. I didn't do as great as I thought I was going to do but I still participated enough to make me think that I'm making a difference on this campus ... maybe. . .

Corbin, a senior scheduled to graduate in the spring, exemplified the "over-involvement" that several of the students expressed:

I'm a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, National Pan-Hellenic Council, Black Student Association, Order of Omega Honor Society, Resident Student Association, Gamma Beta Phi Honor Society, Multicultural President's Roundtable, Greek President's Roundtable, Leadership Cabinet, and the Diversity Committee. Sometimes I feel like I'm over-involved and I just want to stop. I just want to sleep.

Spiritual Connections

Among the many challenges for Black students attending a PWI in a small rural community was the lack of opportunities to maintain their relationship with a church that provided them with the same experiences as their home fellowships. Linda described her loneliness:

I think that the hardest thing for me coming here was that I wasn't homesick as much as I was church-home sick. I really missed my church family and here I really haven't found a church home that feels like it's the right place for me.

Several of the students interviewed found a connection to their faith and their culture through their involvement with the university's Gospel Choir and local church activities. Miriam said, "I have survived being here by being plugged into a community church and that has really helped. My church has made a total difference in the shaping of my social life." The church that Stephanie attends provided off-campus support for her. She noted:

It's smaller than my home church but I enjoy it and being there has improved my spiritual walk. I'm very happy. Volunteering at the church has helped me reduce the stress by getting off this campus and seeing people in a more positive atmosphere.

Tamica and Tia credited their involvement with the Gospel Choir as a positive social and cultural experience. Tamica enthusiastically shared:

My major thing I knew I wanted to do when I came to college was be in the Gospel Choir. It's like a club, a class, and a ministry. I enjoy it and I love it and I love the people and it's really been kind of my connecting point as far as being in school and getting involved and not going home every weekend. That's the one thing that I sought to be involved in and I am enjoying every moment of it.

Tia explained:

The Gospel Choir is a place where a lot of the Black students come together to sing for the Lord, to praise the Lord and worship...lots of friends...there are a lot of social activities going on in the Gospel Choir and it's really a place to worship and have fun.

Black Student Organizations

Each of the universities under study had a Black Student Organization, accessible to all students, that addressed the concerns and interests particular to the African American students.

The Black Student Organization provides opportunities for students of color to interact and participate together in campus-wide activities throughout the school year. Shawn was the president of the Black Student Organization on her campus. She described:

The Black Student Organization is a student-led organization that is about creating a community for Black students on this campus. It's also about educating people about the issues that affect Black communities, to create social programs that specifically address issues of Black students, and to educate everyone else. It's a social organization and we have a lot of fun but it's also about the nitty gritty, about education and promoting academics. Everyone is welcome.

Black Greek Organizations

Historically, Black students attending HBCUs and PWIs have found solace and solidarity with other Black students by joining a Black Greek-letter organization. Although open to any student who meets the academic requirements, involvement allows African American students to create a social and cultural connection with people with similar backgrounds and interests. Rooted in academic excellence and community service, Black Greek organizations provide leadership opportunities and positive social experiences that contribute to overall student success. Particular to those Black students at a PWI, these organizations can also provide a climate for social interaction and inclusion to remedy racial tensions and social injustices experienced in the university community-at-large.

Greek Segregation

I asked the participants if there were interactions among the Black and White Greek organizations. Andrea gave a quick answer:

No and that's where it's most apparent that it's not. It's very, very cut and dry...like in Black and White. You do not come here and we do not go there. Once I became a member of a sorority, that's when I realized like...these people don't even want us here. There's just a lot of ignorance and intolerance among the Caucasian Greek organizations. We have tried for about 2 years to do things with them. And we tried to get a big group thing together...and have a big Greek day, which turned out to be successful. One semester all of the organizations pitched in, gave money from their budgets, and we had a successful event. People came out and it was successful...we were like...we did it... but it hasn't happened again...to my knowledge it was just that one time. I think that has a

lot to do with the segregation because everybody on this campus is Greek. It's a small campus and most of the Caucasians are Greeks; pretty much a majority of them are. And among African Americans...we're trying...we're going a good job because the numbers have grown within the organizations even since I've been gone.

Stranger agreed with Andrea, adding:

We're totally separated. We've been trying. Last semester I got in contact with two of the White groups and we were trying to have like a foursome...like three of their groups and one of mine or two and two...we wanted to get together and have a pool party or whatever to sort of put an end to the segregation...to try and make the Greek community more cohesive. We talked about it and that's as far as it went. I was like...we're ready...tell me what we need to buy...tell me where we need to meet...and that was the end of it. I guess when they saw that I was willing...it ended there. So I mean we've tried. We've reached out a few times but it's not happening.

Black Greek-White Greek Tensions

According to the students who were members of a fraternity or sorority, racial tensions existed between Black and White Greek-letter organizations. Stephanie explained that there were a lot of misconceptions concerning her organization:

Some people have a lot of misconceptions about Black Greek life in because they don't really see the service projects and everything else that we are. They just kind of see us like a social group that can provide entertainment for them. The only time we hear from White Greek organizations is when they want our group to do step shows for them and then we don't hear from them for the rest of the year. That's a small part of what we're really about. They never ask like, 'Do you want to help like on a community service project...something like Habitat for Humanity or something.

Stranger spoke of differences in the way Black groups and White groups were treated:

I feel like the White groups are highly favored compared to the Black groups. For example, they are given office space and we are lucky if we get a cubicle. Also, there's very little interaction between the White Greeks and the Black Greeks. There's an annual Greek Week on campus but it did not include us. They claimed that they invited us to their meetings but for the most part, they had the meetings when they knew we couldn't come. When we did send people to the meetings, they would always hand you an itinerary with all the Greek events that had already been planned. We just had to go along with it. They had already planned everything. They just wanted to use us to come and help. This year we decided to boycott their Greek Week activities.

Queen spoke of a personal example where she was made to feel her organization was inferior:

A couple of weeks ago, I was in the Greek office where the NPHC [National Pan-Hellenic Council] has this tiny little corner...and someone actually asked me what I was doing in the Greek Office...and I'm like, I'm a Greek and I'm in NPHC. We might not have all of the money and the resources...we may not have like 300 members like you do but we do way more service and we do way more substantive stuff for this University And we have every right to be here just like you do. Even the administration has acknowledged that we do three times as much service as the predominantly White Greek letter organizations. It makes me mad because we have every right to be in that office and utilize it just like they do. We're still Greek letter organizations.

Institutional Practices

This section addresses the fourth research question: How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe institutional practices that promote or obstruct their persistence to graduation? The themes were: (a) student support services; (b) staff support: a safe haven; (c) student-centered listening leaders; (d) diversity: just do it!; (e) Black faculty: where are you?; (f) Black mentors: been there, done that; and (g) recommendations for future Black students: passing the torch.

The students were asked to describe some of the positive programs, personnel, and practices that have supported and helped them adjust successfully to their campus environment and achieve their academic goals. They were also asked to describe any university-related factors that have negatively impacted their ability to navigate successfully through their college experience. During the last phase of the interviews, the students provided recommendations for improving the overall college experience for future African students.

Student Support Services

Emphasizing the need to be proactive, Queen, a graduating senior, described the importance of using student resources to help students reach their academic goals:

The reason that I am where I am is because I found out about the support and resources provided by the Office of Student Affairs. The thing is that the university has resources but students don't know that they have resources to go to. So I think that the reason I am where I am is because I found out about those resources and I utilized them. So, as far as a practice, if you feel like you were treated unfairly in a class, you have someone that you

can go and speak to because I've done that. They do try to support you but you've just got to ask for it. If they don't know that you're struggling, then they can't help you. They want you to get the most out of your education.

Miriam imparted the top three practices that her university provides in support of student success:

They're open. They're available. They have great student services. Those are the top three things that I think make a university successful. Whenever you call someone, they're there to answer the phone. If you need a question answered, they're there to help you with that. If the system is backed up and you can't register, which is really hard, they'll sit down with you and plug in your classes for you. They make sure that their students are their priority and that any problems are taken care of as soon as possible.

Tamica provided very positive comments about university personnel and programs and added that free textbook rental was the "best thing:" She continued:

I think that everyone has been generally helpful. I can't think of one person who has been spiteful to me and has done anything to keep me from graduating on time or not succeeding in school. Also, the university makes lots of diversity programs for us. There are a lot of opportunities to do something. If you want to start a club or an organization, I believe that it's easier to do it here than it would be at an HBCU. I think they've done that great...The free rental of textbooks is awesome! I would have to say that's the best thing that this school ever did for its students.

Linda described the significance of free tutoring services with student tutors:

There's free tutoring at the Tutoring Center that they have where students tutor students...so it's not like it's an adult or a teacher sitting across from you...it's a student that has or is now taking the course...who knows what you're going through...and can empathize and sympathize with you. I took full advantage of that because I am not a math person...and I'm not a science person and many of the courses that I had to take were in science or were math-affiliated. They know me by name over there like, "Oh here comes Linda. Somebody get her a tutor."

Francesca noted her appreciation for computer labs and academic advising:

I think that providing computer labs is number one because a lot of the kids are not able to afford a computer. You have computers in the library and you have computer labs in here and in other buildings across campus. Also, Academic Advising is always open. You can go there and say that you want to see an adviser. Like in my department, they'll give you an adviser but if you're not comfortable with that adviser, you can always change it, which is exactly what I did. My adviser was not advising as I thought she should have or putting her heart into advising me so I switched to a different adviser and I've had him ever since. He's done a wonderful job. He's been a tremendous help for me. A lot of the people here are actually willing to help... faculty and staff.

For Gabrielle, scholarship support played a significant role in her success. She explained:

Their scholarships – scholarships are how I made it through college. If it had not been for scholarships, I would probably have been really reluctant to even go further than my community college. So scholarships are awesome.

Elizabeth and Linda made very positive comments in support of a mentoring program for Black freshmen and upperclassmen. Elizabeth said:

The university has a mentor-mentee program that pairs up a minority student who is already established here on campus teams up with a first-year minority student and shows them the ropes. I did that my freshman year and I think it's great because it's a good way to connect with other students and the university. A lot of people became really close friends with their mentors and to this day still hang out with them and have relationships with them. I think that's a really good program.

Linda added:

The Peer Mentoring Program is great. The woman who mentored me when I was a mentee is still my mentor to this day. I don't think that without her, I would have made it to where I am today because she was such a role model figure for me. She was a year ahead of me. ...so I mean there was a lot of stuff that we had in common and I just looked up to her and I wanted to do everything she was doing. She just really showed me the ropes here. She really took me under her wing and she was like, "This is how you do this. Don't forget to do that. Walk with your head up high. Don't walk with your head down. Shake with a firm hand." You know...stuff you learn throughout your childhood but she just reaffirmed everything. She really was like a mother figure to me...even though she was only a year older than me. Her support has helped me a lot and I miss her to death. I wish she were still here. And I mean she just really, really showed me the ropes and opened my eyes to a lot of things and I will be forever in her debt and grateful to her for that. That program is definitely another experience that has helped me to get to graduation.

Corbin, a graduating senior headed to graduate school, acknowledged that the support of the Writing Center and student organizations was helpful to his success:

This university has a strong support network for students. In addition to free tutoring services for students, we have a Writing Center where you can take a paper and they will edit it to your teacher's specifics, and you can keep turning it in as many times as you want. Supporting such groups as the Black Student Organization and Greek life, the Gospel Choir...getting individuals together who are all striving for one goal, graduation...pushing them... has definitely been beneficial.

Staff Support: A Safe Haven

Most of the students credited their success to specific Black staff members in Admissions and Student Services. Based on their remarks, it was obvious that these two offices had made a significant impact in their lives. Tia said, “They are the staff that actually took the time to get to know me and help me. They were always there if you needed to contact them.” Tamica added, “They’re a shoulder to lean on. You can take your concerns to them. They make you feel like it’s a safe haven here.” Ace agreed:

You can tell when people are faking it...they don’t take an interest in you just because you’re Black...but I think they have a vested interest in every Black student on this campus. If they see you and you look like you’re not as happy as normal they ladies are on it! They’re like, what’s wrong? Are you OK? Do you need something? I think that if I needed anything...whether it is a piece of gum or a dollar...I think that I could go to either one of them ladies and ask them for it. And if they don’t have it, they would do anything in their power to make sure that I had it.

Several of the students mentioned an admissions recruiter who went above and beyond to recruit and retain them to graduation. Boogie said, “He’s one of the people who really made me feel at home. We talked a lot...and I still talk to him now...I still see him.”

Ace added:

After he met me, he called my house everyday! He knows my brother and sister by name. He could identify my parents blindfolded if they said hello to him. I’m telling you...he is a go-getter He makes you feel like this university really needs you to be a part of this campus in order to thrive. He makes you feel important. He is like that with every Black student who is here. The ones who are really thriving, you can be guaranteed that he had something to do with them being here and being happy about being here.

Elizabeth commented that one particular Student Services staff person “works really hard to make sure that minority students feel comfortable. She definitely extends herself beyond what she has to....you know to give that comfort to students.” Linda commented about this same person:

She has been my mentor...whether it’s been inviting me over for Sunday dinners or throwing an end of the year celebration for all the Black seniors. She’s just an all-around great woman. If I’m going to class and I just need to stop and chat for a while or cry or whatever, if she’s there, she’ll be there for you. Having that type of open relationship with a staff member really makes a difference.

Student-Centered Listening Leaders

During the last phase of the interview, I asked the students what they would say to administrators if given the opportunity to make recommendations to their respective universities for improving the environment for Black students. The number one recommendation from several of the students was to have student-centered administrators who demonstrate a genuine concern for every student. As one student said, “As far as Black students go, we want to be considered as more of an asset to the university than a liability.” Shawn, Linda, and Gabrielle shared that administrators needed to make time in their schedules to listen and talk with students. Gabrielle expanded:

One thing I think that is needed regardless of race is that administrators, from the top down, need to have one-on-one forums with students, not just with the SGA. Set it up where you are available and where students can talk to you. That way you know what’s on their minds. Make the time for students to speak one-on-one with leadership to let them know what you think about the campus. There will be some guidelines so it won’t be just a rag fest.

Linda advised:

Campus leaders from administration just need to really listen to the students, listen to what they have to say...their opinions, even if they disagree with them or whatever...just really making sure that their voices are heard, you know...jus making them feel like what they say matters. What I say you need to care about is a big deal because any student, not just African American, wants to know that they’re important and that them being here is helping this campus in some way...that being here is important to the faculty; that I’m not just a number...I’m a person...where people respect me for who I am.

Shawn recommended:

First, I would recommend that the administrators talk to students. At least once a semester the leadership needs to have an open dialogue with students...if it means coming to their events...pick a marginalized group and go to one of their events. Leaders should be student-centered...I get that the leaders are really busy because I’m really busy but I still find time to connect with people. I can look at how leaders spend money and their time to determine their concern for me as a student. I would tell them that they need to make this campus truly safe and secure university where Black students or homosexual students could come and talk to anybody at anytime, including campus security without feeling like they’re going to be ignored or worse. If all students felt like we belonged and that this is our family then we would feel safer and more valued.

Diversity: Just Do It!

For universities that communicate and advertise their support for diversity, the students are keenly aware that practices need to align with rhetoric. As illustrated by Queen, Ace, Shawn, and Ken, improvements at their universities are needed primarily in the area of cultural sensitivity training. Queen stated:

I think that they could do a better job educating the faculty about cultural sensitivity. I hear a lot of the Black students talk about how their White professor singled them out as the only Black student in the class when they're talking about a Black issue or something. They think that that student is supposed to represent an entire race of Black people. I think that training the faculty to deal with those issues and to answer those questions would really prove more beneficial in the future. I don't think that the faculty here is ready to interact with the growing numbers of minority students that are coming here. Maybe some type of sensitivity or cultural training for the faculty would be good.

Ace added:

We need more Black faculty or at least White faculty who are more sensitive to our cultural history. For example, I feel like slavery was bad, period. But some of my White teachers say they can find the positives about slavery where, as a Black student, I don't see any. They try to get positives out of what should be a totally negative situation. Yes, some people showed strength and perseverance but slavery was bad I don't care how you spin it.

Shawn recommended action:

I think that one of the big things is don't just tell me you treasure diversity...don't just let me walk around campus and see these mottos and visions and missions about diversity. Do it! I would tell them that they need to push as hard as possible to make sure that diversity is infused into the curriculum come hell or high water. Don't just talk about doing it...just do it!

Ken recommended:

The university is doing a large, large, I can't say how big...enormous disservice to their White students. Most of these kids will leave here with their bachelors, go on, and possibly get their masters. A lot of them may wind up in urban cities, Atlanta, Baltimore, DC, or New York City and find themselves working with and working for people of color. If they have no reference for diversity by virtue of their education, they will be lost. If you are going to give them an academic background and academic instruction, so as to carry a career on, you need to give them the same kind of social instruction, diversity and cultural instruction about multiculturalism because that's what this nation about. We're no longer a melting pot. As it relates to African American students, include us more. Don't pay lip service to us. Involve us.

Black Faculty: Where are You?

As noted elsewhere in this study, the most central component in ensuring students' academic success is establishing a relationship with faculty. The students reported their desire to meet, get to know, and develop relationships with Black faculty. Elizabeth, Francesca, and Andrea admitted that they were only vaguely aware of who the Black faculty were or how many there are on their campuses. Elizabeth acknowledged:

I know there's got to be a Black Faculty Association somewhere. Having the Black faculty come together to meet with the new Black students would be really good...and it would be nice to know who all the Black faculty are on campus. There are a couple of them who came to the Black Student Organization meeting and it was great to see some faces there who weren't just students.

Francesca said:

To be honest with you, I feel like a lot of the African American faculty need to make themselves more known to the African American students here so we can have more mentors and more role models. Everybody knows and talks about the Black staff but you don't hear much about the Black faculty.

Andrea recommended:

The African American faculty need to be more welcoming to Black students and more involved in their lives. I believe it's vital to keeping them in school and increasing their chances to graduate. For Black students, it's often a matter of life or death with their education. They need that support from those role models.

Black Mentors: Been There, Done That

The students in this study expressed their need to connect with mentors who share their culture and who can empathize with the pressures and challenges that Black students face on predominantly White campuses. Andrea pointed out:

A mentor program with Black faculty, staff, or upper class students would be great, Black people who have already been there and done that. If you don't get the opportunity to know that you could succeed...then why are you going to want to succeed? If you've been told your whole life that you're going to come to nothing, that you're going to go up there to that school and mess up, that you're not going to do anything good with your life, then you may live up to that. You need someone to say, "No, you're not going to fail, you're going to do the right thing because this is a big deal and you need to graduate." Having someone to give you that positive support would make a huge difference for a lot of students.

Miriam expressed:

Having a Black student mentor you during your freshman year would give you somebody to relate to because it is hard to come into a complete different culture. Your roommate may be White and they have different habits...different everything...you live differently! I think that trying to hook them up during their freshman year with somebody that may be African American...even just a minority period...Mexican, Asian, whatever...just another minority so they can have some idea of not complete alienation. That would be the top thing I think. Sometimes you need that Black person to vent to and you can tell them how you feel and know that they understand.

Benson added:

A lot of Black students, especially those first-generation college students need extra support and encouragement. I think it's better if Black students have a Black mentor because we constantly see of these White faces just looking at us like they're wondering why we are here and what we really do. I think that if they had someone that they can talk to, relate to, motivate them, and help them out, I think that's the biggest thing.

Recommendations for Future Black Students: Passing the Torch

Boogie encouraged:

Don't let anybody or anything stand in your way. If your parents don't encourage you, if there's nobody else in the world to encourage you, I mean...you've just got to do it for yourself. Find something that you love...even if you have to leave that school for another one...you've got to find what you love and you've got to fight for it...because when it comes down to it...it's all about do you have the desire to pursue what you're trying to attain? If you're just doing it because somebody told you to or you just think it's the right thing to do, or if you're doing it because everybody else is doing it...then more than likely, it's going to fall off. I mean I already know pretty much what I want...so you just got to go out there and get it.

Elizabeth advised:

Evaluate what things you want to get out of being on campus. Like I mean if you want there to be a large Black community for you to go to then maybe this isn't the campus for you...you know if you are comfortable seeing a sea of faces that look nothing like you...if that's not going to really scare you or anything...then you know this could be the place for you. It really depends on what you want. For me, I'm not lost here. I don't really feel like I was completely out of place. It was weird not seeing anyone that was like me but I didn't feel like that threw me...but that might not be the thing for everyone else.

Ken warned:

Look, the first thing you have to do, you have to show up for your classes. Don't go in there and go to sleep. Go in and sit down, sit up front and pay attention. Let the

instructors know who you are. Give your homework your best effort even if it pulls a “D” or an “F,” whatever it is, give it your best effort. Let the instructor see that you’re trying. The analogy that I use is this...You go to McDonald’s, their job is to make burgers and they’re going to make them. When you come here, the instructor’s job is to teach you. If that instructor winds up failing entirely too many persons, there’s something wrong with that instructor. Because they chose to get into education, their mission is not to just hand out “Fs” and “Ds.” They want to see you learn it. It’s a halfway process. Meet them halfway and they’ll be right there for you.

Gabrielle stated:

I will just tell them up front that this is a school for learning. It is not a playtime school. You are out in the middle of nowhere. This is a very small little town. It is not a campus town. It is not in the middle of downtown, walking distance. If you are coming for books, you are coming for the right thing. If you are coming to party, you need to go and find it somewhere else.

To close the interview, I asked the students if they would recommend their university to other African Americans and finally, if they would recommend their university to their younger siblings. After listening to their initial trials and triumphs, their answers were often surprising:

Linda contributed a quick answer, stating:

I definitely would because it’s a different experience than what you might be used to...but if you do come...just make sure that you come with an open mind and an open heart. I would definitely recommend this institution to anybody but you have to be willing to take on the challenge and make the sacrifice and really step outside of yourself and become one with the university and allow the university to become one with you and enrich you and shape and mold you and you shape and mold it and leave your footprint in the mountains when you leave.

Queen added:

I would say that true greatness is going to present itself to you wherever you go. You can be great at an HBCU where you feel the most comfortable or you can make a conscious decision that you’re going to excel wherever you go. So, don’t be afraid of coming here just because of the stereotypes or just because you know that there are going to be people unlike you. See it as a challenge. The whole world is going to be full of people who aren’t like you. Your job is going to be full of people who aren’t like you, people who may not understand you, and people who you may not even like. But if nothing else, you need to learn how to interact with those people and let them learn something from you. Teach them as much as you can and you’ll learn something from them in the process. But come here ready to leave a mark because one of the benefits is that because there are so few of us, when you excel, when you just show that little bit of effort, you’ll shine. So, take that opportunity to shine.

Francesca's answer was short and to the point:

I would because I think the faculty and staff are trying to do a great job of bringing a more diverse student body here. I also think that they're doing a great job of trying to make things here more equal for African American students.

Tia added:

I would recommend that you at least come and try it out because there are opportunities here like the free textbooks. Scholarships are there. The opportunities for help with free tutors are good. It's free, it's open, it's quiet, not a lot of criminal activity, not a lot going on so it's easy to focus up here...easy to focus on your studies, your academics...maybe more than at an HBCU.

I asked the students if they would recommend their university to their younger siblings.

Andrea's answer centered on her sister:

Yes. She's stronger than I am...she would stand up for herself and not take crap so I don't feel scared for her like maybe if I was looking through somebody else's eyes for me...My parents were terrified about me coming here and being by myself...and not because I'm needy or anything like that but maybe because I'm too nice...that maybe I wouldn't say no to people who would try to take advantage. But my sister? No. I'm not worried about her.

Boogie contributed excellent advice with his affirmative answer:

Yes, I am. It's a good school. It has good people. I mean...you can sacrifice 2 to 4 years of partying. You can do that whenever. So, come and get your education. I mean it's really a character builder kind of situation. Like all of this other stuff I faced I just saw it as a way to...I found a way to make it make me stronger... I don't know...it's just a nice...it's just refreshing to have a change of pace. I guess it could prepare you for the real world in some aspects but...like...let's just say that it's not going to be like all hunky dory when I get out there...I'm going to have...most of the time my bosses are going to be middle-age White Americans...they're going to be the ones calling the shots until I can be at the point where I'm calling my own shots...and I mean you have to learn how to deal with that.

Gabrielle considered her sibling brothers as she stated:

No because my brothers would want a social life and there is not one here. Because I know their personalities, no ...because I wouldn't want to send them up to fail. Because you know, they are sociable. They are social people and I am not so I can, you know, grow in this environment, whereas they need some kind of supplement. They need some kind of playtime and [University A] will not or cannot provide that for them. They need to be in a metropolitan area. Anyone else who is looking for a college, [University A] is one of the cheapest colleges, good professors. If you are willing to travel and you are not afraid to be far away from home, this is it.

Shawn answered in the affirmative and offered some advice for her young brother:

Yes; but I would tell him don't just come here with the expectation to go to class or to go do fun, extracurricular stuff and not fight for this place to be better than it was when you got here. I think that if more of us continue to do that, then eventually, there's hope. I would tell more Black students to come because if they don't come, then it's going to stay just like it is.

Document Analysis

The document analysis consisted of a content review of a variety of printed and electronic documents from the two participating institutions. According to Merriam (1998), the purpose of a document analysis is to examine “congruence between documents and the research problem” (p. 133). The analysis served to triangulate data discovered in the interviews and observations.

Using critical race theory as a framework, the analysis describes the researcher's interpretation of how African Americans are referenced and portrayed in documents relative to the students' stories and the research theme: *Walking the Talk*. The images and references are additional illustrations that might contribute to Black students' expectations and experiences in relation to a predominantly White university.

A broad range of information is used to represent universities to prospective and current students. In response to today's wired generation, colleges and universities are increasingly turning to interactive and multimedia technology as recruiting strategies to connect with potential students. Both universities under study use print and electronic media that includes Web video and broadband Internet technology to reach a target, traditional student group that virtually grew up on the Web. For example, each institution has launched a marketing video on *YouTube*.

Data from university Internet web pages, view books, magazines, and undergraduate catalogs provided insights for this analysis. The view books and information guides were provided by the university Offices of Admissions and Enrollment Services.

Web Pages

A university's website can play a significant role in communicating the norms, values, and customs of that institution to prospective and current students. Many of today's students conducting college searches are more likely to scroll down a Web page than to look through a college catalog. To get an indication of a campus culture, online visitors to the universities under study can take an online tour through their photo galleries that reveals programs, services, and activities across the university landscape.

While conducting this analysis it occurred to me that, depending on one's perspective, the same object can be described in several different ways. Perhaps one of the benefits of White privilege is not being aware constantly of one's race; always seeing oneself as the norm. Through the lens of critical race theory, race is central to describing reality as experienced by people of color and the websites were evaluated in this vein.

Someone conducting a school search by looking at these websites might easily conclude that the university is committed to diversity. All of the website pictures were in color and reflected a diverse study body. Noticeably absent in this review were photos that might be attributed as Black faculty and staff. This would be of concern to students and parents who agree that Black faculty and staff members are important role models and mentors for Black students.

Analyzing photos from the websites looking for people of color and Black people in particular, is a very subjective process. The "typical" Black person does not exist because we come in many different hues of skin color from the lightest lights to the darkest darks. Therefore, what I have selected as the number of people who "appeared" Black to me might be a completely different number when determined by someone else.

Through the lens of critical race theory and using the Document Review Guide, I conducted a random survey of the web site from both universities and examined 89 pages of photos; 51 pages depicted 104 images from University A and 38 pages portrayed 77 images from University B. The difference in the number of pages was because University A used more photos on its website than did University B.

Of the 104 images at University A, I identified 28 or 27% as images of African Americans. From the University B website, I found that 25 of the 77 images, or 32.5%, were images of African Americans. Both of these percentages gave an enormously false image of the more factual numbers of Black students at both universities that are reported as approximately 4%. Such inflation might have significant implications for building false perspectives and expectations for potential students and parents factoring racial demographics into their college searches.

I also examined the photos through the context of stereotypical sports and music activities for Black students on predominantly White campuses. Of the 77 images of African Americans at University B, 6% depicted sports activities and 10% depicted involvement with music. At University A, 9% of the 104 images of African Americans depicted sports activities and 3% depicted music activities. I interpreted these percentages to be closer to the actual Black student demographics than were the overall image totals.

Although the photos did not conflict with publicized university diversity values, the skewed numbers might be interpreted as misleading. During the interviews, several of the students mentioned “culture shock” when they arrived on campus. This analysis demonstrates that for students who limit their college search information to a website, their experience is definitely not going to align with their expectations.

View Books

As noted previously, colleges and universities are no longer limited to recruiting students through college fairs and campus tours. In addition to websites, printed view books provide prospective students with a more traditional and tactile tool to examine a college's culture.

University A and University B have glossy, color viewbooks, provided to me by Admissions staff, with diverse representation of students and activities. In addition to action shots of sports activities and theater and musical performances, stunning aerial and panoramic photographs of the region are included.

As opposed to the website analysis where I counted the number of images reflected, in this view book analysis, I focused on the actions and activities of the Black students photographed in light of the following stereotype themes discussed in the student interviews.

The photos included:

1. a Black smiling female writing in a notebook;
2. a Black male athlete playing in a game;
3. Black and White females sitting together on the grass;
4. a smiling Black female in a music class;
5. a White smiling female instructor talking with two Black males in a classroom;
6. a Black smiling male;
7. a Black smiling female in a car with a smiling Black male;
8. Black students smiling and clapping at an event;
9. a Black male stepping (dancing);
10. a Black female basketball player on the court;
11. Black and White smiling male athletes;
12. a Black male basketball player;
13. Black male athletes in a game;
14. a Black smiling female;
15. a Black smiling female walking on campus;
16. a Black smiling female hugging a White smiling female; and
17. a Black male athlete running track.

Black students were smiling in 11 of the 17 images. One might say, “So what? People usually smile in photographs.” However, through the lens of critical race theory, the “smiling Black person” is also an enduring stereotype of Black people as “happy people” in spite of the atrocities of slavery and Jim Crow segregation.

As a stereotype, the “smiling Black person” is portrayed as unthreatening, warm, and friendly just as were 65% of the Black students in the view books. Conversely, Black people who are more serious and smile less are labeled as angry, frightening, intimidating, and ungrateful. One of the students interviewed reported that her friends called her the university’s “token Negro” because of her smiling photograph in a marketing brochure.

Another critical race perspective on the viewbook photographs can be related to the activities of the students. Only 12% of the images depicted Black students in a classroom activity whereas 47% illustrated Black students as athletes. This exemplifies the prevalence of

another stereotype: Black students are admitted into predominantly White universities because of their athletic ability instead of academic competence.

Congruent with all stereotypes that disguise the truth, the students interviewed reported that photographs taken on campus for marketing purposes were usually staged and did not always portray reality. This practice has serious implications for prospective Black students who view these materials and expect that most of the Black students on a predominantly White campus are happy athletes.

University Magazines

The division of University Advancement at University A and University B publishes university magazines that are comparable in size, format, and content. For the most part, the magazine articles relate to donor support, faculty, staff, alumni news, and achievements. The magazine could serve as a resource for current students looking for positive role models, mentors, and advocates.

In a review of the 64 pages in both magazines, I examined 179 photographs and discovered that nine (5%) were photographs of Black people. In University A's magazine, 4 of the 85 photographs and stories (4.7%) were about Black faculty or alumni. Similarly, University B's magazine contained 5 out of 94 photographs and stories (5%) that were about Black faculty or alumni.

College Catalogs

During the interviews, Shawn discussed her unmet expectation for a diversity infused curriculum that reflected Black culture. Colleges and universities around the country have developed undergraduate and graduate programs in African American studies designed to expose students to the history and culture of Americans of African descent and the impact of institutional racism on the Black experience. The college catalogs of the universities under study were examined for academic courses related to African American issues.

The Interdisciplinary Studies Department in the College of Arts and Sciences at University B offers a Minor in Black Studies to address the needs of Black students who seek to explore their heritage and non-Black students who desire an understanding of the Black experience. Examples of available courses included African American Literature, History of Africa, Recent U.S. History, History of the Old South, and Race and Minority Relations.

University A offers an African and African American Studies interdisciplinary program (AFAM) that promotes awareness and understanding of issues related to peoples of African descent. Students plan a course of study in the AFAM minor complimentary to their majors. AFAM faculty members represent disciplines that include art, criminal justice, geography, history, literature, music, political science, and sociology.

One of the students interviewed was an African American Studies minor who reported her frustration that she never had a Black instructor in this program. She was highly concerned that a White teacher of Black history would “water down” the impact of slavery and racism in this country. Allegedly, a White instructor said, “Let’s look at the positive side of slavery.” From the student’s perspective as well as through the lens of critical race theory perspective, that would not be possible.

Summary

The lack of images of Black faculty members in these documents is congruent with the theme, Black faculty where are you? In light of this review, I might add, *Black alumni where are you?* The lack of positive Black images in university publications reinforces negative stereotypes and has implications for recruiting and retaining Black students, faculty, and staff. Through the lens of critical race theory, the exclusion of positive Black images is an indication of not overt racism, but a sort of subtle discrimination that is incongruent with the universities’ stated diversity values.

Observation Analysis

As a long-term resident of a southern Appalachian region that is 95% White, and as an alumna and student at a university that is 96% White, I acknowledge that the centrality of race and the effects of racism are daily and persistent-lived experiences. Each is inextricably intertwined into a relentless awareness of what Du Bois (1897) described as a double consciousness, “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” (p. 2).

No matter where I go in this area, whether to the mall or the grocery store, it is rare that I see another person of color. I am always astutely aware that I am “the other” and that my motives are suspect. Almost always when I see another African American, known or unknown, we nod and smile in silent agreement that it is good to see that we are not in the struggle alone.

In addition to my self-awareness as a person of color in a predominantly White environment, while conducting this research, there was an additional double consciousness as an observer-participant who was continually trying to balance the subjective and objective researcher role as an insider and outsider. According to Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2007), with fieldwork there is “detachment and involvement, subjectivity and objectivity, insider and outsider stances” (p. 9). The reality of the students I interviewed was also my reality, their stories were also my stories, and I intensely understood their pains and passions to overcome the odds and successfully persist to graduation.

This process was a personal journey that required me to confront my own demons, frustrations, and challenges to find confidence and competence in an environment that does not reflect my culture and heritage. The observation guide kept me focused on recording the events as they pertained to the research study. Field notes reflected the detailed attention I paid to issues such as weather conditions, the challenge of finding a parking place on campus, tape recorder malfunctions (I had four), getting lost on campus, and fears about driving 70 miles home late at night on empty stretches of winding roads after interviewing students or attending evening events at University B.

During the observations, the lens of critical race theory validated the centrality of race and permitted me the privilege of giving voice to those experiences as my story, my reality. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), “The ‘voice’ component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice” (p. 58).

Over the course of the study, I attended events at both campuses including sporting events, celebrity lectures, Black Student Organization meetings, Black Greek organization meetings, Diversity Council meetings, Black History Month events, theater performances, and a Black faculty and staff presentation, most of which occurred during Black History Month.

Two stories from my observation field notes reflected congruence with themes that emerged from the interviews and document analyses.

Stereotypes: They Said “Black,” Right?

The following is presented as written in my field notes:

Today was one of those days when I actually looked forward to the 2-hour drive across the mountain. There can be no place in this country more beautiful in the fall than this region of southern Appalachia. The drive takes me by breathtaking scenery with stunning mountain vistas, a lake that looks like glass, bristling streams, and tree leaves with colors so bright that in combination, make me more grateful for God’s majesty and tapestry. I have made the trip so many times that I can now anticipate the next valley, mountain range, creek, house, and gas station. There are long stretches of highway with no signs of human life. I always remember to fill up and have the car checked; I have no faith that if my car broke down that I would get the help I need.

Today I was able to spend more time with the Black students at University B. They invited me to come over for a Black student organization meeting followed by a Meet the (Black) Greeks orientation. Finding a parking space was easier than it was the last time I was here and I found a spot close to the student center. I was running late because it took me awhile to find the name of the meeting room that I was given. When I walked in, I thought I was in the wrong place because about one third of the students in the room were White and there was a female White student leading a discussion. I did not want to disturb the meeting in progress but I needed to find out where I was supposed to be so I softly walked over to one of the Black students near the back of the room and I whispered, “Excuse me but I’m trying to find the Black Student Organization meeting.” When he whispered back, “This is it,” my first thought was that he misheard what I said. He did hear me say, “Black,” right? How could this be? You talk about culture shock! I

took a seat and watched these young Black and White students discuss plans and projects to increase campus-wide awareness and support for Black issues. I found out that the President of the organization was a Black male and the White female student at the front of the room when I walked in was the Vice-President! As I watched them work in partnership, I could not help but think, now here is a model for Barack and Hillary. I will speak of this experience for a long time to come.

Stereotypes: The Basketball Game

Following is another segment as recorded in my field notes:

It's a cold day in mid-February and I drove to the campus of University B for a basketball game. I don't even know where the games are played but as I approached the campus, I saw a group of cars lined up and I decided to follow them, hopefully to the basketball arena (there is safety in numbers). When those cars pulled into a Permit Parking Only restricted lot guarded by campus security, I realized that they had led me as far as they could and now I was on my own. Somehow, I felt deserted and alone. I looked around for a public parking lot but didn't see anything unrestricted so I decided to approach the two White security guards and ask for their help.

I pulled up close to the security gate and as the guard approached, I smiled as big as I could and said, "Excuse me sir, but I've come from out of state for a basketball game but I can't find a parking place. Would you please give me directions to a public parking lot?" Much to my surprise, he said, "This is your first time here? Well, welcome to our university and come right on in!" This was certainly not the response I expected. Was it because I was Black and they were White? Was it because of my out of state license plate? It was probably a little of both. I'm almost always surprised when White people are nice to me; I suppose it's from the many years of training that I've had to the contrary. This parking lot attendant's behavior was definitely atypical. After parking my car, I walked over to him, told him that I was conducting research on the university and would like to get both their names, and promised to let the executive leadership staff know how well they represented the university. They seemed stunned to hear that I was a researcher and eagerly gave me their names. Walking away, I felt like I had just dispelled another stereotype and so had they.

Concluding Statement

This study comprised a narrative of the expectations and experiences of 20 successful African American students at two predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia. The data began with a description of the students' family backgrounds. Compared to high school or a community college where most of them were academically successful, several of the students said they experienced a rocky start at their universities.

The academic, cultural, and social demands at their respective predominantly White universities were often overwhelming. Several of the instructors, although generally helpful, contributed to the students' stress through negative stereotyping and racist behavior in the classroom. White students are not subjected to racial slurs and racist acts such as the noose incident alluded to by several of the study's participants. Racist, negative experiences with community members, community police, and campus security added to the students' academic, cultural, and social challenges.

The students identified support services and supportive staff members as being “safe havens” who provided a shoulder to cry on or a willingness to listen and help. In conclusion, the students offered recommendations for improving the campus climate for future Black students; and, in spite of the difficulties they faced, most of the students said that they would recommend their university to their siblings and to other prospective Black students.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

"I would encourage Black students like me to come and positively impact this university for the better. If they don't come, then it's going to stay just like it is."

(Shawn, a participant in the study).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the findings of the study in relation to the literature review, succinct answers to the research questions that guided the study, and recommendations for institutional practices and future research. The previous four chapters described the theoretical and practical landscape for the academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences of 20 successful African American students at two predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia. Their stories and perspectives as presented in Chapter 4 were the primary focus of the study. It is through their voices and experiences that university faculty members, staff, and administrators can increase awareness of the persistence of racism and racist behaviors and develop strategies to create campus and classroom environments that are more welcoming, affirming, supportive, and respectful of all students.

Data from the study were consistent with the literature findings related to Black students' experiences at predominantly White universities. As an example, Fries-Britt and Turner (2002), found that increased understanding concerning academic, cultural, and social experiences of Black students is essential to improving their college experiences and degree attainment rates. This study adds to the body of literature by providing a context for understanding African American students' expectations and experiences on two predominantly White campuses in Southern Appalachia.

From my personal concern regarding the educational disparities and graduation rates between Black and White college students, my objective was to discover the factors involved with their choice to matriculate at a predominantly White institution, their expectations of the campus culture prior to their arrival, their campus experiences in light of those expectations, and

the institutional practices that supported or discouraged their academic success and persistence to graduation. According to Jones (2003), feeling alienated from the academic and social campus life is one of the main reasons that minority students drop out.

The intent of the study was to detail and describe the academic, social, and cultural expectations and experiences of participating African American juniors and seniors at two peer universities in Southern Appalachia. Their stories should provide and improve understanding of their student-institution relationship and their perceptions of institutional practices that promote or hinder their success.

The significance of the study is to contribute valuable information to university administrators who might recognize the academic, social, and cultural challenges for Black students on their campuses and identify institutional changes that need to occur to enhance their learning and support and increase their chances to persist to graduation. The secondary objective was to fill the gap and enhance the body of literature concerning the Black experience on White campuses in Southern Appalachia. Previous studies focused on why Black students failed at predominantly White institutions; I wanted to investigate the academic, social, and cultural expectations and experiences of students and factors that led to their success and persistence to graduation. To that end, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their academic expectations and experiences?
2. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their cultural expectations and experiences?
3. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White institutions in Southern Appalachia describe their social expectations and experiences?
4. How do African American juniors and seniors attending two predominantly White

institutions in Southern Appalachia describe institutional practices that promote or obstruct their persistence to graduation?

The challenge and attraction of this qualitative research investigation was to answer these questions by means of an ethnographic approach through the lens of critical race theory. The challenge of ethnography was to successfully collect, analyze, and interpret data that illustrated the sociocultural realities for Black students in predominantly White campus community environments. In addition, ethnography is a time-intensive approach to research. Every aspect took longer than I originally thought especially finding 20 students to agree to participate in the study. It came as a surprise to me that students of the wired generation pay far more attention to text messaging and Facebook notes than they do e-mail. The advantage of an ethnographic approach was the ability to immerse myself in the campus cultures, to meet and spend time with successful Black juniors and seniors, to share their positive and pejorative experiences, and most importantly, to hear their stories of tribulation and triumph.

Conducting the investigation through the lens of critical race theory was challenging because it informs us that racism is an ever-present reality. Racism is often cleverly disguised as deficiencies of the oppressed instead of a weapon wielded by the majority to mute and marginalize minorities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The unmasking of racism on college campuses, the bastion of intelligence, was and continues to be a challenge. Previous researchers have examined the reasons for the erosion of Black students' academic performance compared with their White peers (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Mow & Nettles, 1990). The benefits of critical race theory could be applied to increased understanding of the centrality of race and the acknowledgement of educational inequities in the classroom. An additional advantage of critical race theory was that it sanctioned the telling of stories as a powerful tool to challenge the status quo and contest negative stereotypes.

In this chapter, several findings are presented and discussed in relation to this study, previous research, and theory. Conclusions drawn from the findings and research questions are presented. Finally, recommendations for research and improved practices conclude the study.

Research Findings with Comparisons to the Literature

For purposes of organization and in accordance with the research questions, this section contains the following categories: (a) academic experiences: faculty influences; (b) cultural experiences: environmental influences; (c) social experiences: racial identity influences; and (d) institutional practices: walking the talk. Each category presents the major research findings of the study together with brief comparisons with the literature. It is my intent to describe what was learned from this investigation and how the findings compared to existing literature concerning African American students' experiences at predominantly White universities. Although these findings are specific to African American students at two universities in Southern Appalachia, their implications might be considered for other colleges and universities in this region of the country.

Academic Experiences: Faculty Influences

Faculty influence was a major theme that emerged from my interviews. The literature was extensive regarding faculty influence on Black students' experience and persistence. A study by Allen (1985) established that for Black students on predominantly White campuses, relationships with faculty are effective predictors of student outcomes. Similarly, Fischer (2007) asserted that Black students with stronger ties to professors rated their college experiences more positively.

Most of the students in this study reported very positive comments about the faculty but also spoke of significant needs for improvement particularly in the area of cultural sensitivity training to eliminate stereotypical comments and behaviors in the classroom. The literature suggested Black students have consistently reported believing that White faculty were prejudiced toward them (Allen, Bobo, & Fleuranges, 1984; Dinka, Mazzella, & Pilant, 1980; Semmes, 1985; Smith, 1980). Consequently, these students often have difficulty forming relationships with White faculty members (Boyd, 1979; Dinka et al.).

The importance of maintaining a supportive academic environment was discussed by Fries-Britt and Turner (2002). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that faculty had one of the strongest impacts on student involvement and persistence, both in and outside of the classroom setting. Nettles (1991) suggested that the ease of developing relationships with faculty was one of four factors that led to academic integration for African American students. However, Kobrak (1992) found that some faculty members viewed their roles as academicians and researchers as opposed to facilitators and retention agents.

According to the students in the study, faculty members had both a positive and negative impact on their successful persistence toward graduation. The students described some faculty as helpful” and “friendly” and others as “racist, weird,” and “uncaring.” One student used the term “disappointing” regarding an instructor in her department who pointed to the student in a stereotypical, negative manner. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident and warrants additional comments.

As the theme *stereotypes: representing the race* suggested, the students reported that White faculty members repeatedly singled them out as “Black spokespersons” for the entire African American community. Because the students were most often the only African American (or one of few) in the class, they did not need the additional pressure or false responsibility to be the “voice” of all Black people. Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) suggested that even though Black students might present a unique point of view, they should not be expected to serve as resources or to speak as an expert during cultural or ethnic discussions.

Pouncey (1993) reported that Black students were often asked to represent the “Black perspective “as if such a monolithic view truly existed. I have often wondered about the response of an academic community if a Black faculty member asked a White student to address the universal view of White people relative to a specific topic. Such an occurrence often has been the experience of students of color in the classroom and has implications for their perception of a positive, welcoming, institutional environment. Kobrak (1992) found that

pejorative Black students' experiences in the classroom with faculty facilitated racist behavior by students and other instructors.

Cultural Experiences: Environmental Influences

The students who participated in this study described a discrepancy between their cultural experiences and their expectations. According to Kuh et al. (2005), when students' expectations closely match their reality, they have a better connection with their college environment. Moneta and Kuh (2005) found that inconsistencies between students' expectations and subsequent experiences had a significant influence on their success and desired academic outcomes.

Stage and Manning (1992) pointed out that minority students often were expected to adapt to the existing, often unwelcoming environment of the majority culture. The students in the study depicted campus and off-campus communities that were significantly racially and ethnically segregated, unwelcoming, intimidating, and racist. One of the students said, "I expected it to be different." The campus tours, orientations, recruiting conversations, and university marketing materials portrayed a campus that was inviting, warm, and receptive to the needs of all students. When placed in campus environments that are not welcoming, students' feelings of alienation can increase with a correlating increase in student attrition rates. Jones (2000) found that a large part of Black students' early departures from predominantly White institutions was because of poor institutional climates and instances of racism.

Before they can concentrate on academics, students must feel comfortable in the campus environment. According to Strange and Banning (2001), "Campus environments set conditions that affect student learning" (p. 200). According to the students' stories in this study, Black students at predominantly White universities experience this environment differently from their White peers. Edgert (1994) reported, "A better understanding of campus climate may be a critical element in enhancing diversity in our colleges and universities" (p. 51).

The influence of the campus climate on the persistence of Black students at predominantly White institutions was illustrated by multiple studies in the literature (Benton,

2001; Cabrera et al., 1999; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Gloria et al., 1999; Hinderlie, 2002; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado et al., 1998).

Cureton (2003) found that Black students' experiences with campus police were significant indicators of a campus' racial climate. The study's participants discussed tensions involving Black students and campus and community police. They reported that "for no reason" campus and community police often "shut down" Black social functions. One student in the study related an incident where [White] campus police refused to stop and help a Black student who was having a seizure.

Racist incidents with members of the off-campus communities further denoted the universities' overall racial environment for Black students. One student reported that when he and a group of Black friends were physically assaulted by White males from the community, the police arrived and immediately assumed that the Black students had started the altercation. Black students' perceptions of unfair treatment, prejudices, and social injustices by campus and local police might be associated with a belief that these incidents are legitimized and supported by university practices and policies that privilege White people.

Social Experiences: Identity Influences

According to Jones (2003), a sense of comfort in the social context is a prerequisite for psychological well-being and successful academic performance. In her seminal book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, clinical psychologist Tatum (1997) emphasized that students of color in predominantly White environments need identity-affirming experiences. Racial identity development, the central focus of Tatum's book was defined as "the process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group" (p. 16). The choice to affiliate with groups of racially, ethnically, or culturally similar people plays an important role in combating racism and pejorative stereotypes.

Most of the students in the study reported that they were affiliated with Black fraternities or sororities and Black Student Organizations. The students admitted that racial segregation on

their campuses was most apparent in the student cafeteria. Is this self-segregation a problem to be fixed or a coping strategy that that needs to be understood and validated? I suggest the latter. When Black students gather to maintain some semblance of solidarity among themselves, they are demonstrating a resistance to racism as opposed to what some White students might view as racist behavior. Schwalbe (2008) suggested that this was a false parallel because it does not take into account the historical responsibility for racism and the significant differences in power between Blacks and Whites in this country. The genesis of many of the predominantly Black organizations on campuses resulted from exclusion from the dominant campus community (Williams, 1994).

For many Africa American students, going to a predominantly White college represents what Jones (2003) referred to as a “disjunction,” a separation from family and cultural heritage (p. 8). In an attempt to remedy this circumstance, these students need to identify and engage with a community commonly based on race or culture (Sedlacek (1987). Within these specific-to-culture communities, Black students discover the advice, counsel, direction, and support to sustain them as they confront the campus community systems they must negotiate.

From the theme that focused on social life, students discussed the scarcity of social outlets on the campus that appeal to Black students. Even those who were engaged with campus organizations often commented, “There’s nothing for us to do here.” Those students who choose not to join a Black sorority or fraternity or to associate with the Black student organizations said they felt even more isolated and alienated from campus social activities. One of the students who participated in activities such as barnyard dances or skiing was told by other Black students, “That’s the White coming out of you.”

Because the students interviewed were juniors and seniors persisting towards graduation, they had learned to adjust to the limited social opportunities and reported that it allowed them more time to concentrate on their studies. Allen (1992) found that immersion in studies was an example of how Black students coped at predominantly White universities.

Institutional Practices

A significant factor in the academic, cultural, and social success of minority students has been the institutional context of providing a learning community where barriers to success are minimized and experiences for optimal growth and development are maximized (Holmes, et al., 2000). During the interviews, three principal themes emerged relating to administrators, faculty, and staff practices that illustrated how institutional practices impacted these students. These were: (a) the importance of staff support to their success, (b) the need to recruit more Black faculty and mentors, and (c) the need for “listening leaders” who make time in their busy schedules for their most important constituents, their students.

Staff

According to Saddlemire (1996), African American students continue to perceive predominantly White institutions as hostile, unsupportive, and unwelcoming. These were among the cultural climate descriptors that the students reported in the interviews. To overcome these challenges and effectively cope with an often-alienating environment, the students were quick to recognize and name specific Black staff members who provided them with a “safe haven.”

According to Kimbrough, Molock, and Walton (1996) and Thompson and Fretz (1991), African Americans construct social values more from a family or group orientation than do other ethnic groups. Fleming (1984) found that some Black students resorted to cultural social values and sought out Black allies for affirmation and support in the midst of a hostile environment.

Several of the students expressed this collectively. One student elaborated:

Black staff work really hard to make sure that minority students feel comfortable here. They have a vested interest in every Black student on this campus. If they see you and you look like you're not happy as normal they're like...what's wrong? Are you OK? Do you need something? I think that if I needed anything...whether it is a piece of gum or a dollar, I think I could go to either one of them and ask for it. If they don't have it, they would do anything in their power to make sure that I had it. Having that type of relationship with staff makes a difference.

Promoting the success of all students is the challenge and responsibility of all university personnel starting with the university's president. Considering the plethora of college mission statements that include a commitment to diversity, I was disappointed and surprised at the scarcity of research that addresses the university president's role in improving recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of students and minority students in particular. Structural and functional changes in the institution might be required to accommodate the diverse perspectives, needs, skills, attitudes, and cultural backgrounds that accompany students of color to predominantly White campuses (Green, 2001). The president should be empowered to bring all campus constituencies together to address these issues.

As with any leadership role, I believe that listening is an important concept and the students who were interviewed agreed. When a leader communicates effectively with his or her constituents, it opens the door for rhetoric to be separated from reality. The students were asked what they would request of a university president to help them achieve their academic goals. A repeated response was to have a listening leader who would meet with them on a consistent basis and listen to their concerns.

Two students commented:

At least once a semester the leadership needs to have an open dialogue with students. Leaders should be student-centered. I get that the leaders are really busy because I'm really busy but I still find time to connect with people.

[The president] just really needs to listen to the students, listen to what they have to say...just really making sure that their voices are heard, just making them feel like what they say matters. What I have to say, you [the president] need to care about and it's a big deal because any student, not just African American, wants to know that they're important and that their being here is helping this campus in some way...that being here is important to the faculty; that I'm not just a number, I'm a person and I want people to respect me for who I am."

Without placing complete responsibility on the individual university presidents, the pervasive and pejorative attitudes and behaviors illustrated by stereotypical and racist incidents as reported by the students might be indicators of governance systems and policies that guide and control the higher education milieu. As Atwell (1988) said, "I propose that we acknowledge that

many of the structures and values that we accept on our campuses are actually obstacles to the educational success of minorities” (p. 8).

To help them effectively cope with racism, racist attitudes and behaviors, and challenging adjustments to a predominantly White university, the participating students repeatedly mentioned the need for African American faculty as role models and mentors as presented in the theme *Black Faculty: Where Are You?* According to Smith (2000), faculty members of color serving as role models can provide a sense of connectedness and emotional as well as social support. By extension, this student-faculty relationship might help to increase the retention of students of color. However, before adding responsibilities, administrators need to consider existing strains on Black faculty members who often serve in several university-related activities on top of class loads. For example, as opposed to a heavier workload burden, administrators might demonstrate their value for Black faculty as mentors for tenure and promotion considerations.

Predominantly White universities need to increase efforts to recruit and retain faculty and staff of color. The students in this study said they felt it would be a valuable experience to have someone who could personally relate to their culture and challenges in order to be successful on a predominantly White campus. Sedlacek (1999) suggested that the absence of diverse cultural perspectives pertinent to Black students could also have an effect on their learning, progress, and identification with the institution.

DeFour and Hirsch (1990) found that the mere presence of faculty of color provided confirmation to students of color that they could complete their degrees and become competent, successful professionals. Both universities that participated in the study had Black faculty and staff associations who could work with administrators to increase their numbers on campus and address the need for more Black role models and mentors as requested by Black students.

Research Conclusions

This section presents answers to each of the primary research questions that directed this study. It is divided into four subsections that focus on the academic, cultural, and social

expectations and experiences of the participating students and institutional practices that contributed to or discouraged their successful retention, persistence, and graduation.

Academic Expectations and Experiences

The students interviewed in this study enrolled at their universities with the expectation that, because they were “invited,” they would be welcomed and treated with equal levels of support and respect as provided to all students. In reality, they experienced positive and negative encounters in academic settings. Their stories told of challenges in focusing on their academic success while simultaneously combating a campus and community racial environment where racist comments, slurs, and behaviors that denigrate African Americans are evident. Positive experiences included the relationships that they developed with supportive faculty members.

From the voices of the students, it is clear that African American students attending predominantly White universities are not afforded the privilege of “just being a student.” On the contrary, because of the color of their skin, they are *hypervisible* students and therefore susceptible to levels of scrutiny, evaluation, criticism, and accountability not afforded to their privileged White peers. This *hypervisibility* was evident by students being “singled out” in the classroom and negatively stereotyped by instructors who demonstrate a lack of sensitivity to the social and psychological needs of their Black students. The story from the student who was asked to leave the class so that the other [White] students could “say how they really feel about Black people,” is a clear example of this vulnerability experienced by Black students.

Cultural Expectations and Experiences

The campus environment is central to how all college students experience reality. For African Americans in predominantly White environments, race is the filter through which they view a campus environment that often ignores or makes their cultural realities invisible in a dominant culture.

The students reported that they expected to find a majority White campus culture that would be significantly different from their own, but they often experienced “culture shock” because of the campus' racial climate and their negative, racist interactions with White faculty, students, campus' community police, and the community-at-large. Some of the students said they perceived the campus culture as being hostile, unsupportive, and unwelcoming. A significant portion of their collegiate experience was spent on struggling with these environmental challenges.

Several of the students expressed the expectation that by choosing to attend a predominantly White university as opposed to an historically Black college or university, they would be able to give more focused attention to their studies in an environment of respect and support for their unique culture and heritage. Their stories illustrated a different reality. Because their institutions displayed a commitment to diversity in the recruitment and orientation process, their subsequent experiences with pejorative realities of a monocultural environment were often expressed as disappointing and deceptive. Their expectations and preconceived notions were often not in sync with their experienced reality.

Social Expectations and Experiences

Most of the students interviewed stated that they expected to have an active social life that is typically associated with the college experience. Even though most of them were extensively involved with social and cultural student organizations including fraternities and sororities, they expressed their disappointment and frustration with the racially segregated environment in which several of these organizations operate. In particular, racial tensions between Black Greek and White Greek organizations were often discussed. Black students who chose not to engage with Black student-led campus organizations stated that they felt alienated from both the Black student community and the majority campus community.

Aside from campus organizations, the students stated that they expected that just because they chose a predominantly White university, they would not have to totally sacrifice their

sociocultural needs and interests relating to faith, music, and fun. However, their experience was to the contrary. For example, several students stated that because of the lack of Black churches in their campus communities, they had to put worship “on hold” until they could get back home. The absence of a radio station that plays hip-hop, jazz, and rhythm and blues was often mentioned as an indication of a campus climate that did not recognize the significance of this genre of music to Africa American students. Finally, the students reported that a “night life” for Black students was essentially nonexistent in the communities-at-large.

Institutional Practices

The students in this study described institutional practices that promoted or obstructed their persistence to graduation. Their stories illustrated the impact of all levels of the university community including administration, faculty, and staff on their total educational experience. Student-centered administrators, including but not exclusive to the president, who take the time to meet with and listen to Black students demonstrate a genuine care and concern for their academic achievements, cultural adjustment, and social contentment. Students who established a positive relationship with the university's leadership personnel expressed the positive impact that this had on their overall college experience. Where diversity was included as a university value, the students expected the administration to “walk the talk.”

As noted elsewhere, students' relationships with faculty were one of the most valuable predictors of student outcomes. Accordingly, the students stated their appreciation for and the significance of supportive faculty relationships to their academic progress and persistence. They also expressed frustration and disappointment with faculty members who demonstrated racist attitudes and stereotyping, especially when considering these same faculty members served as academic role models and campus leaders. In addition, the students related their need for Black faculty mentors who can empathize with the unique pressures and challenges that Black students face on predominantly White campuses.

The university positions most often mentioned as being central to recruitment and retention were Black staff in Admissions and Student Services. Most of the students were actively recruited by their universities with scholarship offers serving as a major incentive for enrollment. However, the positive encouragement and support received from these specific personnel was a primary factor in the students' choice of university. In addition to providing institutional support, these staff members were repeatedly praised for addressing the students' basic personal needs for comfort and safety.

Recommendations to Improve Practice

To improve the recruitment, quality of educational experience, retention, and graduation rates of African American students it is recommended that administrators, faculty members, and staff work together to develop Student Success programs, services, policies, and initiatives that are most appropriate to help them succeed. In addition, issues of race, racism, and the campus racial climate must continue to be viewed through the perspectives of African American students. To that end, effective strategies must address not only the needs of the students but also the overt and covert racism and racist behaviors that exist on these campuses.

An unequivocal, explicit commitment by the highest levels of university leadership to enhancing student success is essential. Executive leadership administrators should meet frequently with all students and African American students in particular to assure that they are responding effectively to their needs. This commitment must be demonstrated and practiced throughout every facet of a student's academic, cultural, and social experience.

The following list of recommendations outlines strategies for improving the institutional environment for African American students on predominantly White campuses as suggested by this research study. There is a need for:

1. developing or strengthening cultural sensitivity training programs for all administrators, faculty, staff, and students designed to create an inclusive and supportive campus climate; these programs must be "sold" in a manner that encourages support and diminishes resistance.

2. committing to the recruitment and retention of Black faculty, staff, and administrators;
3. developing comprehensive orientation and retention programs, with a focus on student success, to help Black students adjust to and engage with predominantly White universities;
4. developing or strengthening peer student and faculty mentoring programs;
5. providing and demonstrating strong support for Black student organizations;
6. providing and demonstrating strong support for Black-oriented social and cultural events;
7. providing a diversity-infused curriculum with African American Studies classes that are consistently taught by African American faculty members;
8. increasing scholarship opportunities to reduce the effect of student loans;
9. developing or strengthening programs with K-12 school systems that prepare all students for academic success in a multicultural collegiate environment; and
10. developing or strengthening partnerships with community leaders including community police that address racial issues and improve the local racial climate.

Recommendations for Future Research

From personal and student participants' concerns, the following recommendations are made for future studies regarding the African American experience on college campuses:

1. A study to explore the expectations and experiences of Black faculty and staff at predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia.
2. A study to explore the perceptions of White students relative to the Black student experience on predominantly White campuses.
3. A study that addresses the university president's role in improving recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of minority students at predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia.
4. A study to determine the expectations and experiences of White students at historically Black colleges and universities (not location specific).
5. A study to explore the expectations and experiences of White faculty at historically Black colleges and universities (not location specific).
6. A study to investigate experiences of students of color pertaining to campus security and community police practices at predominantly White universities (not location specific).

7. A study addressing factors that contribute to the segregation of Black Greek and White Greek programs at predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia.

Concluding Statement

“...the spiritual striving of the freedmen’s sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength, but who bear it in the name of an historic race, in the name of this the land of their fathers’ fathers, and in the name of human opportunity.”

(Du Bois, 1903, p. 14).

Over 100 years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois, a renowned civil rights activist and scholar, addressed the deleterious effects of institutional racism on people of color in the United States. The stories of the students in this study revealed that racism continues to be a pervasive reality in the hallowed halls of the universities they attend.

I have attempted to examine the expectations and experiences of African American students at two predominantly White universities in Southern Appalachia. Through student interviews, document analyses, and observations, information was collected, analyzed, and reported and research topics for future consideration were presented. The African American juniors and seniors who participated in this study might have been few in number, but as reflected in the above quote from Du Bois, their “burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength.” Their persistence to succeed, in spite of the challenges, is a testament of their resolve, intellect, resilience, and character. Their success is also reflective of their families, friends, campus administrators, faculty members, and staff who supported their efforts. It was my honor to witness and report the significant power of resolve and respect over the ignorance and evil of racism.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Name of Participant _____ Location _____ Date _____

Background:

1. What is your home town?
2. Tell me about your family.
3. Are you a junior or senior?
4. What is your major?
5. Why did you choose [University Name]?
6. What factors have kept you at [University Name]?

Academic Expectations and Experiences:

1. Prior to enrollment, what were your academic achievement expectations?
2. Describe your academic achievement experiences in light of those expectations.
3. What academic experiences have you enjoyed the most?
4. What academic experiences have you enjoyed the least?
5. When do you intend to graduate?
6. What are your career goals?
7. How would you describe the effectiveness of [University Name] in addressing your academic needs?
8. What would you recommend to improve academic experiences for African American students?

Cultural Expectations and Experiences:

1. Describe the African American community on campus.
2. Describe what it is like to be Black on a predominantly White campus.
3. Describe the interactions between Black and White students on campus.
4. Describe any instances of racism and segregation on campus.
5. Describe the racial climate at [University Name]. Is it hostile? Is it receptive?
6. What cultural experiences were you expecting at [University Name]?
7. Describe your cultural experiences at [University Name].
8. What cultural experiences have you enjoyed the most?
9. What cultural experiences have you enjoyed the least?
10. What would you recommend to improve cultural experiences for African American students?

Social Expectations and Experiences:

1. Do you live on or off campus?
2. Tell me about your social affiliations at [University Name].
3. Who do you spend the majority of your time with on campus?
4. Are you connected to this campus community? If so, how did that happen?
5. What were your expectations of your campus social life at [University Name]?
6. Describe your experiences in light of those expectations.
7. What do you recommend to improve social experiences for African American students?
8. What do you enjoy the least about your social experiences at [University Name]?
9. What do you enjoy the most about your social experiences at [University Name]?
10. Describe the relationships between Black students, faculty, staff, and administrators.
11. How would you describe the effectiveness of [University Name] in addressing your social needs?
12. What you recommend to improve social experiences for African American students?

Institutional Practices:

1. Describe those institutional practices (policies, programs, services) that promote academic achievement and persistence to graduation.
2. Describe those institutional practices (policies, programs, services) that obstruct academic achievement and persistence to graduation.
3. Describe any institutional practices that might reinforce and improve the educational experiences of African American students.
4. What institutional practices do you believe to be critical for success?
5. What recommendations do you have for increasing recruitment, retention, and persistence-to-graduation rates for African American students at [University Name]?

APPENDIX B
Observation Guide

1. Describe the physical environment.
2. What is the context?
3. For what kinds of behavior is the setting designed?
4. How is the space allocated? Describe the lighting and acoustics.
5. What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?
6. Describe the participants in the scene.
7. How many people are present?
8. What are their roles?
9. What brings these people together?
10. Who is not here who might be expected to be here?
11. What are the relevant characteristics of the participants?
12. How do the participants interact with the activity and with one another?
13. Are participants behaving in a segregated or integrated manner?
14. When did the activity begin? How long does it last?
15. What is the content of conversations in this setting?
16. Who is talking with whom? Who is not talking?
17. Include direct quotes and summarize conversations.
18. Note silences and non-verbal behavior that add meaning to the exchange.
19. How are people dressed?
20. What is my role, whether as an observer or an intimate participant, affecting the scene I am observing? What are my thoughts about what is going on?

APPENDIX C

Document Review Guide

1. Describe the document
2. For what purposes was it produced?
3. When was it produced?
4. Where did I find the document?
5. Who authored or generated the document?
6. For whom was the document intended?
7. What is the history of its production and use?
8. What photographs, if any, are shown on the document?
9. Is the document a primary or secondary source?
10. Did anyone lead me to the document? If so, who was it?
11. Is it a public, internal, or private document? If private, to whom does it belong?
12. Is the document complete, as originally constructed?
13. Has it been tampered with or edited?
14. What does the document imply about the university's commitment to diversity?
15. What does the document imply about the university's support of its African American students?
16. What is the document topic or issue?
17. In what ways does the document conflict or agree with publicized university policies, procedures, and values?
18. List any unique document characteristics.
19. List any economic implications. Is it in color? Are there photographs? What is the quality of the paper?
20. What, if anything, does the document show to express diversity values?

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Forms

**[NAME] UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (ICD)**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Brenda White Wright

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Expectations and Experiences of African American Students at Two Predominantly White Universities in Southern Appalachia*

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

I. PURPOSE:

The primary purpose of this research study is to fulfill the requirements for completing a doctorate degree in educational leadership and policy analysis at [Name University]. The intent of the study is two-fold: (a) to describe the academic, social and cultural expectations and experiences of African American juniors and seniors at [Name University] and [Name University]; and (b) to examine institutional policies and practices that may support or obstruct their plans to graduate.

II. PROCEDURES

Prospective African American juniors and seniors will be identified and contacted by e-mail through [Name], [University].

One-on-One Interviews: The researcher will meet with a minimum of five different students on an individual basis regarding their academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences.

With participants' signed permission, the sessions will be recorded and the researcher will take notes.

III. POSSIBLE RISKS

Due to the subject matter and confidential identities, there are no foreseeable physical, psychological, economic, social or legal risks to the participants enrolled in the study that might cause anxiety, discomfort, or distress when answering interview questions about student

Ver. 1/7/08

Page_____

Subject Initials _____

success. To eliminate the possibility of risks, participants may choose to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study. ***Pseudonyms chosen by the students will be used during the data collection process and in the printed dissertation.*** Also, at the conclusion of the interviews and subsequent transcriptions, participants will be allowed to review their personal transcripts for accuracy and potential changes. Additionally, each participant will be offered copies of his or her interview scripts and the final study.

IV. POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The potential benefit of your participation is to contribute key information to university administrators as they plan, implement, and evaluate the learning environment and social climate for African American students that might improve their college experience and increase their possibility for graduation. Your stories, concerns, struggles, and suggestions for improving university policies and practices will be told, heard, and reported to the administrative and academic communities. Identifying your expectations and experiences might provide a basis for facilitating new dialogue and designing institutional initiatives, programs, policies, and services that will assist African American students, if not all students, in gaining the tools needed for academic, cultural, and social success leading to graduation. Your collective voices could potentially serve as guides in creating more effective diversity initiatives pedagogies, and practices.

V. ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in [location name] for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the university, and personnel particular to this research who are member of my doctoral research committee have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

VI. COMPENSATION

No compensation will be provided to the participants.

Ver. 1/7/08

Page _____

Subject Initials _____

VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW & VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participants are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without consequence. Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling me, Brenda White Wright at (XXX) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at [address]. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

This research project was approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board of [Name University] on January 23, 2008. The IRB Reference number is 08-141.

IX. SUBJECT’S RESPONSIBILITIES

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study by allowing through an interview with the researcher.

X. CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any research-related questions or problems at any time, you may call me, Brenda White Wright at XXX-xxx-xxxx or my doctoral research chairman, Dr. Jasmine Renner, at XXX-xxx-xxxx. You may also call Dr. [Name], [University] Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at (XXX) xxx-xxxx for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team, you may call Mrs. [Name] at (XXX) xxx-xxxx.

XI. SUBJECT’S PERMISSION

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR DATE

Ver. 1/7/08 Page _____ Subject Initials _____

**[NAME] UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (ICD)**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Brenda White Wright

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Expectations and Experiences of African-American Students at Two Predominantly White Universities in Southern Appalachia*

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research study is to fulfill the requirements for completing a doctorate degree in education. The intent of the study is two-fold: (a) to describe the academic, social and cultural expectations and experiences of African American juniors and seniors at [Name] University and [Name] University; and (b) to examine institutional policies and practices that may support or obstruct their plans to graduate.

DURATION

Students will participate in either a focus group discussion lasting approximately 90 minutes or a one-on-one interview that should last approximately one hour.

PROCEDURES

Focus Group: There will be a minimum of five students in the focus group answering questions regarding their academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences.

One-on-One Interviews: The researcher will meet with a minimum of five different students on an individual basis regarding their academic, cultural, and social expectations and experiences.

In both cases, the sessions will be recorded and the researcher will take notes.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS

There are no alternative procedures except non- participation.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.

Ver. 1/7/08

Page _____

Subject Initials _____

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The potential benefit of your participation is to contribute key information to university administrators as they plan, implement, and evaluate the learning environment and social climate for African American students that might improve their college experience and increase their possibility for graduation.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling me, Brenda White Wright at (XXX) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at [address] . You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any research-related questions or problems at any time, you may call me, Brenda White Wright at XXX-xxx-xxxx or my doctoral research chairman, Dr. Jasmine Renner, at XXX-xxx-xxxx. You may also call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at (XXX) xxx-xxxx for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (XXX) xxx-xxxx or (XXX) xxx-xxxx.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in [location name] for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the university, and personnel particular to this research who are members of my doctoral research committee have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT _____ DATE _____

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT _____ DATE _____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR _____ DATE _____

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable) _____ DATE _____

APPENDIX E

Interview Solicitation Letter

Brenda White Wright, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
XXX University

Dear Student:

This letter is an invitation for you to consider participating in a doctoral research study that I am conducting with African American juniors and seniors at XX and XX University. This note provides information about the project and what your involvement would require if you decide to take part.

My dissertation topic is, “Expectations and Experiences of African American Students at Two Predominantly White Universities in Southern Appalachia.” Through a focus group discussion and one-on-one student interviews, the research study will look at how institutional policies and practices at XX and XX Universities impact African American students’ social, cultural, and academic achievement and graduation rates. As an upper class student, your input could provide meaningful insights for assessing and evaluating the learning environments and social climates for African-American students.

Your participation in this study would be completely voluntary involving a focus group discussion lasting about 90 minutes **or** an one-on-one interview of approximately one hour at a mutually agreed upon campus location. *All information you provide is completely confidential.*

If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact me as soon as possible at XXX-xxx-xxxx or by email at [email address]. Thanks in advance for your consideration and potential assistance.

Sincerely,

Brenda White Wright, M.A.
Principal Investigator

VITA

BRENDA WHITE WRIGHT

Personal Data: Place of Birth: Rome, Georgia

Education: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;
B.G.S. Business and Communications Concentration;
1990

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;
M.A. Reading/Storytelling;
2005

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
Ed.D. Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis;
2008

Professional
Experience:

President/CEO,
Girls Incorporated of Kingsport, Kingsport, TN;
1983-2003

Graduate Assistant, Clemmer College of Education, Storytelling Program,
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;
2004-2005

Doctoral Fellow, Clemmer College of Education, ELPA,
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;
2005-2008

President/CEO,
The Wright Approach, Kingsport, TN;
2003-present

Honors and
Awards:

*Award of Honor, ETSU Alumni Association

*Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award, ETSU, Clemmer College of
Education

*Racial Justice Award, YWCA of America

*Communication and Leadership Award, Toastmasters International

*Distinguished Leadership Award, Kingsport Chamber of Commerce

*Distinguished Community Service Award, *Kingsport Times-News*