NEGOTIATING WORLDS, MANAGING SUBJECTIVITIES, AND

REDEFINING SELVES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN

AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATE FEMALES AT PREDOMINATELY WHITE

INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation

by

AYANA MA-EL ALLEN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2010

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee, Norvella Carter
                        Chance W. Lewis
Committee Members,   M. Carolyn Clark
                        Trina J. Davis
Head of Department,   Dennie Smith

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ABSTRACT

Negotiating Worlds, Managing Subjectivities, and Redefining Selves: The Lived

Experiences of African American Undergraduate Females at Predominately White

Institutions. (December 2010)

Ayana Ma-el Allen, B.A., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill;

M.Ed., University of St. Thomas

Co-Chairs of Committee: Dr. Norvella Carter
Dr. Chance Lewis

A narrative analysis of the lived experiences of seven undergraduate African American females at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) is presented in this study. The purpose of the study was to explore the ways the seven women constructed their identity and self-concept in the context of their PWI environment. Other key purposes of the study included strategies in which the women successfully negotiated their PWI environments and the influence of the intersection of race, gender, and class on the collegiate and life experiences of these African American undergraduate females. The framework which was conceptualized from previous literature portrayed the historical context of the African American woman's struggle for educational access as both Black and female, her life on campus, tools for success, and the identity development of African American women. Critical Race and Black Feminist theoretical frameworks, were the foundation for the study. Through these theoretical lenses, the study looked closely at the academic, social, and cultural climate on PWI campuses and the impact of these factors on the identity development and self-concept of the women in this study.

The research methodology of narrative analysis was used and resulted in the emergence of three key findings in this study. The findings indicate that African American undergraduate females at PWIs engage in negotiating worlds, managing subjectivities, and redefining selves as they make meaning and walk out their individual lived experiences as students on Predominately White campuses.

DEDICATION

To my Great Grandma, Elizabeth Smith "Granny" (1904-2007): You are a true American hero and I am blessed to be a product of your legacy! All my life you inspired me with *you*r story and journey… my only wish is that I could have audio-recorded your many words of wisdom and could emulate your faith! You are the epitome of resilience, love, and forgiveness. Never did you harbor any hate, although you endured much hate in your 102 years of life. This dissertation is for you. I am strong because your vibrancy and life runs through my veins.

To My Grandma: Elizabeth Stripling: You were the one that always told me that I could overcome every obstacle that was put before me. You gave me the strength to believe in myself when you reminded me that I always had to be "smarter and more talented than the White kids at my school." I don't know any woman in the world who is stronger than you! I love you!

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on to as I grow and develop as a researcher and educator. Thank you for supporting me through my own autoethnographic process, that experience has been life changing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The name Lucy Ann Stanton is much more than a name. She is a symbol; a symbol of hope, an opened door, a future, and a legacy. In 1850, Oberlin College in Ohio awarded Lucy Ann Stanton the first college degree ever given to an African American woman in the United States (Slater, 1994). Her story is where this dissertation begins, collides with my own story, and those of all African American women who have and will navigate their way through the academic and social worlds of Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Lucy's influence is not only in the attainment of her degree, but it also lies within the struggle and obstacles overcome to reach this pinnacle in American history. My question is where is *"herstory"* documented? Lucy, like so many other African American women, have been excluded from the literature documenting their unique experiences and perspectives.

African American women have consistently resisted systems and situations that have attempted to shut the door on educational opportunity and access. These women have relentlessly fought against deep rooted institutions such as slavery, Jim Crow, and the lack of woman's rights that outright intended to slam the door on their educational promise.

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This dissertation follows the style of *Urban Education*.

Kaba (2008) contended:

> A significant development pertaining to educational attainment has occurred among black women in the USA. Although they suffered twice in their struggle to gain access to formal high school and college educations, first as blacks when they could be killed if they were found reading a book and then discrimination against them as women, which did not end until the early 1970s, today they have become one of the most successful minority subgroups in the attainment of high school and college diplomas (p. 319).

The present success of African American females have some (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2004; Kaba, 2008; Paul, 2003) claiming that African American women are the new model minority (a group that was at one time marginalized, educationally, economically, and socially, who have risen up despite their many obstacles to be prosperous, admired and even emulated). These studies suggest that the progress of African American women in higher education attainment has directly impacted the upward trend in economic and social success experienced by African American women today.

The purpose of this study was to provide a space for the voices and living narratives of African American undergraduate females to be illuminated. Situated as the potential "new model minority", their perspectives are worthy of further investigation. My intent was to examine the life experiences of African American undergraduate females in the context of Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) specifically. Due in part to the fact that African American females currently make up 64% of African Americans in US institutions of higher education, and over 89% of African American women are students at PWIs (NCES, 2009), their voices are critical to the growing body of literature concerning their success.

This study is a mosaic of stories. I listened to, learned from, and analyzed the life story narratives of seven African American undergraduate females at PWIs. I also engaged in writing my own autoethnography about my experiences. My experiences as an African American undergraduate and graduate student at PWIs impacted my life in a profound way. My experiences sparked within me the desire to dig deep into my own narrative, my story. Utilizing narrative analytic tools to excavate implicit meaning in my story helped me to discover many emerging themes in my life. After taking advantage of the silent moments when all was still, I began to write my story, listen to my own voice, my heart. My voice longed to join with the voices of other women who had "walked in my shoes" as African American women on PWIs, and my desire was to listen to their voices, to hear their stories.

Critical Race and Black Feminist Theories

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) presents a backdrop for the study of the lived experiences of African American undergraduate females at PWIs. Critical Race Theory represents the work of scholars that challenge the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American law and society (Crenshaw et.al, 1995). CRT is a movement that encompasses various sociopolitical and philosophical perspectives and it derived from issues of legal studies know as Critical Legal Studies (CLS). CLS critiques the ways in which race plays into the law, its interpretation, and the legal doctrine. CLS also challenges the objective reality of the law known as liberalism (Parker, 1998). As Critical Race Theory scholarship developed, it examined

the law's role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination (West, 1995). CRT has also encouraged other critical perspectives of scholarly investigation: black feminist theory, critical Latina theory, critical social theory (Outlaw, 2005), and queer theory.

Bell (1995), one of the leading voices on CRT who is also considered one of its founders, discussed the tenets of CRT. He used an inclusive statement of "we" to encompass his own contribution to the movement: "Critical race theorists strive for a specific, more egalitarian world. We seek to empower and include traditionally excluded views and see all inclusiveness as the ideal because of our belief in collective wisdom. We emphasize our marginality and try to turn it toward advantageous perspective building and concrete advocacy on behalf of those oppressed by race and other interlocking factors of gender, economic class, and sexual orientation. We see such identification as one of the only hopes of transformative resistance strategy (p. 79)." This statement exemplifies that CRT is a great tool by which those that are oppressed on various axes of oppression can challenge the hegemonic powers that be, and redefine their history while progressing towards the future.

There are two main pillars of CRT. 1) How has a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color been created and maintained in America 2) To understand the bond between law and racial power in order to change it (Crenshaw et.al, 1995).   Ladson-Billings (2009) a leading CRT voice in the field of education also described the foundations of CRT: "Critical race theorists asserted the primacy of race in examining inequality and subscribed to the following set of tenets" 1) racism is normal,

not aberrant in US society; (2) storytelling is an important form for exploring race and racism in the society; (3) CRT theorists critique liberalism and (4) an emphasis on racial realism (p. 88)."

According to Parker (1998), CRT challenges assumptions and norms. It constructs who has power and how power is used in our society. It unveils and unmasks oppression so that those being researched can have a voice. The aim is to integrate theory and practice in a way that individuals and groups become aware of the contradictions and distortions in their belief system and social practices and are inspired to change those beliefs and practices. Parker (1998) discussed CRT's role in utilizing narratives and storytelling specifically for underrepresented students on Predominately White campuses in order to "challenge the prevailing notion of race neutrality in educational institutions. "The thick descriptions of sites (conducting and analyzing interviews, and participant observations) not only serve an illuminative purpose, but can also be used to document overt and institutional racism (Parker, 1998, p. 50)." In the same vein, Bell (2005) contended:

> Critical race theory embraces an experientially grounded oppositionally expressed, and transformatively aspirational concern with race and other socially constructed hierarchies; 'a call for a change of perspective, specifically, a demand that racial problems be viewed from the perspective of minority groups, rather than a white perspective. The narrative voice, the teller, is important to critical race theory in a way not understandable by those whose voices are tacitly deemed legitimate and authoritative. The voice exposes, tells and retells, signals resistance and caring, and reiterates the most fearsome power-the power of commitment to change (p. 80)."

This very quote is the premise behind the work that was done in this research study. My study represents the purpose of Critical Race Theory in research: "to unveil and unmask

oppression so that those being researched can have a voice" (Parker, 1998). This is why CRT is one of the foundational theoretical perspectives in this study.

Black Feminist Theory

Black feminist theory provides another theoretical lens by which to most effectively provide a space for the voices of the lived experiences of African American women at PWIs. Black feminist theory is a powerful framework because it incorporates the tenets of Critical Race Theory described above, while providing an analysis that is representative of the unique perspectives of African American women in our society.   The contributions of Hill-Collins (1986, 2000) in developing Black feminist thought provides a strong background for this study.   Hill-Collins (1986) defined the three key themes that represent Black feminist thought: the meaning of self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of redefining culture.

It is important to note that the ideas in Black feminist thought are created by Black women that clarify the point of view of and for Black women. Second, the definition assumes that Black women possess a unique perspective of their experiences, and that there will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women as a group. Third, living life as Black women may produce certain commonalities of outlook, the diversity of class, region, age, and sexual orientation shaping individual Black women's lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes:

> Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about unjust power relations. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, as well as Black women's individual and collective agency within them, Black feminist thought

reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance. Second, Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates concerning the power dynamics that underlie what counts as knowledge. Offering U.S. Black women new knowledge about our own experiences can be empowering. But activating epistemologies that criticize prevailing knowledge and that enable us to define our own realities on our own terms has far greater implications (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 273-274).

Black feminist thought highlights the significance of seeing race, class, and gender, as interlocking systems of oppression and these three systems most heavily affect African American women (Hill-Collins, 2000).   In this study highlighting the experiences of African American women on PWI campuses; all of these "characteristics" of the African American female are essential to understanding and interpreting the way in which African American women make meaning, and understand how the world functions based on their unique location within the social structure of our society

By utilizing a Black feminist theoretical lens, I was able to incorporate a multidimensional analysis of the experiences of African American undergraduate females at PWIs. More specifically, this study examined the "outsider within" concept, which supports the sociological significance of Black Feminist Thought (Hill-Collins, 1986, 1999). The "outsider within" point of view describes social locations or border spaces occupied by groups of unequal power. Hill-Collins (1999) stated: "Outsider-within identities are situational identities that are attached to specific histories of social injustice-they are not a decontexualized category divorced of historical social inequalities that can be assumed by anyone at will. This shift refocuses attention on the unequal power relations of race, class, and gender that produce social locations

characterized by injustice (p. 120)." In this research study I utilized the "outsider within" framework of Black feminist thought to present the individual and collective experiences of African American undergraduate females at Predominately White Institutions.

Personal Story

My life is the motivation behind this study. At the age of five, my parents left inner city Philadelphia, PA, for a very White, upper/middle class suburban town twenty minutes outside of the city. Both of my parents were first generation college graduates in their families, and desired for me and my unborn sisters to receive an excellent education. My parents knew that a strong education would catapult us to greater heights in college and beyond. What I did not realize at the time was that this great education came at a heavy price. I was the only Black child in my entire elementary school, one of a couple in middle school, and one of four in my high school graduation class.

I believe that it was at a young age, that I began to understand the implications of navigating a White world as a Black female and navigating a Black world as a semi-member of the White world, sadly never gaining full membership into either world. My Grandma always tried to persuade me that I was smarter, more talented, and more beautiful than any of the White kids at my school and that I should be confident in my abilities and push towards my dreams. I guess I took her words to heart because I worked extremely hard to be the best at EVERYTHING that I did.

After high school, I attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was so excited to leave my "White world" behind and find companionship with

other likeminded Black students. What I found at UNC were Black students that were pretty much my clones. Almost all of us were groomed at Predominately White high schools and had very similar experiences as "token Blacks". During my senior year of college, I began my first real research project. I wrote my Honor's Thesis on the experiences of African American female executives. At the time I aspired to be a business woman. I traveled around the country and had the amazing opportunity to interview many high ranking Black females in large corporations. I guess even back then, I was always interested in the life and success of African American women.

After college, I joined Teach for America and moved to Houston, Texas. What I thought was going to be a two year commitment turned into a life-long passion. I taught first grade for six years and was a literacy specialist for one year for the Houston Independent School District. An amazing opportunity arose during my fifth year of teaching to begin a PhD program at Texas A&M University. Although up until 2007 I had only worked with elementary students, my research on African American undergraduate females sparked in me the desire to work with college bound students. I am currently the Director of College Counseling in an amazing charter school district YES Prep Public Schools. Every day I get to live out my research in practice as I work to ensure that 100% of my students blaze new trails and reach amazing heights in college and beyond. I can definitely say that it has been my experience as a PhD student at Texas A&M University that has completely transformed my life. No experience thus far in my life has been more challenging, frustrating, intellectually draining, or lonely; but I

know that the rewards will be well beyond my wildest imagination. A thorough analysis of my life story narrative will be presented in the Epilogue.

Statement of the Problem

African American women have historically been excluded from the scholarly literature documenting their unique experiences as undergraduate students at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). This lack of in-depth scholarly investigation has limited this group from having their experiences and perspectives acknowledged and examined; and as a result their voices are often silenced. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2009b), there were 1,448,000 African American females and 821,000 African American males enrolled in four-year degree earning institutions in 2008. Thus, African American females make up 64% of African Americans in US institutions of higher education.

It is also important to consider the type of institutions that these women attend. As late as 1954, over 90% of Black students were educated at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), by 1995 that number had decreased to 20%. Today only 11% of African American females are educated at HBCUs (Willie, 2003; NCES, 2009a). The NCES (2009a, 2009b) also noted that in 2008, 1,290,898 African American women were enrolled in Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) compared to the 157,102 African American women who were enrolled in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). With 89% of African American women attending PWIs it is imperative to study their living narratives especially considering that the documentation of their experiences has been limited.

The experiences of African American females at PWIs are unique for their social location as members in both gender and racial marginalized groups has had a profound impact and various implications for their college and life experiences.   Bloom (1998) noted that "Scholars studying women's personal narratives need to make a project of helping their respondents verbalize and examine the contradictions of their lives so that they too may 'write beyond the ending.' Women who narrate their life stories must be encouraged and given space to tell and retell their stories, attempting each time to articulate the complexities, confusions, and indeterminacies of lived reality (p. 67)."

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which each African American woman constructed her identity and self concept in the context of her PWI environment. Other key purposes of the study included looking at the ways in which African American women negotiate their White environments and the influence of the intersection of race, gender, and class on the collegiate and life experiences of African American undergraduate females.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it will hear the voices and the living narratives of African American women, providing insight into the lived experiences of the women in the contexts of a Predominately White campus environment. Narrative research specifically documenting African American undergraduate females' perception of their experiences at PWIs is a great tool by which their experiences can be acknowledged, and their multidimensionality and multiple subjectivity may be documented in the extant

literature. Through the use of narrative tools of scholarly investigation all stakeholders on Predominately White institution campuses may have a deeper understanding of the unique experience of African American female undergraduates at PWIs; for narrative research elicits stories rooted in personal experiences and representative of social and cultural phenomenon (Reissman, 1993).

This study has the potential to influence campus decision makers to implement programs and services to support the African American female experience on their campuses. Such programs as high school college preparation (academic, social, emotional), transitional programs, and student affairs initiatives may be created or enhanced from the findings in this study. In doing so, not only will the students themselves have a richer experience, but this will have a profound influence on the entire campus environment. This study is also powerfully important and significant for it provides a space for African American women who are currently or one day will negotiate the world of a PWI campus to hear the voices of women such as themselves, as to build a collective sense of community and experience.

Research Questions

1) What are the lived experiences of African American undergraduate females at PWIs?

2) How do undergraduate African American females at PWIs construct their identity?

3) How do undergraduate African American females at PWIs negotiate their campus environment?

4) How is the intersection of race, class, and gender represented in the narratives of the undergraduate African American females at PWIs?

5) How is the self narrated in the living narratives of African American undergraduate females, and specifically in the context of a Predominately White environment?

Definition of Terms

African American/Black: A racial or ethnic descendent of Africa

CRT: Critical race theory

HBCU: Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A college or university with the majority of the students representing Black ethnicities from Africa or of Hispanic ethnicity. These schools were historically established to education Blacks during times when Blacks could not attend predominately White institutions.

Introspective Narrative: Ronai (1992) contends: "Introspection is conscious awareness of itself, a social process of self-examination involving conversations with oneself; using multiple layers of reflection-a layered account-shifting forward, backward, and sideways through time, space, and various attitudes in a narrative format (p. 103)."

Narrative: One's personal story about a life experience or experiences.

PWI: Predominately White Institution: A college or university with the majority of the student population representing Caucasian/White ethnicities.

Self -Concept: a multi-dimensional construct that refers to an individual's perception of "self" in relation to any number of characteristics such as academics, non-academics, gender roles, sexuality, and racial identity.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The existing scholarly literature centered on African American females at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) represents several areas of study. This chapter is organized into four major categories*: Historical Context: Education as a Means of Resistance, Life on Campus, Tools for Success, and Identity Development*. These categories provide a conceptualized framework of the existing body of work. African American undergraduate females at PWIs must firmly plant their feet on history and stand tall. It is the *Historical Context* in which African Americans and women fought for equal educational opportunities. African American females as both Blacks and women had to utilize their pursuit of *Education as a Means* to resist the various oppressive systems surrounding them.

Once the African American undergraduate female is grounded and understands the impact of history, she will enter her campus and experience the *Life on Campus.* She will enter through the metaphorical gate of her college campus during *Matriculation,* remain a member of her campus community*, Retention,* and then leave through those same gates upon her *Graduation.* All the while she will engage in various aspects of her campus community, including the *Academic, Social, and Cultural Climates*. Each of these facets of her college experience will impact her sense of self and development.

It is also important to note that there are various tools that she can utilize to not only enhance her experience, but to ensure that she is successful and monopolizes on the

support she has. All of these factors, the historical context, life on campus, and tools for success, will ultimately play a part in the *Identity Development* of the African American undergraduate female at PWIs; along with her life experiences up until the point at which she enters college. The heart of this conceptual framework is her ultimate identity development and self concept.

Historical Context: Education as a Means of Resistance

Both African Americans and women have fought to overcome systematic educational oppression. African American women, as members of both groups utilized education and the attainment of access thereof as a critical means by which they could resist the hegemonic powers that existed. African American women were no strangers to resistance in the general sense of the word and the resistance movements that ensued from the time of slavery (hooks, 1981; Hine & Thompson, 1998). Although African American women as both Black and female fought on both sides of the struggle, it left them without true membership within each group. Hill-Collins (2000) described African American female resistance in the historical context: "The long-term and widely shared resistance among African American women can only have been sustained by an enduring and shared standpoint among black women about the meaning of oppression and the actions that black women can and should take to resist it (p. 202)." The resistance movements toward educational access for African Americans and the educational access for women are essential to the African American undergraduate female narrative.

Educational Access for African Americans

African Americans' historical and continual journey towards educational promise and opportunity was in stark contrast to the unearned/ self proclaimed privileges of their White counterparts. African Americans' access to higher education and education in general depicts a past full of struggle and hardship which was ignited within the deplorable institution of slavery in America. African slaves were legally denied the right to an education of any kind. As noted in Finkelman (2006), in 1740, South Carolina became the first colony to officially enact anti-education legislation for Blacks, with many other southern colonies following suite not shortly after. In conjunction with this enactment, legislation also stated that anyone who was found teaching slaves to read or write could incur severe consequences.

As eighteenth century policymakers attempted to push this agenda through prohibitive legislation, the nineteenth century saw the ways in which violent acts of terrorism and fear "supported" the implementation of anti-literacy and anti-writing laws. Many Black schools were burned or shut down, and those individuals who attempted to educate Blacks, especially enslaved Blacks, reaped severe punishment (Finkelman, 2006). Despite such fear tactics and the legal negation of educational advancement, there was a strong movement towards Black educational self-reliance and self-education. In the early 1800s, free Blacks in the North established several institutions to educate people of color and this movement spread through many of the northern states (Finkelman, 2006; Salzman, 1993). The 1830s proved to be noteworthy and pivotal years in the struggle for educational access. The Nat Turner rebellion caused an

onslaught of southern anti-literacy laws and northern school segregation that worked to constrict Black access to literacy instruction. Fear was a tactic to support the implementation of these policies as there was often violent resistance to schooling of any kind for Blacks. "African Americans would not see significant expansion in their educational opportunities until after the Civil War (Finkleman, 2006, p. 447)."

Post Civil War, education became a leading concern of Blacks in America and many "saw literacy as the key to full citizenship" (Salzman, 1993, p. 206). African Americans grew increasingly passionate about their educational promise and what this education could provide for future generations. Anderson (1988) stated: "Blacks emerged from slavery with strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write. This belief was expressed in the pride with which they talked of other ex-slaves who learned to read or write during slavery and in the esteem in which they held literate Blacks (p. 5)." According to Anderson (2007) Black leaders who became literate under slavery reflected a consciousness of literacy and formal education as a means of resistance against mechanisms of oppression (anti-literacy laws) and a means to liberation and freedom. This movement for educational opportunity was not met with open arms and many free men and women in the north and south had no formal education (Willie, 2003).

Several influential Black educational leaders emerged after Emancipation; WEB Dubois, Booker T. Washington, and Mary McLeod Bethune to name a few. These educational pioneers became leading voices and establishers of long-standing educational institutions for African Americans. Although they sometimes differed in

their philosophies of education, they became leading voices in the movement towards African American educational, social, and economic upward mobility. Despite inadequate funding, hostility of government bodies, and the indignities of southern segregation, by 1950, ninety percent of African Americans in the south were literate. This was a great tribute to the tenacity of African American education (Salzman, 1993).

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling *Brown vs. Board of Education* was a "game changer" in the journey towards educational access and equality. Even then, African American females were at the forefront of progress. The face behind the case was that of a young African American girl, Linda Brown and her family. They fought against the segregation laws that prevented Linda from attending the White school in her neighborhood (Turner-Sadler, 2009; Salzman, 1993). This case ruling sparked the beginning of integrated educational opportunities for African Americans; stating that separate schooling for Blacks and Whites was unconstitutional and reversed the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* "separate but equal" tenets. Although directly involving segregated public schools, the case became the legal underpinning for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the dismantling of all forms of statutory segregation (Salzman, 1993). Turner-Sadler (2009) noted that the outcomes of *Brown vs. Board of Education* were not all in the best interest of the Black community. Several Black teachers and principals lost their jobs and the decision sparked the notion of "white flight" which allowed Whites to remain segregated.

Although *Brown vs. Board of Education* inducted desegregation into law, desegregation in practice was an obstacle all its own, and state governments and officials

rejected its proclamations. The Little Rock Nine blazed a trail for African Americans to integrate American schools. In 1957, with the protection of federal troops Black students entered the all White Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. This turning point in the integration of schools sparked the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first of its kind since the Reconstruction Era (Salzman, 1993). Although this Civil Rights Act attempted to protect the civil rights of Blacks and investigate situations in which those civil rights were denied, again state legislatures were able to "dance around" the law.   It was The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was considered a "true" equalizer, for it gave the US attorney general the authority to take legal action in order to achieve school desegregation as well as the first time that federal funding and assistance was offered to school districts to desegregate their schools (Salzman, 1993).

As the aforementioned Acts and initiatives reflected the educational struggles for Blacks at the primary and secondary education level, the African American pursuit of higher education endeavors spawned equal if not greater challenges for post-secondary aspirations.   The Morrill Act of 1862 which established the land grant for public colleges did not readily admit Blacks to these institutions of higher learning. A movement ensued as Blacks along with a few allies (private colleges, abolitionist movements, religious organizations), recognized that education was a means of resistance, and this resistance can be traced back to the prime years when Blacks first entered institutions of higher education (Willie, 2003).

The first institutions to open their doors to Blacks were "Midwestern radical reformatory colleges" (Gallien, 2005, p. 3) and liberal arts schools in the early and mid

1800s. Institutions such as Middlebury, Amherst, Grinnell, Oberlin, Berea, and Wheaton first opened the door to educational access. The founders of these schools were ministers and active participants in abolitionist endeavors, and the welcoming of Blacks into their institutions was in a sense an act of resistance to the institution of slavery and its proponents. Gallien (2005) stated: "These institutions accepted both women and blacks in open defiance to societal norms and as an apocalyptic message to the plantation owners and religious leaders of the Deep South that their hegemonic stranglehold over the inalienable rights of blacks and women were at an end (p. 3)." It also became apparent to African Americans that their best opportunities for higher education would be in the establishment of their own institutions. Cheyney University in Pennsylvania was the first college established for blacks in 1837. Lincoln University and Wilberforce College were established in the 1850s and supported Blacks in their effort toward self education (Fleming, 1981).

Another wave of educational resistance of Blacks emerged with the assistance of various religious and denominational groups such as the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church which assisted in the development of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Willie, 2003). Howard University, Fisk University, Morehouse College, Hampton Institute, and Spelman College are a named few of the HBCUs that were established between the 1860s and 1890s. These institutions represented a true victory and promise over the anti-literacy and anti-education laws that were thrust upon

Blacks during slavery. "Despite the misgivings and anxieties of Whites, Black colleges and universities were established anyway (Bracey, 1999, p. 37)."

Many notable scholars and Black leaders were "groomed" at HBCUs. For example, the incomparable W.E.B. DuBois was a product of Fisk University and Booker T. Washington was a product of Hampton Institute. Most of the schools established for Blacks were seminaries and colleges for teachers or normal schools (home economics). Schools such as Hampton Institute (1868) and Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, promoted an educational philosophy and belief system that Blacks should focus on agricultural, commercial, mechanical, and domestic crafts (Fleming, 1981). This philosophy encouraged an education that would prepare Blacks to pursue an education that would allow them to contribute these skills to society. This was in contrast to the philosophies of W.E.B. Dubois and Northern missionaries who supported the education of Blacks in the liberal arts (Fleming, 1981).

In 1890, US Congress passed the Second Morrill Act, which attempted to require all states to admit Blacks to their institutions of higher education or to provide separate and equal schools just for them. Many Southern states ignored the Act in its entirety, while only a few made an effort to support the establishment of schools for Blacks. This Second Morrill Act was a stepping stone to the separate but equal doctrine that was supported through the *Plessy v. Ferguson* landmark case. The forty private and seventeen public HBCUs that were established by 1890 are still educating students today (Willie, 2003). These institutions were imperative in resisting the tenets of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the movement to hinder African American educational progress. The

numbers represented the movement. According to Willie (2003), by 1895 there were more than eleven hundred graduates of Black colleges. With the number of Blacks with college degrees increasing enough to begin a critical mass, along with self help organizations (Afro-American League of the United States and American Negro Academy)   Blacks began to articulate the political aspirations of their group and encourage younger generations to continue their education beyond high school.

Despite the great opportunities at HBCUs for Black students, others utilized their pursuit of education as a strong means of resistance to enter Predominately White Institutions. A few years before the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, two cases involving African American graduate students were brought to the Supreme Court. These cases, *Sweatt vs. Painter* and *McLaurin vs. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* ruled that the plaintiffs Hermann Sweatt and George McLaurin would be admitted to the University of Texas Law School and the University of Oklahoma graduate schools respectively. The catch was that segregation was ordered to be maintained and both students had to sit, eat, and live alone (Salzman, 1993). Another notable story is that of Autherine Lucy. In 1956, she became the first African American student to enroll at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. Although hate mobs ensued screaming obscenities and throwing rocks, tomatoes, and other objects at her, she still attempted to pursue her education. This pursuit was condemned by the campus community. Sadly for Autherine Lucy and so many other Black students who blazed trials by enrolling into PWI campuses, she was suspended and eventually expelled from the university for her own safety (JBHE, 2005).

Perry (2003) provided a summary of the historical education movement in the

Black community as a form of resistance:

> The black community organized intentional educational communities, collectively constituted, 'as-if' communities, imaginary communities that were capable of modeling possibilities. One can call historically Black schools 'figured universes,' or more precisely counterhegemonic figured communities. These schools were counterhegemonic communities inasmuch as they were organized in opposition to the dominant ideology of white supremacy and Black intellectual inferiority. They were designed to forge the collective identity of African Americans as a literate and achieving people. Central to the formation of a counterhegemonic community is the continual articulation and passing on of a counter-narrative (p. 91).

This abovementioned statement demonstrates the importance of a collective force of

resistance in order to bring about systematic change and progress. In the same vein,

Hill-Collins (2000) noted that Black's resistance to racial and class oppression could not

have occurred without the struggle for group survival.

Currently, today's schools and school systems in majority African American low

income, urban and rural communities are still battling the remnants of many, many years

of institutionalized inequality and oppression. While laws such as the various Civil

Rights Acts, Brown *vs. Board of Education,* and present day Affirmative Action

initiatives attempted to rectify and remedy past injustices, it will still take substantial

time to offer every single student the educational promise that they so rightfully deserve.

The story does not end here; for it is a continuous one as African Americans still push

towards total and complete educational access and opportunities.

Educational Access for Women

Before one can examine the African American woman's educational journey, it is important to look at the American woman's struggle for educational opportunity. Although the educational pathways of African American women differ greatly in comparison to their White counterparts, White women were also subjected to discrimination and denied educational access simply for being women.   The female narrative and historical journey towards higher education attainment creates a space to juxtapose the experiences of African American women in comparison to White women as they independently of each other, fight for their educational equality and opportunities for their futures. Note, the use of the word females in the context of this section, refers solely to White women. As is referenced in the literature, Black women were excluded from historical discussions of the education of women. This will be further examined in the literature review.

Historically speaking, a logical place to begin the discussion of the education of girls and women would be to look at the education of women in Ancient Greece (Kersey, 1981). However, for the sake of providing a context for this study, educational access for women will begin with an excerpt from Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1762) *Emile.* His thinking and philosophical perspective on the education of women had great implications for women's education:

> Were women to cultivate the manly qualities and to neglect those which belong to their sex, they would evidently act contrary to their own interest: of this they are perfectly sensible, and they have too much art to be caught in such a snare. Ye mothers that have judgment follow my advice; do not, in defiance of nature, bring up your daughters to be

gentleman, give them the education of ladies, and assure yourselves it will be much better both for them and for us (p.364).

This quote brings up an interesting discussion concerning the "education of ladies". It is this historical and patriarchal perspective that greatly impacted the educational journey of women.

The education and schooling of females in the early Americas was greatly influenced by the traditions and perspectives of the English and ancient civilizations. Ingrained in society was that women were intellectually inferior to men and their place was in the home; bearing children and performing domestic duties that would keep the affairs of the husband, family, and community running (Stock, 1978; Goodsell, 1931). Goodsell (1931) stated: "It was accepted without challenge that, since women would do little of the world's work requiring book knowledge, their intellectual education could quite properly be neglected or reduced to a meager minimum. Moreover there is ample evidence that the intellectual abilities of women were generally believed to be inferior if not actually nonexistent (p, 3)." In the same vein, Stock (1978) raised several questions about the social location of women and their education: "It is necessary to discover the type of woman postulated as ideal in a particular period, in order to understand the education provided for her. What role would the type of education offered have enabled her to play? How was it related to the role implied for the male by his education (p. 12)?"

As mothers were charged to "school" their daughters in the arts and sciences of housewifery, the prospect of female educational advancement faced many obstacles.

In the nineteenth century, pioneers in the education of women, Emma Willard, Catherine Beecher, and Mary Lyon pushed agendas that greatly influenced the educational movement of girls and women and they opened private schools to fulfill this mission (Eschbach, 1993; Goodsell, 1931; McCandless, 1999; Stock, 1978; Woody, 1929). All three agreed that women deserved access to thorough secondary education. Willard and Lyon sought to produce academically educated women who could teach young women and eventually raise the standards of female education. On the contrary, Beecher believed that women should hone the craft of domestication and that the woman's place in the home could uplift themselves and society (Eschback, 1993).

In the late 1820s the high school movement emerged in the United States. During this time, the mission of girl's high schools was to produce fit wives for educated men, however limited their curriculum to "female appropriate" subject matters (Stock, 1978). Post Civil War schooling for women reflected an increase in clerical, vocational (housewifery, domestic science, home economics), and nursing training. Stock (1978) noted the high school of the twentieth century provided males vocational, industrial, technical, economic, and college preparatory curriculums, while girl's curriculum emphasized business curriculums to prepare girls to become secretaries.

The journey for women to institutions of higher education was met with great opposition and some road blocks. The majority of woman's educational curriculum did not prepare them for colleges and universities as did that of their male counterparts. It was not until 1842, that the first bachelor's degree was awarded to a woman by Oberlin College. This seemingly great victory did not compel an immediate movement towards

woman's higher education acceptances, but in the 1860s and 1870s several land grant institutions opened their doors to women (Stock, 1978). In 1860, Vassar College became the first endowed women's college in the nation (Stock, 1978). What was to follow were a host of academically rigorous institutions committed to the higher education and socio-economic advancement of women; Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, Bryn Mawr, and Mount Holyoke to name a few. These new found institutions of higher education which also composed a majority of their faculty of women were met with great opposition by various academics and public figures who denounced the higher education of women stating that it would corrupt and unsex the female gender. (Stock, 1978). Stock (1978) contends: "Women's roles are subject to the social pressures, economic needs, and ideology of the society in which they live (p. 214)." This statement depicts the various trends in the educational opportunities for women in the twentieth century, as society as a whole was greatly impacted by such events as the World Wars, Great Depression, and Civil Rights Era. At times, women experienced great progress and educational promise, and at others women were again groomed to care for the affairs of their homes.

Woman fought relentlessly to obtain the same higher education opportunities as their male counterparts. Amongst much resistance from administrators and the student body, women had to fight for their right to sit in the same classrooms as men and even to the point of persuading their universities to provide suitable housing and dormitories for women (McCandless, 1999). Education became a means by which women resisted the traditional role responsibilities placed on them by society. Despite great opposition, and

a long battle, women today make up 57% of students enrolled in institutions of higher education (NCES, 2009b).

Life on Campus

The lived experiences of African American females at PWIs is greatly impacted by the campus environment and "educational climate is critical for learning and educational success (Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009, p. 87)." This section of the literature review will focus on the external components of the campus community that inadvertently impact the lived experiences and development of African American undergraduate females. This discussion will focus attention to the process by which African American females come to matriculate, are retained, and graduate from PWIs. Subsequently, a review of the literature on the academic, social, and cultural climates of the campus environment will be presented, including the various challenges African American undergraduate females encounter as they negotiate their campus worlds.

Matriculation, Retention, and Graduation

Matriculation, retention, and graduation are undoubtedly linked. Once students matriculate to a given institution, it becomes the institution's responsibility as much of the individual's responsibility to ensure that students have adequate support, services, and enriching experiences to meet the university requirements to graduation (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). This process can metaphorically be illustrated with a gate. In essence, when an African American woman enters her university, she enters through a gate. The gate opens and welcomes the Black female to the campus world upon her matriculation. The hope is that the gate will remain shut while she maneuvers that world

and the university attempts to retain her throughout her tenure on campus. Then the gate will once again open as she exits the campus world as a graduate.

Matriculation

The matriculation of African American women into PWIs begins before they even step foot on their campus. Whether they are aggressively recruited for their academic or athletic promise, or learn about a given school from their guidance counselors or college admissions representatives, there is much that goes into the decision to attend a given university. The existing body of work indicates that African American females often undergo academic as well as social adjustments to their campus environment as a result of various gaps in their educational, social, emotional, or even psychological preparation (Rodgers & Sumners, 2008; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009; Davis et al., 2004, Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Lewis & Garrison-Wade, 2004, Hughes, 2002). To put it quite simply, it can be quite a challenge for these women to transition.

Academic Transition

One of the resounding discussions concerning matriculation is that of the "pipeline issue" (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005; Swail & Holmes, 2000; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). The pipeline refers to the pool of students who are eligible or meet the admissions requirements to enter institutions of higher education. Many factors significantly impact whether or not African American females will remain in the pipeline towards college. The lack of such factors as socio-economic resources, motivation, and academic preparation can snatch students out of the pipeline, ultimately reducing the flow of African American females toward college (Swail & Holmes, 2000).

Another important factor is students' exposure to the college admissions process, college recruitment, and the academic/personal components of the college application during their high school years. Students that lack access to this information especially guidance on how to navigate the process are at a disadvantage. Pre-college academic preparation and the existing educational pipeline is a major factor in the college success of African American women (ACT, 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Kozol, 2005; Teirney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009). Oh too often, it is very difficult for Black females to navigate the post-secondary world with all of its implicit rules and systems, and therefore adequate and relative pre-college preparation can have an incredible impact on their success.

The burdens and challenges faced in adjusting to campus are even more severe for African American women from urban communities. Urban, low income public schools educate the majority of African Americans in the country, and sadly they are often without adequate resources. Such resources include technology and facilities, a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, and the social and cultural capital needed to be successful in higher education (Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009). These conditions often leave African American women behind their White counterparts who have attended academically rigorous high schools, and have had an abundance of experiences and skills needed to adjust well and survive in college. Statistics and trends demonstrate that African American women are not receiving optimal academic experiences in high school. These students fall in the high percentile of students in low tracking curriculum programs and the low percentiles of students in Advanced Placement (AP) and rigorous

academic programs (ACT, 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Kozol, 2005; Teirney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003). Without the core academic foundation required for college nor the opportunities to even engage in advanced college preparatory academics, African American women are at a great disadvantage.

The ACT (2005) report *Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for College and Work,* defined college readiness as the level of preparation a student needs to be ready to enroll and succeed-without remediation-in a credit bearing course at a two or four year institution. When articulated in these terms, according to the literature some African American women are ill/unprepared for college. According to the report, only 26% of ACT-tested high school graduates met the college requirements, and out of this 26 %, African Americans were five times less likely to be college ready. In the same vein, students that are strategically tracked into non academic programs are at the greatest risk to abandon the option of college all together or to be non college ready (Hoffman, 2003; Karen & Dougherty; 2005; Kozol, 2005; Tierney, Colyar, & Colwin, 2003). The academic transition that several African American women experience has great implications for their matriculation into institutions of higher education.

Social Transition

The social adjustment of African American undergraduate females is an equally important aspect to the transitional and retention efforts for African American females. Students are in need of emotional and psychological support. Hinton & Adams (2006) explored the roles and responsibilities of counselors who aimed to prepare African American students for college. Their findings demonstrated that when Black students

were provided with consistent exposure to the viability of college access and greater personalized support from their counselors, they could better navigate the college preparation process. Students will also benefit from encouragement from parents, family members, and school personnel (Freeman, 1997).

Several research studies have identified the social adjustment of African American females as an issue in need of further investigation (Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009; Davis et al., 2004, Lewis & Garrison-Wade, 2004, Hughes, 2002; O'Connor, 2002, Robertson, Mitra, & VanDelinder, 2005). African American women often struggle with adjusting to a new environment Many women must adjust to being the minority voice in their classrooms and feel the pressure to perform at extensively higher levels than others; the "prove I belong factor".

Retention

One of the leading concerns amongst researchers is the retention and persistence rates of students in institutions of higher education. Retention is defined as the proportion of students who enroll and remain at a particular institution. Persistence refers to the proportion of students enrolled at one institution who transfer and remain enrolled in another college (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 2008). These numbers are even more concerning when one evaluates the retention of underrepresented populations such as African American females. It is one thing to see that students make it through the gate, but there is much that must be considered in ensuring that students have the necessary tools to succeed through graduation.

Swail and Holmes (2000) provided a powerful and relevant retention model. They identified the five components of a persistence framework for the retention of African American students. These factors (financial aid, recruitment and admissions, academic services, student services, and curriculum and instruction) were identified as having the greatest influence on monitoring student retention. College campuses must recognize the interlinking of all of the components rather than isolate them. This framework can assist campuses in providing a comprehensive approach to student retention and can be extremely advantageous in meeting the needs of African American females. Karen and Dougherty (2005) presented a retention framework that was similar to that of Swail and Holmes (2000). Their framework identified raising students' aspirations; improving academic skills; and a strong integration of academic and social life on campus as tools by which to effectively impact student retention.

Individual Versus Institutional

Much of the research emphasizes that student retention should be a great priority and responsibility of the given institution. When African American students historically first entered PWIs, it became their own responsibility to navigate the campus world and attempt to survive until graduation. If they did not find their way successfully, it was of no fault to the university, rather their own (Feagin, Vera,& Imani, 1996; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Museus and Harris, 2010; Swail & Holmes, 2000).   According to the work of Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996), students in their study cited no evidence of major retention efforts by university personnel, rather their own personal determination to succeed   as the primary reason they were able to endure racial and other hardships

and complete their degree. Other research supports the "personal crusade" (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996, p. 143) of African American women and students in general to graduate. Such students have described their experiences as perseverance, endurance, battle, and struggle. Feagin, Vera, & Imani (1996) contend:

> Plaguing the efforts of traditionally white university officials to recruit and retain African American students today is a perception among many African Americans that such efforts are not sincere but are based only on a need to exhibit a few black students to improve student statistics and to dress up a poor racial relations image. Even the best recruitment and retention efforts on behalf of African American students need to be supplemented with efforts to change the ingrained character of white thinking and acting in regard to racial matters. (pp. 154-155).

Multicultural Initiatives

The literature also stresses the importance of multi-cultural initiatives in higher education that embrace all ethnic groups (Jones & Williams, 2006; Lett & Wright, 2003). These initiatives are essential in the matriculation and retention of African American students up until their graduation. As noted in the work of Lett and Wright (2003), an institution is responsible for the healthy development and achievement of its student body: "An institution must explore, refine and/or develop successful models of student development which are both cognitively and psychosocially adept and embrace such, in order to be productive and successful in its efforts to retain and graduate students of color minimizing and destroying barriers in the process (p. 189)." Jones and Williams (2006) specifically examined the impact of the African American Student Center programs on the retention of Black students at a Predominately White Institution. Their findings indicated that such safe spaces as Black cultural centers can greatly support students in many aspects of their campus experience. There is a growing need to

explore other multicultural investments on PWI campuses and their possible and preferable impact on the experiences of African American undergraduate females.

Graduation

Graduation represents so much more than the commencement ceremony, with the caps and gowns and pomp and circumstance. It is also a symbol of great accomplishment and the completion of a treasured rite of passage. Graduation is the ultimate goal and the pinnacle of college success for African American women. According to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (JBHE) (2007), the national average graduation rate for African American females was 47% . Although this is well below the 63% average for White students, surprisingly the graduation rates at prestigious universities, flagship institutions, and top ranked liberal arts schools were considerably higher than for the graduation rates at HBCUs.   In fact, according to the JBHE (2007), at twenty HBCUs only two thirds or more of all entering Black students did not go on to earn a diploma.   The disheartening data that represents the dismally low percentages of African American students' graduation rates are often a result of much larger institutional issues such as ill-academic preparation and study habits, low college endowments, and the lack of resources and financial aid for students.

These statistics from the JBHE, bring up an interesting discussion. If in fact PWI campuses are responsible for graduating a higher percentage of African American females than HBCUs, then there is a great need in the literature to explore the factors that attribute to these findings. Such questions that are posed concern individual student success versus institutional intervention and programmatic support for this population, or

even the amount of funding that PWI campuses receive in order to provide support structures. Still, there is a growing need to research this issue.

Allen (1992) identified important/critical influences on African American students' success to graduation. He concluded that individual characteristics such as intelligence, academic background, and ambition along with general situational characteristics such as life at the institution, level of academic competition, university rules/resources/procedures, racial relations, relationships with faculty and friends, as well as support networks are the major influences that impact if a student will complete college and graduate. The most important finding within the literature concerning graduation is that a nurturing environment for African American students has an incredibly positive impact on Black student retention and graduation rates (Banks, 2009; Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; JBHE, 2007; Whitla, Howard, Tuitt, et. al, 2005). The JBHE (2007) identified factors of PWIs with high Black student graduation rates: a) strong orientation and retention programs to help black students adapt to the culture of the PWI campus. b) mentoring programs for black first year students c) establishment of strong black student organizations that foster a sense of belonging among African American students d) the presence of relatively large core of black students on campus. The JBHE (2007) also identified factors for high dropout rates amongst African American students at PWIs: a) inadequate K-12 preparation, b) first generation college bound student, c) availability of financial aid. While these examples of support are important, it is equally important to explore the actual campus environment.

Campus Environment

The campus environment encompasses the heart and soul of the campus community and experience. What makes a university so multidimensional is the blend of social, academic, and cultural life. For the sake of this discussion, the environment does not reflect the physical buildings and beautifully manicured lawns and spaces. Rather, the living, breathing pulse of the individual players, programs, and student life that exists within the gate. There are countless facets that compose the campus environment, too many to name in reference to this study. What will be presented in this review of literature is the impact of the academic, social, and cultural climates of PWIs on the lived experiences of African American undergraduate females. This review will begin with the importance of negotiation; African American undergraduate females' ability and knowledge to work their way successfully through various systems and components of the campus community.

Negotiating the Environment

African American women should and have adapted several conscious and subconscious strategies to negotiate and maneuver the various systems on their campuses. These systems include, for example academic resources, social outlets, and implicit rules and governances of the campus environment. Negotiation refers to the ability of students to locate relevant and available support programs, and identify key people and spaces for assistance and information (Banks, 2009; Hernodon & Hirt, 2004; Lewis, et.al, 2004). Negotiation is the process by which African American females are able to gather the information and services they need in order to be successful.

Negotiation in the literature is also discussed in the manner in which students are able to manage the various relationships and responsibilities in their lives (Banks, 2009, Johnson-Bailey, 2001).

Lewis, et.al (2004) discussed the negotiation of systems in African American PhD students. In their work, they found that negotiation of systems assisted students in feeling valued. Also, institutions of higher education needed to focus more on helping students negotiate these systems. While Herndon & Hirt (2004) contend that negotiating environments includes students' perceptions of their own minority status in a PWI environment and their impressions of the overall university climate, culture, and challenges associated with students of color. Banks (2009) studied the negotiation of multiple relationships amongst the African American females in her study such as family, professors, mentors, friends, and classmates. In her work Johnson-Bailey (2001) found that negotiation was a coping mechanism utilized by the reentry African American women in her study. These women chose to go back to school despite the various responsibilities in their lives.

Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) provide an interesting perspective on negotiation and African American women. They described the notion of shifting that produces a sense of double living and managing of multiple roles for Black women. Their research contends that African American women are relentlessly pushed to serve and satisfy others and made to hide their true selves to placate Whites, Black men and other people in their communities. They paint a picture of the way in which Black women have mastered art of shifting:

> They shift to accommodate differences in class, gender, and ethnicity. From one moment to the next, they change their outward behavior, attitude, or tone, shifting 'White', then shifting 'Black' again, shifting 'corporate', shifting 'cool'. Shifting has become such an integral part of Black women's behavior that some adopt an alternate pose or voice as easily as they blink their eyes or draw a breath-without thinking, and without realizing that the emptiness they feel and the roles they must play may be directly related. Shifting is often internal, invisible. It's the chipping away at her sense of self, at her feelings of wholeness and centeredness-often a consequence of living amidst racial and gender bias (p. 7).

Negotiation is a means by which African American woman adjust and stay connected to their academic, social, and cultural worlds on their campus.

Academic Climate

The academic make up of an institution is the heart of the campus environment. Although other factors such as social and cultural climate play a part in the overall experiences of African American undergraduate females, the main impetus for attending a university is to attain an academic degree; therefore it is critical to explore the influence of the academic climate. There are several key components of the academic climate. Apart from the academic players such as students and professors, the academic climate is also composed of university structures such as academic advising, tutoring/mentoring, supplementary instruction, research opportunities, academic support services i.e. writing centers, student disabilities services, campus facilities and laboratories, and the curriculum (Swail & Holmes, 2000; Whitla, Howard, Tuitt, et.al, 2005). Unfortunately for many African American women, this environment can prove to be difficult to navigate (Banks, 2009).

Classroom

African American females' academic preparation in high school has a great impact on their classroom experiences at PWIs. Not only do they often have to adjust to the rigorous curriculum and academic expectations, but the very racial make-up and lack of diversity in the classroom context often looks and feels different from the classrooms that they experienced in high school. African American women have encountered the unique experience of feeling hypervisible while at the same time feeling invisible within the classroom setting (Banks, 2009; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Moses, 1989). This dichotomy of experience reflects that as a Black woman she physically stands out, yet often her perspectives and experience are ignored and not acknowledged by professors or peers. "The differential treatment of Black women students in the classroom may serve only to make them feel even more isolated from the campus community. Black women and their comments may be ignored in some classes and in seminars while, on the other hand, they may be called upon to represent their race (Moses, 1989, p.4)."

One of the most interesting experiences of African American women in the classroom environment is token syndrome (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Moses, 1989). Moses (1989) described token syndrome as the small number of people from other ethnic or racial groups who are often seen by the dominant group to be 'tokens' and are thus treated as representatives of their group or as symbols rather than individuals. These students can also be described as spoke persons. African American females are often called upon within the classroom context to represent the Black voice or the Black

female voice. The feelings of being one and only was also addressed in the work of Willie (2003). Willie (2003) stated: "Black students on white campuses, those who are alone in their classes, find themselves struggling with the material and preoccupied with that which makes them different. Since all blacks are stereotyped as 'not smart', those who are facing academic challenges have their concentration undermined simply because they are acutely aware of the stereotype. The very isolation of those who are facing academic challenges without the benefit of a tutor, study group, or help from professors, renders them even more vulnerable to the effects of these stereotypes (p. 58)." Other researchers have discussed challenges faced by Black women in finding study partners and cross cultural inclusion in academic support groups and advising (Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Willie, 2003) due to the various stereotypes that exist.

Black women often wrestle with stereotypes in the classroom (Fries-Britt, 2002; Moses, 1989). First Fries-Britt (2002) asserted that high achieving Black students may camouflage their ability and try extra hard to prove themselves as mechanisms to cope with the pressure of various stereotypes. Moses (1989) explained that these stereotypes can mask the reality of Black females' experience. She asserted that Black women are culturally stereotyped as being independent, emotionally strong, and capable of taking care of themselves; however, these stereotypes obscure the fact that Black women sometimes have trouble asserting themselves in academic settings. Professors and students alike may be unaware that Black women's presumed toughness masks uncertainty and vulnerability. African American females must also fight against

stereotypes and doubts about their intelligence within the classroom environment; having to overcome some of the deeply flawed and outright wrong historical and "scientific" explanations for black inferiority. Their own internal thoughts and struggles about their abilities can impact their academic achievement in the classroom.

Some researchers do not believe that students are academically incompetent but rather suffer from other internal conflicts (Perry, Steele, Hilliard, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1998). One such form of internal conflict is that of stereotype threat described by Steele & Aronson (1998) who argued that Black underachievement derives from the stereotype threat of the student's academic environment: "The psychic distress that negative stereotypes can cause are great. The prospect of being stereotyped triggers an internalized anxiety or low expectancy about one's ability that has already been established as a result of prior exposure to the stereotype. When a negative stereotype about one's group becomes relevant to the situation that one is in, it signals the risk of being judged or treated stereotypically, or of doing something that would inadvertently confirm the stereotype (p. 402)."

Relationships with Professors

Relationships with professors are critical to the academic climate of an institution and greatly impact the experience for African American women. Depending on the institution whether it be a Research I institution or a liberal arts teaching college, these factors play critically into the academic atmosphere. Often students at Research I institutions find professors more engaged in their research agendas, then effectively teaching and mentoring their students. Several studies have indicated that African

American women benefit greatly from building positive and strong relationships with faculty (Banks, 2009; Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Lewis & Garrison-Wade, in press; Moses, 1989; Robertson, Mitra, & VanDelinder, 2005). Women who have these strong relationships are usually more satisfied with their overall PWI experience (Robertson, Mitra, & VanDelinder, 2005). What the research does present is that these relationships are difficult to maintain with White faculty on campus : "The pervasive whiteness of the historically white college environment is conspicuous in the role models typically encountered by black students. Few if any of their professors will be black or provide a black perspective (Feagin & Sikes, 1995, p.)."

Another body of literature centers on the importance of incorporating teaching styles that support African American academic achievement (Banks, 2009; Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Gallien & Peterson, 2005; Robertson, Mitra, & VanDelinder, 2005; Watkins, 2005). Watkins (2005) described the importance of professors' incorporation of cultural relevant learning styles into their instruction. Such focus on knowledge building and support will greatly impact the academic climate for Black students.   Also, Gallien (2005) noted that very few professors possess the cultural, historical, or pedagogical backgrounds that are congruent with the dominant learning styles and backgrounds of African American students. He also noted that many professors believe it is the student's responsibility to accommodate their teaching styles and methods, and grasp the material on their own. It is often difficult for African American women to build strong relationships with diverse faculty members such as Black professors, because they are often underrepresented on campus or spread too thin.

Curriculum & Majors

Often times more than not, African American experience and more specifically the experience of Black women are excluded in courses, curriculum, and research agendas documenting their history, success, and contributions (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Gallien, 2005; Moses, 1989; Robertson, Mitra, & VanDelinder, 2005). Majority epistemology, ways of knowing and experiences are often privileged and preferred in the curriculum. This transcends various disciplines. Moses (1989) discussed the strong influence of the curriculum on the academic climate of the campus: "There has been a failure of the curriculum to keep up with the scholarship on minority and women's studies. The curriculum is not preparing students to deal with the multicultural society in which they live. The Black experience is not given any acknowledgement at all and majority students are being deprived of information about the Black experience. The programs in women's studies and Black studies departments are usually administered by white women and Black men, not Black women. Thus, Black women find themselves in situations where their concerns often are not heard (p. 6)."

Multicultural perspectives should also be reflected in the curriculum at a much deeper and involved level than simply offering a few ethnic, racial diverse courses. According to Feagin, Vera, & Imani (1996), a strong multicultural orientation in curriculum is not just for the benefit of students of color, but are especially important for Whites. Others (Gallien, 2005; Watkins, 2005) have noted that universities are attempting to improve the inclusion of Black experience and perspectives into the

curriculum and also establish departments of African American and Africana studies, but still African American women rarely hear about their history, culture, or traditions; or read literature by Black authors.

Majors and academic concentrations have a great impact on the academic climate and experiences for African American women. Moses (1989) noted that African American women traditionally majored in education, the social sciences, and humanities but there has been a steady increase in their shift to majors in business, computer science, math, and engineering. In traditional science and math majors, the numbers of African American women students is still greatly underrepresented even though there has been an increase. Black women often have been made to feel uncomfortable by white faculty and administrators who may persist in beliefs that Blacks do not have the intellectual capacity to succeed in such disciplines. (Feagin & Sikes, 19995; JBHE, 2007; Willie, 2003). Black women are few or maybe the only African American woman in her classes. As the number of Black females in these "hard" majors increase, there is a great need to investigate their experiences within the literature and the impact their field of study has on the academic climate and experience.

Social Climate

The social climate and existence has a profound impact on the experiences of African American undergraduate females. Researchers have noted the positive relationship between a warm, welcoming, and inclusive campus community and an increased satisfaction with campus life (Whitla, Howard, Tuitt, et.al, 2005, Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009). If the academic

climate is the heart of the campus environment then the social climate can be thought of as the blood running through the veins of the institution; branching and extending throughout the entire campus community. Social climate of a university represents all of the extracurricular activities and opportunities available to students outside of the academic classroom. Athletic opportunities and events, student organizations, social networks, residential life, dining experiences, and traditions all make up the social fabric of the social climate (Herndon & Hirt, 2004).

Much of the social support for students occurs through the offices of student affairs. Many offices of student affairs on campuses typically branch out into other arenas of student support such as residential life, Greek life, and offices of minority affairs. The offices of minority affairs support underrepresented populations. These offices and the personnel that staff them are an important component of the texture of the campus social climate. In the work of Whitla, Howard, Tuitt, et.al (2005), the students in their study highlighted the importance of the human capital on campus. Human capital refers to the staff who run diversity programs and the degree of respect with which students and administrators hold such staff. Much of the literature represents a very separate and distinct social atmosphere amongst the races on PWI campuses (Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Lewis & Garrison-Wade, in press; Willie, 2003) In fact, The literature often represents campus communities that are "socially polarized along racial lines (Willie, 2003)." Willie (2003) discussed the notion of separate but equal on the college campus in his study. Due to this social polarization, African American women may experience feelings of social alienation which greatly impacts the social climate.

Due to the fact that social alienation has been examined extensively in the literature, it is important to review the work that has been researched in this area especially since these factors are critical to the social climate and experience of African American females.

Social Alienation

One of the central issues faced by African American women at PWIs is that of social alienation and loneliness. African American women attending PWIs experience significantly greater levels of overt racism, sexism, feelings of social isolation, personal dissatisfaction, and stress more than their White counterparts. African Americans attending PWIs may feel that the environment is unwelcoming and intolerant of their presence on campus which can lead to depression and social alienation (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Foster, 2003; Foster, 2005; Robertson, Mitra, & Van Delinder, 2005; Hayes & Murray, 1998; Lewis et al., 2004; Moses, 1989; Redden, 2002). Redden(2000) discussed the implications of social alienation for these women: "Victims of social alienation were less effective socially, had fewer friends, felt lonelier, and participated less in extracurricular activities. Social alienation experienced by African Americans at PWIs is expressed and perceived by the quality of relationships between the African American and the White population of students, teachers, counselors, advisors, and staff. A lack of diversity in the staff, social activities and academic organizations in PWIs concerns all minority groups and produces special anxieties that can affect a student's ability to learn and succeed (p. 5)."

Feelings of isolation can negatively affect the well being of these women: "African American women face multiple psychosocial stressors because of the variety of

"ism" within the American society and entering Predominately white universities can intensify the experience of isolation and oppression (Hayes and Murray, 1998, p. 17)." Robertson, Mitra, & Van Delinder (2005) identified that the social isolation of African American women may produce four modes of adaptation: (a) affirmation mode (b) assimilation mode (c) withdrawal mode (4) separation mode. Each mode describes the way in which these females attempt to cope with and navigate through their new and sometimes unwelcoming campus environment. The affirmation mode depicts a movement with the dominant culture, wherein they may have several interactions with Whites both personal and professional; and have developed a sense of partnership with Whites. The assimilation mode of adaptation represents a movement toward the dominant culture in which she may reject Black culture and ideology for a more "favorable" White experience. The withdrawal mode of adaption is a movement away from the dominant culture in which they may tolerate the White experience but cling firmly to Black culture as a source of identity. Lastly, the separation mode of adaptation is a movement against the dominant culture in which the ideology and White culture is completely rejected and the Black experience and culture is reverenced and esteemed as "best." This body of work is a great tool by which to assist African American women and university partners in establishing support.

Davis et.al (2004) discussed social alienation in terms of invisibility versus supervisiblity. In their work they support the connection of feelings of invisibility and visibility in conjunction to the identity development of African American students in their work titled *A Fly in the Buttermilk.* This title is a metaphor utilized by one of their

research informants to describe his experience: "being alone in a class with many white students." In terms of supervisiblity several African American students stated that they were often singled out by professors to speak for the entire black race when issues of race were addressed in the classroom (Davis et al., 2004).

The extant literature proposes possible solutions to alleviate the feelings of alienation that may be experienced by these women. Though no single proposition can completely eradicate the women's feelings of alienation, proactive measures of support can provide arenas for student engagement and collective involvement: "Social support can be defined as the extent to which a person's basic social needs for assistance are gratified through interaction with others. Social support includes such concerns as affection, identity, positive reinforcement and security felt by the student. Social support is seen as a basic building block in an individual's well being and undoubtedly will influence a student's performance in school (Robertson, Mitra, & Van Delinder, 2005, p. 36)."

Foster (2005) discussed the importance of establishing and maintaining Black student communities and its precursor to effective student life programming and policy development. Others have proposed that PWIs target efforts to include African American perspectives into the curriculum, provide financial resources to support and implement programs geared towards African American interests and concerns, and focus on a model of inclusion to ensure that African Americans do not feel like "guests" on their campus but that their presence is celebrated and validated (Feagin, Vera, Imani, 1996; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Redden, 2002; Robertson, Mitra, Van

Delinder, 2005). Another possible solution is the universities' commitment to provide

mentorship for these women through relationships with faculty, staff and other students

on campus. However, another challenge facing African American females at PWIs is a

shortage and lack of positive mentorship.

Cultural Climate

The cultural climate of the campus environment can greatly impact the

experiences of African American undergraduate females. The cultural climate of the

institution is felt through the very fabric of student life. As with the above

analogy/metaphor the cultural climate can be viewed as the outward physical body

(academic-heart, social-blood running through veins). The body represents the diverse

student "body" on the campus. It is important to note the way in which different cultural

backgrounds and groups interact with each other on campus. Is there a climate of

blending and multicultural dialogue and exploration, or does the campus represent a

sense of segregation amongst its different ethnic and racial groups within the student

body? These are interesting questions to ask in order to get a sense of the atmosphere

and cultural temperature of the university.

The cultural climate of a PWI should reflect the multicultural perspectives of its

student body. Multicultural policies and programs can support the recognition of and

respect for cultures and groups that have historically been underrepresented and

excluded. In the work of Watson et al. (2002), their findings indicated that students

were enthusiastic about their institutions display of diversity and multiculturalism in the

recruitment process, but that they were highly disappointed with the reality of the

monocultural campus they experience after their enrollment. More often than not, students are made to believe that they will find a community of students with similar backgrounds and experiences.

For African American females in particular, it is essential that they locate arenas on their campus where they can celebrate both their heritage and their unique location as females. Feagin, Vera, & Imani (1996) discussed the importance of integration on a PWI campus: " The full integration of traditionally white institutions of higher education will have to be a two-way street. It will mean more than the one-way assimilation of African American students to a dominant white campus culture. Two-way integration means that white administrators, faculty members, staff members, and students listen carefully to African American students, and make major adjustments in their own attitudes and perspectives, as well as alterations in discriminatory practices in all areas of campus life (p. 155-156)."

Along these same lines, Tierney (1999) contended: "Rather than demand that students of color attending mainstream institutions of higher education undergo initiation rites that inevitably lead to their cultural suicide, a more protean cultural model of academic life can prevail. Such a model should contend that students of color on Predominately White campuses be able to affirm, rather than reject who they are. Campuses that adopt this model will not be sites of assimilation, but instead sites of contestation and multiple interpretations (p. 89)." This quote is a powerful example of the need to acknowledge the unique cultural contributions of the student body. Also, Museus and Harris (2010) asserted that the institutional cultural climate should promote

racial equity on campus and success among college students of color. These positive racial climates are necessary for cultivating environments that are equitable and conducive to minority student success.

Cultural Spaces

Universities have recently begun to understand the importance of providing a safe space on campus for their diverse student populations. Universities acknowledge these spaces and are supportive with the development of cultural centers, and more specifically Black cultural centers. These intellectual and social spaces provide students and faculty alike the opportunity to engage in relationship development as well as educate the campus community about their heritage and culture (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Jones and Williams (2006) also examined the role of the African American Student Center programs on the retention of Black students. Not only do these centers impact and support the experiences of African American women, but enrich the entire cultural climate of the university. In a sense, these centers represent a celebratory honoring of the contributions of cultural groups.

Intraracial Tensions

Another interesting tension on the cultural climate has to do with intra relationships between Black students. Several researchers have identified the tensions that arise from Black students on issues of good/bad hair; light/dark skin; as well as the Oreo complex that many Blacks encounter when others believe that they talk and act White (Johnson-Bailey, 2001). Black students are not a homogenous group, even though the consensus among the White majority on campus is that they are as one. White (1998)

noted that Black cultural centers provide services to Black students from different countries, states, and socioeconomic backgrounds which in turn presents a group of students with different needs, perspectives, and campus friendship networks and affinity groups. There are often times when intra group differences are more salient than in others. White (1998) also noted that Black students may have dual social relationships to the campus-their position as a student and their relationship to their campus as a Black student. Her research propels the discussion concerning the increased diversity that encompasses the definition of a "black student" This includes international Blacks that are not African American in the way in which we typically use the word in our American society. There are many layers to the Black community which is a sub-community within the larger campus community.

Self- Segregation

Bennett (1998) discussed the issue of accusations towards Black students for what has grown to be called "self-segregation". This notion perplexes White administrators and students because historically laws banded the integration of Blacks and Whites, but now that no such legal borders and boundaries exist, Black students on PWI campuses often decide to mingle within their own Black community. Although no de jure segregation (segregation mandated by law) is illegal according to the law, many campus environments suffer from de facto segregation (segregation based on social, economic, and other reasons not based on laws imposed by the government) and continues to flourish as an inescapable reality (Bennett, 1998).

According to Bennett (1998), Black students integrate as soon as they matriculate at PWIs. She refers to this as "cosmetic integration": " They are physically on the campus and can be seen intermixing with White students in classroom situations. Unfortunately, those inter-race interactions are often superficial (p. 124).". In spaces such as dining halls and campus sporting events, students are seen sitting and socializing with members of their own racial groups. Still Bennett (1998) contended that Blacks are accused of self-segregating: "By blaming Black students only, a potentially volatile dichotomy is created. Therefore, instead of placing the onus upon Black students for allegedly being separatists and expecting them to correct the perceived problem alone, both Black and White students along with the campus community should equally strive to rectify the situation (p. 124)."

Bennett (1998) stated: "The reason that self-segregation is an issue is that Black students and other students of color are finally exercising their right to choose. Some Blacks are not giving Whites the chance to alienate and ostracize them. They are actively seeking intragroup validation. Scholars are alarmed because they realize the burden of integration will now fall on the White students. Given that the White majority has the power, it is only logical for them to contribute to, and initiate, the integration process. When Black students are accused of self-segregation, and their White counterparts are not, they are being accused of breaking a law they did not create and one that no longer exists (124)." Discrimination is a major component of the cultural climate on a campus and there has been a great body of research on discrimination at institutions of higher education.

Racism/Discrimination

A strong body of literature focuses on the ways in which cultural tension amongst groups can produce a hostile/negative cultural climate. Discrimination is one such assault on a potential culturally pluralistic campus environment. Several researchers have discussed African American females' experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination on their campuses. African American women are frequently subjected to covert and overt situations of racism and prejudice. As presented in the literature, campus environments can result in maladjustment and stress. Also, a lack of tolerance from the campus community is often a result of differences in values, morphology, and ways of conduct attributable to African American females (Robertson, Mitra, & Van Delinder, 2005).

The research conducted by Hughes (2002) depicts the campus climate for African American students. Her research findings indicated that African American students in general and not per se African American females feel excluded from many campus traditions and social activities. She describes the outward, seemingly covert acts of racism and discrimination, such as the display of the confederate flag, and playing of offensive music in public. Implicit symbols of racism are found all throughout many Predominately White campuses including the names of buildings, statues, and university traditions (Hughes, 2002).

Quantitative measures of discrimination have also been explored (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Suarez-Balcazar et.al, 2003). D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) controlled for GPA and academic achievement in their studies to isolate the impact of

situations of racism and discrimination on Black students' experience. Their findings

indicated that Blacks experiences with racism was great and demonstrated the

differences in White and Black experience between students with similar academic

performance. In the work of Suarez-Balcazar, et.al (2003), their findings suggested that

African American students experience more incidents of differential treatment in

college-related situations than their Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian classmates. In

general African American students experience differential treatment by faculty, teaching

assistants, and students. Their results indicated that females rated situations higher for

"degree of offensiveness" and "degree of discrimination". Other studies have found that

many African American females in particular at PWIs have incurred several challenges

in adjusting to their new college spaces. Robertson, Mitra, & Van Delinder (2005)

indicate that it is important to comprehend how racial prejudice plays a role in the

adjustment of the African American female student attending a primarily White college.

A new way of thinking about covert acts of racism and discrimination is

presented in the work of Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000). They explored the ways in

which the racial climate on college campuses impacted the undergraduate experiences of

African American students through racial microaggressions. Microaggressions is defined

in the literature as subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward

people of color, often automatically or unconsciously. What is critical to note in their

work is the manner in which they define the collegiate environment. They analyze the

racial climate by examining college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to and

through graduate and professional school for African Americans. According to the work

by Zambrana & MacDonald (2009), 77% of African American women in their study reported experiencing instances of racial discrimination on their PWI campuses. With statistics representing numbers this high, it is imperative for research to emerge that specifically addresses strategies to alleviate the cultural dissonance experienced by Black females on PWI campuses.

Toolbox for Success

When considering several of the barriers that African American females face on campus which directly affects their life on campus such as the ones identified above, there are several measures that can further push and encourage these women toward success. Within this section of the literature review, I will discuss the work that has been done on identifying ways in which to best ensure the success of African American undergraduate females at PWIs. African American undergraduate females have in fact been very successful throughout their time on a PWI campus. This aspect of the literature explains the tools by which African American women can be successful. It is this strong nature of these women that have helped to support their success. Self-efficacy, cultural capital, resilience, and the importance of support networks have been identified in the literature as essential characteristics of those women and their success.

The work of Herndon & Hirt (2004) is critical to the existing body of literature concerning the success of African American students. They identified three critical stages of higher education: pre-college, early-college, and late-college. Within each stage of the higher education experience, several themes emerged in their study that push the discussion forward on the best ways by which to support African American students.

The emerging themes in the pre-college stage were family influence, macro-perspectives on race, and motivation. The emerging themes in the early-college stage were negotiating environments, affinity and connectedness, and spiritual support. The emerging themes in the late-college stage were family expectations and role models/mentorship. Their findings indicated a strong connection between family and success in college. Davis et al.(2004) state: "Our informants shared strategies that led to successful graduation. The common thread running through the stories was a perceived ability to move beyond unfairness, sabotage, and condescension and to find common ground on which to build relationships (p. 442).

Social/Cultural Capital

A famous proverb in the Bible states: "The people perish for a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6 King James Version). Although there is little, if any, room for the collision of spiritual references and America's schools, this statement is quite appropriate and truthful for African American undergraduate females. African American undergraduate females must acquire and learn the craft of utilizing various social/cultural cues and tools to successfully navigate their campus community. Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, and Tolivar (2005) defined capital: "In addition to economic capital, each social class possesses social and cultural capital, which parents pass to children as attitudes, preferences, and behaviors that are invested for social profits. Educators differentially value high-status cultural capital, rewarding the students from dominate cultural backgrounds who possess this capital, leaving those students with nondominant cultural capital at risk for lower school success (p. 329)."

According to Freeman (1997), cultural capital consists of the assets and behaviors on which individuals can draw to meet a certain set of established values in society. These values are generally established by the majority group and encompass behaviors such as the way people speak and dress. The discussion of habitus is also presented in the work of Walpole, et.al (2005): "Although cultural capital is knowledge, habitus is a tool kit of strategies. Habitus acts as a web of perceptions regarding the possible and appropriate action to take in a particular setting and to achieve a particular goal. These perceptions are shaped by a person's cultural background and values, which are part of social class (p. 330)."

In short, cultural capital involves what African American females bring to the table in terms of cultural and social experiences and perspectives. This cultural capital has great implications on the way in which these women adjust to and are treated within their PWI context. The research has demonstrated that African American women typically lack knowledge, social/cultural capital and habitus concerning the ways in which to navigate their campus environment (Banks, 2009; Freeman, 199; Walpole, et.al, 2005; Thomas, 2000). Thomas (2000) discussed the likely characteristics of African American students who attended college. These students are more often than not female, come from upper-middle class backgrounds, have parents with some college education, are in academic programs in high school, and fall in the third quartile on standardized tests, and have educational expectations of earning a graduate degree as high school seniors. Her findings highlighted that college was available for those students who had the cultural capital and knowledge based on privileged family

backgrounds. Unfortunately, findings also indicated that students from low-income backgrounds usually did not even go to college.

African American women who acquire seemingly appreciated cultural and social capital can utilize this tool as a means to negotiate her campus environment and be successful. It is imperative to discover what aspects of cultural capital are esteemed in her campus context as well as seek out people who can help her navigate the process of acquiring the necessary cultural capital in order to be successful. Banks' (2009) research on undergraduate Black women directly focused on the impact of cultural capital on the college success of these women. Her work highlighted the various strengths that African American undergraduate females bring to their institutions despite lacking "traditional" conceptions of cultural capital such as pre-college academic preparation, access to high-cultural experiences, travel, etc. Her work proposed that Black women begin to analyze their social location in relationship to race, gender, and class. She contended that this analysis become part of their cultural capital because they help these women make sense of discrimination and can help them develop strategies and discourse to negotiate the consequences of bias.

Self- Efficacy

Self-efficacy is also an essential tool of success for African American undergraduate females. The belief in one's ability to successfully perform or accomplish a given task can support the process of high achievement. Self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's capability to perform a task, specifically one's capacity to mobilize cognitive and other resources required to execute a course of action successfully

(Baldwin, 2006).   There has been some body of work on the self-efficacy of individuals in schools, the work place, and life in general (Bandura, 1997). However, the literature is very scarce concerning the specific self-efficacy of African American undergraduate females. The work that has been done in self-efficacy in higher education contexts has centered around males and students of White ethnic backgrounds.

According to the work of Thomas, Love, Roan-Belle, Tyler, Brown, and Garriott (2009), self-efficacy beliefs garner a more comprehensive explanation of the associations between motivation and academic outcomes for African American women. Their study focused on the influences of self-efficacy beliefs and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on the academic adjustment of African American women attending institutions of higher education. Their findings indicated a strong connection between one's self efficacy and their desired motivation to accomplish a give task. This work is essentially relevant to the discussion of the positive influence higher self-efficacy can be for African American undergraduate females. Getz (2000) examined the way in which African American students could enhance and promote their own self efficacy and the impact of their life experiences on their higher education success. Long, Monoi, Harper, Knoblauch, and Murphy (2007) explored the impact of self-efficacy on the academic achievement of urban students. African American females that have a strong sense of self-efficacy and belief in their ability to succeed on their campuses, based on the literature will do better academically, socially, and emotionally on their PWI campuses. Although self-efficacy is a great tool for success, there is much space available for the exploration of self-efficacy in the life stories of African American undergraduate

females. Still several researchers have discussed the ways in which self-efficacy and resiliency go hand and hand (Getz, 2000; O'Connor, 2002; Thomas et al., 2009).

Resilience

"Resilient students are often self-efficacious: they believe in themselves and their ability to succeed (Getz, 2000, p. 459)." Resilience can be described as "the glue that keeps us functioning when we are confronted with life's misfortunes or challenges (Joseph, 1994, p. 25)." It is in fact the attitudes, coping strategies, and personal strength that is characteristic of people who manage adversity and adjust well to the changes demanded of them by their life circumstances. Resilience is basically the ability to "bounce back" (Joseph, 1994). Stevens (2002) defined resilience as moral steadfast perseverance, demonstrated by hardiness and courage in the face of dangerous and hazardous conditions.

Within the literature on resiliency, some researchers have looked at resiliency in adults, especially those who have encountered traumatic situations in their youth (Higgins, 1994). While others have focused the attention of their research on resiliency in children and adolescents (Joseph, 1994; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2008; McGinty, 1999; O'Connor, 1997). There is interestingly a growing body of literature pertaining to resiliency in young African American girls (Paul, 2003; Stevens, 2002). This research speaks specifically to the ways in which to foster and support resiliency in maturing Black girls. The perspectives in these works are important and quite relevant to the conversation of resiliency in African American undergraduate females. The attributes of

resiliency that are presented, if in fact developed in the early stages of childhood, can translate to the self-concept and development of African American females at PWIs.

Another trend in the research on resiliency explores resiliency in higher educational contexts (Banks, 2009; Getz, 2000; O'Connor, 2002). O'Connor (2002) defined resiliency as the why and how individuals experience success in school despite structural constraints. She is calling for an understanding of the socio-historical and institutionally responsive processes involved in the concept of resiliency. That is, an academic discussion of resiliency that examines the structural restraints in higher education that are related to race, class, gender, and other social locations Although quite limited, there are a few researchers who have specifically examined resiliency in African American students as well as African American females in institutions of higher education (Banks, 2009, Franklin, 1996, Getz, 2000).

Banks (2009) stated: "Black women undergraduates who do the additional work of negotiation and strategy development are often described using the term resilient. In this case, the use of resiliency is closely linked to "bootstrap theory", another ideological stance in which individuals bear the sole responsibility for outcomes connected to structural oppression with little focus on the ways they bear this responsibility or the cost of this work (p. 36)." In the same vein, Getz (2000) investigated the connection between resiliency and self-efficacy in the higher education success of African American students. Her work represented an approach to establish the interconnection of these tools for success in African American students.

An autobiographical narrative about one's first person experience as an African American female at Predominately White college is presented in the writing of Hargrave (1942). Her words powerfully portray the resilient nature of the African American female student: "Here I am, learning to face life. My aim is to forget the color of my skin, avoid being emotionally aroused because of ill-treatment because of my conspicuousness. I would be a fool to let these immature white students ruin my chance for a college education. I must go on (486)." Her words depict the strong desire for African American females at Predominately white colleges to persevere in the face of great adversity and the importance of having a resilient spirit and attitude which can positively impact the college experiences of these women.

Support Systems

Previous research demonstrates that strong social networks and support are essential tools for success for African American females at PWIs (Baber, 2010; Barnett, 2004; Bradley & Sanders, 2003; Cole, 1994; Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Fries-Britt, 2002; Foster, 2003; Gallien & Peterson, 2005). Women most monopolize on their support networks in order to positively impact their success. Barnett (2004) and Fries-Britt (2002) both discussed the integral role of Black families and other familial networks in supporting African American college students on Predominately White campuses. This research emphasizes the need for strong communication and networks within the family structure. These strong family and community networks are important for African American women throughout her matriculation and tenure on PWI campuses.

An interesting body of work proclaims the importance of building relationships amongst Black females as a tool by which to share collective struggles and to encourage one another. Bradely & Sanders (2003) stated: "Sisterhood is a prevailing ethos within African American culture. The special closeness of Black women has been intergenerationally transmitted from its cultural roots in many African societies (p. 188)." Their research suggests that African American females who are having difficult times on their campuses should not only seek out support from counseling services on campuses, but that they should include their "sistas" in the process. They propose: "A useful way to adapt individual counseling to draw on the social and cultural resources of African American women is to involve the client's "sistas" (close friends and family members) in a counseling session. Using a "sista" intervention is designed to provide support for the client and to raise her awareness about how her behavior and thinking affect her (p. 188)."

Group survival and perseverance is a great tool by which African American women can reject hegemonic forces of oppression. Through membership within small groups and the African American women group on a larger scale, women can work together to strengthen their collective effectiveness in combating negativity. Foster(2003) contends: "This resistance subcommunity can be broadly characterized as the attempt of similarly situated individuals to bring dignity to their experiences, perspectives, and existence in the face of social structures that would deny them that dignity. Dignity refers to the democratic, egalarian principle by which all people are accorded a basic level of respect based simply upon their shared humanity. Moving from

the idea of the individual pursuit of dignity to the formation of collective resistant identities based upon the similar predicaments of individual social actors (p. 267)." Also, "Black feminist works portray African-American women as individuals and as a group struggling toward empowerment within an overarching matrix of domination. If power as domination is organized and operates via intersecting oppressions, then resistance must show comparable complexity (Hill-Collins, 2000, p.203)." African American women on PWIs must create a place and space in which to build relationships grounded in trust and understanding. Through the impermeable bonds of collective struggle, there is hope for collective healing, collective perseverance, and collective success.

Mentorship

Another great source of support for African American females is that of establishing relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators on their campus. Unfortunately, another challenge facing African American females at PWIs is the shortage or lack of mentors readily available to guide and support the women through their undergraduate experience. Due to often small numbers of African Americans at the faculty and administrative levels on PWI campuses; students may struggle to connect and maintain strong relationships with possible African American mentors whether they be male or female. According to the JBHE (2009) Blacks make up 5.3 percent of all full-time faculty at American colleges and universities. But a more accurate picture is obtained when faculty at HBCUs are eliminated in this statistic. When this adjustment is made, Blacks are about 4 percent total of the full-time faculty at PWIs nationwide. This

statistic powerfully depicts the great challenge for mentorship relationships to occur at

PWIs. When and if institutional priorities are focused on recruiting and retaining

African American and other minority faculty and administrators, natural mentor

relationships will emerge.

Moses (1989) noted: "Black women students frequently miss out on the

experience of having a mentor or advisor they can look to as a role model. Black women

faculty members and administrators are scarce on many campuses and those who are

there are often overburdened with committee work and other obligations. The lack of

Black women leaders on college and university campuses is a distinct disadvantage for

Black women students (p. 9)." It is this lack of invested and committed academic,

social, and emotional support that is a challenge for African American female students

on PWIs. Although these women may receive an assigned mentor or advisor; most likely

these mentors are of differing ethnic backgrounds and experiences (Coleman, 2008).

Several researchers have addressed the concerns of mentorship at the

undergraduate level. Lynch(2002) noted that the institutionalization of mentoring as a

formal or assigned programmatic initiative is one means higher education, particularly

Predominately White Institutions can positively influence the undergraduate

experiences for African American females. Redden(2002) proposed that peer

mentorship among the divisional classes of African Americans can make students feel

welcomed and received upon entering college. Also, PWIs' must (a) encourage African

American women to establish social support systems of friends and academic mentors,

(b) encourage African American women to use extended family as a helping and caring

network, which will assist in building self-esteem, values, competencies, and

relationship patterns (c) encourage African American women to get involved with social

organizations/fraternal groups that supplement Black extended family network, provide

experiences with leadership, business, political, and civil affairs; (d) encourage African

American women to get involved with church to promote spiritual and social needs,

provide strength and ability to make meaning of life and transform negative energy into

positive accomplishments (p. 4-5). Lynch(2002) also asserted that culturally relevant

mentorship strategies should be included in cross-racial mentor relationships where in

African American women are concerned.

Counterspaces

Along the same lines as group survival, another key element discussed in the

literature concerning support systems is that of the creation of counter-spaces: "Counter-

spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and

where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained. Counter-

spaces can be created within African American student organizations, offices that

provide services to African Americans, Black fraternities and sororities, peer groups, and

student-organized study halls (Baber, 2010; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 70)."

Counter-spaces is a critical support structure that can positively impact the success of

African American women.

In *The Diary of an African-American Freshman at Harvard College*, Millner

(1998) writes autobiographically about the importance of support networks amongst

students on her campus. This first person account of experience is important to the

existing literature. She discussed the Black table as a symbol of unity and community:

> It's called the Black Table because all the black people are there. Of course there are white tables-so many that no one considers it remarkable. Segregation when not enforced, puzzles white people. Sitting together, we do present a formidable picture to any white person who might want to join us. I sit at the Black Table in the dining hall for 'us'. I self segregate and it makes me feel so good. The opportunity to sit at a table full of young black people with shared goals and paths and dreams and knowledge is something none of us would miss out on for the world (p. 119).

Identity Development

The identity development of African American females at Predominately White

Institutions is pervasive in the literature. Not only is there a strong focus on the ways in

which African American females at PWIs develop their identities on campus, but there is

also attention to the meaning making processes of these women as they maneuver and

manage their various experiences on their respective campuses. (Carter-Black, 2008;

Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Stewart, 2008; Friss-Britt, 2002; James, Phelps, & Bross,

2001; Frisby, 2000; Evans, 1998; Highlen, Tom, Ashton, & Thompson, 1998; Jackson,

1998; Howard-Vital, 1989). The identity development of African American females in

general and not specifically females at PWIs has been critically impacted by external

perceptions and factors of society. These outside pressures have greatly affected the self-

esteem and perceived self-worth of several Black women. With the labels and

stereotypes attributed to the characteristics of Black women, it is important to note the

development of an African American female identity and offer a space for African

American women to understand their multiple locations and to define themselves.

Self-Worth and Self-Esteem

Within US culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal, and inevitable. In this context, certain assumed qualities that are attached to Black women are used to justify oppression. From the mammies, jezebels and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jimmies on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to Black women's oppression (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 5)

As a result of the historical and contemporary negative portrayals of African

American women in our society through the media and social outlets, several women are

faced with the challenge of negative identity development upon their arrival and

throughout their tenure on a PWI campus. All too often, these women have been

bombarded with unfruitful images much earlier in their lives and upon their arrival to

campus, much of the damage has already been done: "Historically, African American

women have been devalued in America based on two immutable characteristics: race

and gender. In addition to a history of oppression associated with these factors, these

women have been consistently deluged with societal messages especially from the mass

media-that often either exclude or denigrate them (Johnson-Newman & Exam, 1998, p.

70)." Several African American women have tried to cope with such negative feelings

by attempting to imitate White standards of external beauty:

> Concerns about acceptance, appearance, assertiveness, and external affirmation- especially from African American men-often place African American female college students in an extremely vulnerable position. The desire for acceptance may override their better judgment and cause them to attempt to adopt values, standards, and behaviors that may denigrate them. This pattern often leads the young women to other self defeating behaviors. The way that young African American women see themselves and others-the foundation of their personal identity-may be

influenced negatively by feelings of inadequacy (Johnson-Newman & Exam, 1998, p. 72).

The scholarly literature is rich with research that has focused on the self-esteem of African American women, especially in comparison to their White female peers. Self-esteem defined is one's attitude about one's self. The estimate of how capable, worthwhile, and successful one is. Self –esteem is different from conceit, for a conceited person has an insecure and unrealistic estimation of self and in order to maintain this inflated sense of worth needs to see others as less capable. Those with positive self-esteem perceive realistically and own up to their strengths and weaknesses and are not driven to compare themselves to others or devalue the success of those around them (Joseph, 1994). The development of self-esteem has been described in several different ways. Psychologists William James and C. H. Cooley provide interesting perspectives on the development of self-esteem. First, James asserted that self-esteem is the result of the difference between what I want to be and what I think I am or could be. If what I want to be is close to what I am or think I can be, then I like myself. If my view of myself is not what I would like to be and if I think I can never reach my ideal, then I devalue myself and have poor self-esteem (Joseph, 1994) Cooley contended that a person's self-esteem comes from feedback, real or imagined, that is received from others such that we value ourselves in the same way that we believe other people value us. He coined the term "looking glass self" (Joseph, 1994). The aforementioned perspectives on self-esteem development are important to the discussion of African American females and their identity development, for self-esteem, self-worth, and self-validation are important components of the African American female experience.

Frisby (2000) found that pop culture media and advertising, especially images of White women impacted the self-development and self-esteem of African American college women. Through the use of the social comparison theory which states that individuals have a need to evaluate themselves and that they do so via comparison with others, the research demonstrated that African American college women do engage in some type of self-evaluation. An interesting discussion emerged from this research which suggested that the effect of self-evaluation did not negatively change mood state or satisfaction with their bodies and physical attractiveness for African American women. In fact, the research suggested that in comparison to White women, African American women were able to buffer or protect their self-esteem when exposed to idealized images of beauty and physical attractiveness. In the same vein, Hayes and Murry (1998) explored the self-esteem of African American females through group mentorship and shared experiences. They conclude: "African American women face multiple psychosocial stressors because of the variety of 'ism' within the American society. Entering Predominately White universities can intensify the experiences of isolation and oppression. As student services within these institutions begin to address issues of recruitment and retention for this population, programs that provide emotional support and enrichment are important (p. 16)."

Evans(1998) explored the self-development and self-esteem of African American females compared to White females. The study specifically addressed the relationship between attachment and self-esteem in African American and White female college students. The results of the study indicated a positive correlation between attachment

and self-esteem. An interesting twist on the discussion concerning African American females perceptions of self-worth in comparison to White females was presented in the work of James, Phelps, & Bross (2001): "Middle and upper class African American women attending Predominately Caucasian universities have internalized the predominate cultural ideal of thinness. It would appear as though this population has accepted the White standard of beauty as appropriate and one that should be achieved (p 45)." This perspective on the discussion presents the need to explore socio-economic factors of identity development for African American women.

Gushue and Constantine (2003) examined cultural aspects of individualism, collectivism, and self-differentiation in one-hundred twenty three Black females attending a PWI. This quantitative study focused on the ways in which individualism, collectivism, and self-differentiation relate to African American women's experiences in the four domains of Bowen's differention of self-construct. The results of the study suggest that African American women who value individual uniqueness, yet viewed themselves as having more or less equal status to others, possess a more differentiated sense of self and were able to stand up for their beliefs while remaining connected to significant others in their lives. Also, the results indicated that although most African Americans tend to be more collectivistic in orientation, most African Americans are bicultural to some degree; and this bicultural status may enable them to express both individualistic and collectivistic patterns depending on the context.

Multiple Identities: Race, Class and Gender

No matter what anyone may say to the contrary, Black women are different. They're different from Black men and they're different from White women. It is true that much of

what they have experienced derives from racism and much from sexism. At the same time, however, much of what Black women have experienced and still experience today-both bad and good-involve the blend of the separate identities in a way that chemists would call a combination, not just a mixture. Both race and gender are transformed when they are present together, and class is often present as a catalyst -Hine and Thompson, 1998, p. 256.

African American women are often excluded from the literature on the Black experience and the female experience. This exclusion from the existing literature and historical frameworks provides some context for the impact of the "double jeopardy" of race and gender as their intersection relates to the African American female experience. bell hooks (1981) discussed sexist-racist oppression in society: "When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *white* women. Black women often had to choose between a black movement that primarily served the interests of black male patriarchs and women's movement which primarily served the interests of racist white women (p. 7)." This quote reflects the interesting positionality of the African American woman in society. Due in part to this location, the ways in which Black women make meaning and construct their sense of reality and self are worthy of attention.

The impact of race and gender on the African American female is pervasive in the literature (Blue, 2001; Buck, 2000; Hayes & Murray, 1998; Hayes & Murray, 1998; Hill-Collins, 2000; Hine & Thompson, 1998; hooks, 1981, 1990, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Steele, 2003; Stewart, 2008; Winkle-Wagner, 2009; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009). Anderson (1996) provides a great backdrop to open up the discussion of the various identities and social locations of Black women. His is an explanation of race, class, and gender: "Race is a social structure, constructed through

social interaction and manifested in the institutions of society, interpersonal interactions,

and the minds and identities of those living in racially based social orders. Similarly,

class is a social structure that, like race, organizes material, ideological, and

interpersonal relations; and, as feminist scholars have shown, gender is more than a

matter of interpersonal relations. Gender is institutionalized in the fabric of society and

shapes, like race and class, material well-being, social identities, and group relationships

(p. ix). " This framework is supported by other researchers.

Blue (2001) passionately discussed the dimensions of race, class, and gender in

his discussion of the unique location of African American women. He goes beyond

simply providing a definition of these positions, but also calls for the liberation of Black

women:

> A one-dimensional examination of the effects/roles of race or gender,
> without also critiquing the ways that race is engendered and that gender is
> racialized, will never bring about true liberation on either the personal or
> societal levels. Historically White feminism has failed in many cases to
> also effectively critique White privilege rather than solely male
> patriarchy, while at the same time, Afrocentric paradigms have often
> failed to effectively critique the role of gender oppression and male
> privilege, particularly within Black communities. Black women who are
> oppressed on all sides of those equations, are left without the luxury to
> ignore any one aspect of race, class, gender, or sexuality in favor of
> another (p. 121).

Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) underwent an extensive investigation of the impact of

racism and sexism on different aspects of African American woman's lives; self-image,

relationships with men, lives as mothers, experiences in church, and experiences at

work. One of the largest most comprehensive studies of African American women's

perceptions and experiences of racism and sexism simultaneously and how they connect and intersect with one another (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Race, Class, and Gender in Higher Education

First Steele (2003) had an interesting perspective in looking at multiple identities in relation to educational contexts. He discussed three distinct social identities in his work towards a theory of African-American achievement. He noted that in order for African Americans to achieve in school, their identity as members of a castelike group, their identity as members of mainstream society, and their identity as members of a cultural group in opposition to which whiteness historically and contemporarily. He asserted that African Americans have to be capable of dealing with the dilemmas that emerge from the socially constructed contradictory nature of these identities, as well as those inherent in the identities themselves. This perspective can in fact be translated to the experiences of African American females.

There is a growing body of research specifically examining the intersection of race, class, and gender in African American women at institutions of higher education (Stewart, 2008; Winkle-Wagner, 2009; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009). Zambrana & MacDonald (2009) found that race, SES, and gender are " co-constitutive and mutually reinforcing dimensions (p. 75)." that shape one's life chances, opportunities, and, in turn, experiences in higher education. Winkle-Wagner (2009) investigated how race and gender are created through interactions between self, other, and society. She studied the interaction that creates race and gender through an examination of an interaction-based

notion of identity (defining identity as he interaction between self, others, and society

and more specifically allowing space for identity impositions (the unchosen me).

Buck (2000) noted: "The double burden of racism and sexism is difficult for

most African American women to handle. Unless encouraged to do otherwise, many

African American female adolescents and young adults may choose inappropriate

psychological "resistance strategies" such as self-denigration due to the internalization

of negative self-images, excessive autonomy and individualism at the expense of

connectedness to the collective (p. 8)." Also, Stewart(2002) investigated the ways in

which social and cultural identities such as race, gender, and class intersected and

interacted to inform the self-definitions of Black students on a Predominately White

campus. Her findings suggest implications for student development theory and student

affairs practice respectively.

Definitions of Self

By talking with rather than talking to other Black women. African American women have the opportunity to deconstruct the specificity of their own experiences and make connections with the collective experiences of others. The give and take of the dialogue makes struggling together for meaning a powerful experience in self-definition and self-discovery. (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 190.)

In the midst of negative representations of African American women, the

management of multiple identities, and the oppression that ensues, African American

women can redefine who they are through positive and uplifting language and an

epistemological viewpoint that celebrates and validates the Black woman. The scholarly

research also presents the means by which African American women can take ownership

of their identity definitions and reject those placed on them by historical and present day

societal norms. A central theme presented in the literature is that of the relationship between race, class, and gender in the discussion concerning identity development (Highlen, Tom, Ashton & Thompson, 1998; Jackson, 1998; Hill-Collins, 2000; Blue, 2001; Stewart, 2002; Gushue & Constantine, 2003; Steele, 2003). Blue (2001) contends: "Black women have continually had to reject negative stereotypes and preinscribed notions of both Blackness and womanhood based in a system of institutionalized oppression. Because Black women are duly oppressed along the axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality, it is necessary to take on the responsibility of recreating cultural identities and politicized knowledge and responsibility of recreating cultural identities and politicized knowledge and theoretical assumptions based on criteria that are important and relevant for them/us (p.136)."

Hill-Collins'(2000) work presented similar conclusions. She discussed the importance of self-definition as a means of resistance:

> Black women who struggle to 'forge an identity larger than the one society would force upon them are aware and conscious, and that very consciousness is potent. Identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition. In this process Black women journey toward an understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class, Black females' refusal to relinquish control over their self-definitions: resist by creating own self-definitions and self-valuations in the safe spaces they create among one another. Self-definition is a powerful form of resistance because it rejects the dominate cultures definitions of beauty, purity, and privilege: by emphasizing the power of self-definition and the necessity of a free mind, African American women can proactively resist and overcome their current struggles. Self-definition empowers women and gives them tools of agency within their individual social situations (p. 114).

The discussion does not simply end with identifying the struggle undertaken as African American wrestle with identifying themselves. Some researchers have focused attention on solutions and ways by which to support African American women through the identity development process. Jackson's (1998) research focused on the social situatedness of race and gender within the daily experiences of the participants, and how these experiences influence a woman's definition of self. The three themes that emerged in Jackson's research were daily struggle, being a member of the African American community, and being an African American woman. Within the context of her research she contends: "Society requires African American women to pay attention to their race and their gender in ways that keep them distinct even as they try to join or glue them together within their identity. Depending on the type of environment they are in and the people present, some African American women will cope with stressors put upon them as a result of their race and/or gender status by ignoring the stressors. Others will tackle such stressors head on in an effort to contradict stereotypes that might negatively affect their self-definition. Regardless of the adaptive strategy, the social/historical reality of African American women requires creative psychological responses that include coping, deft negotiating, and strength to maintain overall self-integrity (p. 175)."

Howard-Vital(1989) and hooks (1989) profoundly sum up the literature presented on identity definitions: "Unless we African American women take an aggressive, unrelenting, lead in identifying who we are, we will continue to react to distortions and perceptions created by others (Howard-Vital, 1989, p.190)" hooks (1989) contended : "As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality,

establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject (p. 42-43)."

The conclusions that emerged from this literature review concerning the identity development of African American women at Predominately White Institutions are the need to include the interaction of multiple identity facets as a component of psychosocial development, the pivotal role of intimate relationships, and the incorporation of spirituality in understanding individual development. Subsequently, student affairs stakeholders can incorporate student support groups, mentorship, and the development of integrated social and cultural identity.

Summary

This literature review provides insight into the work that has already been done in the area of exploring the experiences of African American undergraduate females at Predominately White Campuses. It is important to take a historical view of her experiences from the viewpoint of her duality as an African American and a women. These characteristics are imperative to the discussion. Furthermore it is important to examine the impact of her campus environment and the factors of the academic, social, and cultural climate. Ultimately, the research is concerned with the identity development of African American females, specifically in the context of their campus and societal experiences. It is within this previous work that this research study will present narrative first person accounts of experience. This study will add to the existing

body of research through the narrative nature of investigation and the living narratives

and voices of African American undergraduate females.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the design and implementation of this study. It is important to provide a framework of the methods and procedures I utilized because I carefully selected my research methodology in order to excavate answers to my research questions. The research methodology of narrative analysis is the cornerstone of the work that has been done in this study. This chapter will provide the reader with an overview of narrative research and the essential process by which I collected and analyzed the data. This chapter will also provide background information about the informants.

Background

Seven African American undergraduate females attending Predominately White Institutions throughout the nation shared their lives and stories with me in this work. This research study provided a space for the informants to engage in a conversation/discussion about their lived experiences as Black women living and learning on PWI campuses. This study did not solely examine the informants in the context of their current situations as college women, but also provided a space for the life stories of each woman to be shared. As the women reflected back on their lives from childhood up until the present time, layers of experiences were revealed. Each layer of their stories unveiled the true essence of their existence and was an essential stepping stone to the discussion specifically focused on their present college experiences. A

narrative analysis of the lived experiences of African American undergraduate females at PWIs will be presented in this work.

Research Design

Narrative is the representation of process, of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Narratives are not records of facts, of how things actually were, but of a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of life (Josselson, 1995, p.33).

This study utilized a qualitative research design, and more specifically a narrative inquiry design. Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. The key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world; a focus on experience as it is lived and felt (Mishler, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Merriam, 1998, 2009). Denzin & Lincoln (1994) are leading voices on the subject of qualitative research:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

My study more specifically has been designed as a narrative analysis. There are various definitions of narrative research presented in the literature. Generally speaking, most definitions allude to the analysis of the story-telling nature of experience. Schwandt (2001) described narrative inquiry is a broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences and reporting that kind of research. Narrative inquiry or narrative research also includes examination of the methodology and aim of research in the form of personal narrative and autoethnography. According to the definition provided by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber (1998): "Narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a life story provided in an interview or a literary work or in a different manner. It can be the object of the research or a means for the study of another question. It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality (p. 2)."

As the previous definitions provide one with a general explanation of the nature of narrative research, the work presented by Bloom(1998) is important to my study, for her view on narrative research reflects that of a feministic epistemological framework rooted in social awareness and advocacy. She contends:

> Narrative research is concerned with using narratives of the "self" as a location from which the researcher can generate social critique and advocacy. Narrative research is concerned with deconstructing the "self" as a humanist conception, allowing for nonunitary conceptions of the self. It is not simply the content of a narrative that is critical narrative research; rather, it is the interplay between the narrative that is told and the structure of the telling that is critical. Lives are too messy, too complex, and too deeply lived at an interior level for the narrator to ever tell it all,

and the narrator's desires for particular kinds of self-representation are too deeply felt to be abandoned (p. 310-311).

This study employed narrative analytic tools to illicit stories representative of the first hand experiences of African American undergraduate females attending PWI campuses. Through the use of in depth interviews, I analyzed each interview in extensively to excavate meaning within each individual narrative. Chase (1995) stated: "All forms of narrative share the fundamental interest in making sense of experience, the interest in constructing and communicating meaning (p. 1)."

Positionality

As the primary source of data collection and analysis, I the researcher am the instrument in my study**.** Merriam (1998) contends: "In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. Conversely, the investigator as human instrument is limited by being human-that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal bias interfere. Human instruments are fallible as any other research instrument (p. 20)." In the above quote, Merriam (1998) explains the dichotomy I experienced as the researcher. Without the use of a standard survey or tool, I had to constantly attempt to void myself of bias and personal input, but at the same time I had the opportunity to interact with my data as no inanimate survey or tool could.

 It was my responsibility as the researcher to provide myself with various checks and balances throughout various parts of the research process.   Such checks and balances included triangulation and credibility measures, which I will discuss in more

detail later in this section. Bloom (1998) provided a framework for my position as it is directly related to narrative research: "The task of the narrative researcher, is to make sense of the telling rather than the tale. This is done both by recording and interpreting how an individual has lived and made meaning about her life and by creating an interpretive text that explicates how and why individuals construct stories about themselves to serve particular purposes and fulfill particular needs brought on by one's social positions and personal desires (p. 311)."

I also attempted to stay grounded in an empathetic stance. I believe that this frame of mind/state of position helped me in the analytic process of the data. Josselson (1996) discussed empathy in research and its impact on the meaning making processes:

> The empathetic stance is a way of approaching data that allows for discovery rather than seeks confirmation of hypotheses and that fosters more exhaustive quests for explanation rather than the illusion of finding a preexisting truth. If we listen well, we will unearth what we did not expect. This becomes the paradigm for discovery. Meaning is not inherent in an act or experience, but is constructed through social discourse. Meaning is generated by the linkages that participant makes between aspects of her or his life as lived and by the explicit linkages the researcher makes between this understanding and interpretation, which is meaning constructed at another level of analysis. The empathetic stance orients us as researchers to other people's experience and meaning-making, which is communicated to us through narrative. To understand another within the empathetic stance means being able to understand their stories. Narrative is the means by which we, both the informants and as researchers, shape our understandings and make sense of them (p. 30).

Informants

Selection Criteria

The criteria utilized to select informants was that they were a) African American/Black American females and b) currently enrolled as undergraduate students

at a Predominately White Institution (PWI). The selection process itself varied and I utilized several methods such as recruitment emails, personal referrals, and snowball sampling. Initially I sent out emails to several Black student organizations at PWI campuses informing them of my research study and soliciting interested participants. Two of the informants came to be in the study through their responses to the recruitment email. From these two informants, one more woman was referred and participated (snowball sampling) in the study. Another one of the informants was randomly referred to the study during one of my visits to her campus. Two of the informants were referred by their school counselors, and the last informant was referred by one of these two women (snowball sampling).

Informant Information

This study is centered on the shared stories and lived experiences of seven African American undergraduate females aged seventeen to twenty-one, all of whom were enrolled at a PWI at the time of the interviews. Four of the women self-identified as African American, two of the respective informants noted that they were Nigerian American, and one woman self-identified as only a woman (she did not self-identify as African American or Black, just a woman which will be addressed in her narrative). The women represented all four classifications of undergraduate students and appeared to be at different levels of understanding and synthesis of their lived experiences. This perceived level of maturity in part reflected their institutional classification. The informants represented diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds (urban, suburban, private, and public.), regional location of childhood and adolescence, the type

of educational institution that they currently attended (Ivy League, elite private schools, public flagship institutions), as well as diversity in majors. Their shared experience as African American undergraduate females at PWIs is the focus of this study and the defining characteristic of the informants in it.

Procedures

I engaged in approximately two hour face to face interviews with all seven informants to discuss each woman's lived experiences growing up as an African American female leading up to her current experience at a PWI. The interviews fostered a storytelling atmosphere, in which the informants freely talked about open ended questions that were guided by the researcher. Each interview was audio recorded while I wrote extensive observational notes. The recorded interviews were then transcribed into written text. I combined my observational notes and matched them with the text in written form, so that both forms of data collection were together in one document. Each interview was analyzed using narrative analytic tools of analysis.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research such as in the narrative analysis design of this study is reflected in the relationship between my research findings and the real world (Merriam, 2009). I utilized two strategies to ensure the credibility of my study. First, I utilized the method of *triangulation.* Merriam (2009) defined triangulation as the use of multiple sources of data or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings. In conjunction with audio-recorded interviews, I wrote extensive observational notes during each interview which highlighted the "unsayables" throughout each interview. I

recorded such nuances as body language, long pauses, and other environmental factors that I observed as the audio-recorder captured the conversation between me and each informant. The observational notes were utilized extensively in the analysis of the data and were a critical part of the rich description I presented in the findings section.   I also read several narratives of African American undergraduate females at PWIs throughout time. These historical perspectives of the lived experiences of AAUFs were relevant to the phenomenon I studied, and assisted in my ability to triangulate the data. I also triangulated using multiple sources of data. The findings contained the perspectives of seven African American women with various experiences and perspectives. I was able to analyze each of their narratives independently and interpret themes that transcended them all. The emergence of similar themes and experiences demonstrated that I was able to compare and cross check between narratives.

Another strategy I implemented to ensure the credibility of my study was *member checking.* Merriam (2009) defined member checking as taking data and interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if the findings are plausible. In this study, much of what I interpreted was in fact my own interpretation. Throughout the data analysis process I was able to ask several questions of the informants in relation to my interpretation of some things that they said, especially in consideration of my findings. The informants were very instrumental in providing feedback throughout this process and contributed to the credibility of the research findings and analysis.

I also utilized *reflexivity* "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183)." There were some biases and assumptions that arose during my interviews with the informants. I sometimes, reflected on my own experiences and would negate what they were saying rather than realize that their description of their reality, was in fact that…their reality. I reflected openly with my advisor about my data and instances in which too much of "I" was presented in the data. It was important for me to stay grounded in a reflective position. It truly helped me to check my biases. "Authors are being called upon to articulate and clarify their assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation to the study at hand. Such a clarification allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 219)."

Transferability

Merriam (2009) stated "Transferability is to think in terms of the reader of the study. This involves leaving the extent to which a study's findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations. The person who reads the study decides whether the findings can apply to his or her particular situation (p. 226)." Using this perspective of transferability in my study, it was important for me to utilize *rich thick descriptions.* Rich, thick description refers to a description of the setting and informants of the study, detailed description of the findings with evidence in the form of quotes from interviews, field notes, and documents (Merriam, 2009).

The findings section of the study includes various quotes from informants as well as short excerpts of conversation and dialogue between myself and the informants which highlighted the exchange of ideas and experiences and to provide a rich description of the conversation. Another strategy that Merriam (2009) discussed in order to encourage transferability is *maximum variation* in the informants interviewed. Maximum variation allows for a greater range of application by readers of the research. In my study my informants are very diverse. They grew up in multiple parts of the country, attended various types and locations of institutions, and have diverse socioeconomic and educational experiences. This variation in the informants that were interviewed in this study increases the chance that a reader will be able to transfer the findings to his or her own personal experience or situation.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability in qualitative research represents whether the findings in a given study are consistent with the data collected and presented (Merriam, 2009). Again the strategy of triangulating multiple methods of collecting data such as audio-recording and observational notes assisted in the dependability of my data. Another strategy utilized was the *audit trail*. I have been an avid and faithful journal writer since I was in the second grade. This passion of mine became a very important part of my research journey. The *audit trail* or log in qualitative research describes how data was collected, categories derived, decisions were made, and other reflections and questions that arise throughout the research process (Merriam, 2009). My own audit trail of sorts is

presented within each narrative as I inserted my own thoughts and reactions throughout the process.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the use of audio-recorded individual interviews with all seven informants. Reissman (1993) states: "Interviews are conversations in which both informants-teller and listener/questioner-develop meaning together (p. 55)." This quote is the essence of the collection of data in this study. The interviews were conversations between the informants and myself. Subsequently, each audio-recorded interview was transcribed into written text. Observational notes accompanied the recorded interviews which provided detailed descriptions of the setting and participant nuances that could not be captured in audio form. The interview questions are located in Appendix A.

Plan for Analysis

After the transcription of interviews, highlighters and colored pens became my best friends for the long and arduous process of coding the data. I read through each interview as a fine tooth comb navigates each strand of an African American woman's hair in its natural state. This analogy depicts the careful manner by which I deeply dug into the data as to not miss any hidden "kinks" or nuances. I read and reread the data numerous times, making notes and coding conversations, for it was essential to determine which narrative analytic tools would best assist me in the analytic process of the data. After reading the transcriptions multiple times and exploring various possible narrative analytic tools to analyze collected data, it became apparent that the utilization

of a holistic-content perspective (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach,& Zilber, 1998) would best

assist me in gathering an overall impression of each informant, as well as deciphering

themes within each narrative.   It also became apparent that I would analyze the

"iconicity of the self" (Linde, 1993) presented within each narrative to glean the

experiences of African American females at PWIs.

     A holistic-content approach takes into consideration the entire story and focuses

on its content. The authors describe the manner by which the researcher can utilize the

holistic-content perspective, and I followed their procedure to analyze the data. Lieblich,

Tuval-Mashiach, and Zibler, (1998) explain: "Read the material several times until a

pattern emerges, usually in the form of foci of the entire story. Read or listen carefully,

empathetically, and with an open mind. Believe in your ability to detect the meaning of

the text, and it will 'speak' to you (p. 62)."   It was indeed interesting to watch the data

come alive and "speak". Reading each transcription several times allowed me to

discover patterns and detect central foci/themes of the narratives. The holistic-content

perspective of data analysis also helped me to make connections between common

themes that were pervasive in all of the narratives. Josselson (1995) also discusses data

analysis: "Data, after all, do not speak for themselves. They presuppose certain ways of

asking questions and certain ways of interpreting results. The result of our experiments

are never self-evident in their import. They are merely the occasion for us to try to

weave a narrative in which obtaining a certain set of 'significant' results makes sense-

sense in the context of ongoing narratives both of epistemology and of a developing

communal tale of human experiences. And 'sense' is a product of interpretation,

grounded in the social conditions in which we live, formed by inescapable ideology, and spoken in a consensual language (p. 29)."

The data analysis included the discovery of themes in each individual narrative and across narratives amongst the women. Such concepts of metaphors and the unsaid (silences) in the text were also critical to the data analysis, Reissman (1993) eloquently describes the critical role of the researcher in the reporting of the narrative data and the way by which the research has "power" over participant depiction in the text: "Photographers, like investigators fix the essence of a figure. By denying viewers (readers) information, they paradoxically provide us room to supply our own. We can invent an entire world analyzing the figures (dialogue), although we know very little about them (p. 13)." Another important aspect of the analytic process was influenced by the work of Ochberg (1994). His focus on life story research assisted me in the analysis of the data: "Each life story elects, from an unlimited array, those moments that the narrator deems significant and arranges them in a coherent order. This fashioning of order is much more than a chronology. A life story establishes what counts as the main line of the plot and thereby, which incidents should be construed as making progress or as retreats or digressions. Similarly, life stories create narrative tension: How did the series of events build up into a significant problem, and how was it overcome. In these ways a story establishes what sort of life this has been: a comedy of fortuitous salvations, a tragedy of unrealized chances, an epic of storms encountered and weathered.

Due in part to the fact that one of my research question centered on the construction of the self in each individual narrative, Linde (1993) presents a critical perspective on the analytic process of the self: "Narrative is among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity. Narrative is a significant resource for creating our internal, private sense of self and is all the more a major resource for conveying that self to and negotiating that self with others (p. 98)." In my analysis, I investigated the major characteristics of the self that are specifically maintained and exchanged through language (Linde, 1993): a) The continuity of the self through time; b) relation of the self to others; c) the reflexivity of the self (treatment of the self as other including moral evaluation of the self) (Linde, 1993). The construction of the self in this study was directly related to the social location of each participant at a Predominately White Institution.

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

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology used in this study. This chapter also provided background information about the informants, the selection of the informants, the research design, as well as the ways in which data were collected and analyzed throughout the research process. This chapter discussed the overall framework of the research study and the strategies by which it was carried out.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION TO NARRATIVES

I worry intensely about how people will feel about what I write about them. I worry about the intrusiveness of the experience of being 'writ down', fixed in print, formulated, summed up, encapsulated in language, reduced in some way to what the words contain. Langauge can never contain a whole person, so every act of writing a person's life is inevitably a violation (Josselson, 1996, p. 62)

Introduction

In order to fully engage in the following chapters, the reader must prepare him/herself to embark on a journey. Seven young women have opened up their lives and have invited me in to tell their stories. This chapter can be thought of as a metaphoric museum tour/experience. The metaphor of a museum is utilized because it is a place where artifacts and precious items are stored, housed for onlookers to not only view with their physical eyes, but to fully indulge in an experience. Most artifacts depict a story, or the onlooker has the creative freedom to create the story based on what he/she takes in through the five senses. Museums in a sense help time to stand still and allow the observer to enter a different space and time. It is this metaphor of a museum that will guide the following chapters of this study.

The reader must enter the lives of each individual participant leaving behind the crutch of his/her own subjectivity. However, the reader must become an outside observer and must embrace the objective. The reader/observer will have the opportunity to do so as he/she enters and explores each gallery of the museum, each women's life and story. A life on display without any literal visual representations, just her words...the scenes that she depicts with her words…the sights and sounds only

magnified through her speech. The reader is in fact the observer, looking into the worlds of the women who were brave enough to tell their unfiltered, unadulterated story of their experience as African American undergraduate females at PWIs.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTINA

When the Levees Broke Narrative

Christina was the first young woman that I interviewed. I was somewhat shocked at the comfortable nature of our emails and phone conversations before we met. Christina did not seem the slightest bit apprehensive, especially considering the way in which I received her contact information. The cliché, "things happen for a reason" rang true for the meeting of Christina and me. I went to visit Christina's college for work on a college counselor visit. I snuck away from the boring counselor tour and found my way in the basement of the student center, peeping around corners, looking for the student affairs office. I popped into the office, appearing like a student myself, whispering "Hello, hello is there anyone in here?" I found my way to a back office with a cracked door and I began to knock. The gentleman said I could come in. We exchanged pleasantries and then I got straight to the point.

I explained to him that I had snuck away from my tour and was looking to find African American females to participate in my dissertation study. I asked him if he knew of any Black females on campus who were extremely active, and maintained a strong presence in the campus community.   He did not even hesitate, the name Christina rolled off of his tongue immediately. Before I could even complete my question, he was writing down her email and phone number. He urged me to contact her immediately, for she would be so excited to participate in my research. Spring break rolled around a few

weeks later and I was back on the road for the six hour drive to talk to Christina about her experiences.

Christina is a senior at a medium sized private university in the southern part of the United States. When I asked Christina the question, "How would you identify yourself?", her answer was short and to the point: "I am a twenty-two year old senior at (UNIVERSITY), originally from New Orleans." This description, however quite brief does not even scratch the surface or should I say depth of such a phenomenal young African American woman. Throughout my conversation with Christina it was apparent that her understanding of her own development was "developing" throughout our conversation. By the end of our conversation, she had shed new light on who she is and how she identifies herself.

Childhood

Christina's narrative begins at an interesting point. When asked to paint a picture of her childhood she paints the picture of her surroundings: "had a huge backyard, huge front yard". It is here that her story begins, the memories of her home and life in New Orleans are such a critical component of her past, present, and future existence. Home is where the narrative begins as well as who she was as a child. The picture she paints is quite vivid and I could clearly picture the scene:

> I grew up in New Orleans East in a middle class Black suburban area. I would have to say that the east is great suburban living. It isn't as congested and busy as it is uptown and downtown and the French Quarter. We had a huge backyard, huge front yard, got to play around, I was pretty active. My friends used to call me the walking encyclopedia cause I would just know random facts. I didn't get a TV until I was 9 or 10 and even when I got a TV I didn't have cable. So I watched PBS a lot. So that's how I knew random things.

As Christina continues to paint a picture for me of her childhood she transitions from the physical location of her childhood in New Orleans and who she remembers herself to be (the walking encyclopedia) to the people that were in her world at this time and whose influence shaped her. "Blood is thicker than water." This is what Christina immediately remembers about what she has come to know as a member of her family. The importance of her family and their support in her life is definitely evident throughout her narrative. Christina describes her family as a typical nuclear family, parents still married, and an older brother who was also a critical person in her life.   Her family is without a doubt interconnected and linked to the theme of home in the narrative:

> I grew up with a pretty much nuclear family. Mom and dad still married, they are celebrating 29 years in July. And I have an older brother. He is going to be 25 soon and really close, really close family. Growing up my parents always enforced the importance of family. Blood's thicker than water and things like that. Whenever I was in trouble I would always see my family first even until this day and it was great. I was happy really I didn't have a tough life. My parents provided for me very well. Some people say I would be spoiled or privileged but we definitely had to earn everything and work for it. And you know there are some things we didn't get to do. I didn't have a big sweet sixteen. I wasn't a debutant you know spending thousands of dollars.

Adolescence/High School

Christina's narrative shifts in tone and the sense of euphoria as she transitions from childhood to adolescence. It is this time in her life that she begins to grow awareness of herself and begins to form ideas about who she is as a person, especially in the context of the world around her. Christina attended Predominately White schools growing up and later on in the narrative attributes the "not so great of a transition" to her PWI campus to her experiences in elementary, middle, and high school. She did not

undergo a great "culture shock". What is extremely significant about her narrative during this time is that it is centered around her memory that she started puberty early. Here is the point at which her narrative explores her body image:

> I would say my adolescence was, well I think it really started when I hit puberty. I developed really, really early like 3rd grade. I would be teased because you know I was getting thicker and wider and heavier and a little heavy set up top and I remember I used to hide it. I would wear big tee-shirts and baggie jeans. I turned absolute tom boy I would say about 5th grade. My mom would have to kill me to get into a dress then. I used to love dresses, pink, I just loved all of it I was the girly girl but I definitely was active in sports and things like that but I think once puberty started I was becoming more shapely then some of the people I knew and I would get teased about it and I would definitely cover it up.

In this narrative, it is apparent that Christina is trying to make meaning of her body image and the way in which she embraces that image. She attempts to manage the contradictions of having to embrace a sense of "tom boyishness" with the wearing of baggy clothes, so she can hide her maturing body, even though she was a girly girl deep down who loved dresses.

In the same vein as her awareness of her body development, Christina also discussed another shift in her own identity during her adolescence. She discussed the way in which she began to understand herself. This understanding is connected to how others perceive her. It is this point in the narrative where it is evident that Christina is internalizing what others think of her. Up until this point Christina has mentioned how others viewed her (walking encyclopedia) but at no point in the narrative does she mention what she felt about this or how it impacted her. There is a shift from embracing who she is, to doubts about who she is. Upon the arrival of other African American students to her school, Christina experiences difference. As I listened to this part of her

narrative, I immediately could relate to her and I was reminded of my own narrative.

The term of Oreo emerges in the narrative and is reminiscent of the "Oreo-cookie"

existence in my own narrative. Interestingly enough, Christina begins to encounter this

existence after other African American students arrive to her Predominately White

school. :

> We had more African Americans in the school and that is when Oreo. I would be teased for being an Oreo. I didn't know about certain things you know. I couldn't listen to Q93 an urban radio station here. I listened to B97 and I used to love Alanis Morsette and Hanson. OMG I used to LOVE Hanson. I was the hugest Hanson fan and then when they came you now when most of the Black people came, they were like what? You like Hanson, who, you know and most of my friends are Predominately white and I guess fifth and sixth grade is when I really saw color as being significant. I knew I was Black but that was when I know it was more significant in the world than what I had expected. Yeah, that is how it was, my friends knew I was Black and I know I was Black but it wasn't a big deal at all growing up until the Oreo sort of teasing and things like that and that is when I sort of realized I am Black and I am a little different I guess than others.

High School

High school proved to be another space in which Christina grew and developed

as a person. So much of what she learned and experienced in her world during this time

had a significant impact on her development. When I asked her how she would identify

herself during her high school years, her response paints the picture of a very open,

diverse young woman:

> I would say people knew me as the really cool well rounded girl. I had a lot of friends from different groups. I had some of my closest friends from high school and even to this day are Black and then I have my white friends that I went to elementary and middle school with. I was in the choir so I was really cool with the band and I was really good in academics and I stayed social.

Her family emerges yet again as a constant source of perspective givers and supporters. A major turning point in her life occurs when she was introduced to double consciousness, and it is during the time of her high school years. I was so interested to hear that Christina had awareness of double consciousness at this time in her life. Something I do not think I truly, truly understood until I began my PhD program. Sure, I had heard of and read about double consciousness, but I had not internalized its relevance in my own development and its impact in my existence. It is also during this time that Christina begins to understand the importance of negotiating/managing roles and worlds:

> When I first got to high school that is when my parents first sat me down and told me about the real world. There is a way you act with your friends and a way you act in front of your teachers, whole idea of the dual identity. That is when it definitely came into play. You had a group of wealthy White kids from uptown that came here and they sort of already had these preconceived notions in their head. That's when my parents sat me down. I would say the whole dual consciousness, double consciousness thing that is when it first came and it came from my parents and my older brother who went to (UNIVERSITY) which is Predominately white catholic school here and his school was less diverse than mine and he definitely gave me a lot of experience and told me a lot of his experiences.

Transition to College

The way she understands herself in the context of going to college is wrapped up in a story she tells about the night before she moved into her dorm. Through this story it is apparent that her transition to college had an interesting impact on her family, especially her father. She understands herself at this time in the context of her father's use of the word: "baby". This is significant to Christina's narrative because she must attempt to work manage her location as the baby within her family structure in

comparison to the woman she is becoming. Within the narrative she discusses that her

father no longer calls her by her first name but begins to refer to her as the baby: " When

I was sixteen, my dad started calling me the baby, like he stopped calling me Christina

and started saying what is the baby doing? " As Christina begins to discuss the transition

from high school to college, she flashes back to the night before she moved on campus.

She literally refers to this moment as a flashback in the story. As I listened to this story, I

took off my researcher hat and by this point in our conversation had put on the hat of an

inquisitive and interested friend:

> My dad sat me down and I had already had the sex talk when I was
> twelve. I guess my mom just sort of casually mentioned it. My dad pretty
> much reiterated alcohol use, and safe sex. That was the last conversation
> and then woke up moved, packed, preparing my room, my dorm room,
> met my roommate and things like that, it was nice.

Her flashback is quickly, almost painfully interrupted by an unpredictable natural

disaster. The greatest transition of all is displayed in Christina's own words: "Then it got

a little interrupted because of Katrina." Indeed, Christina's transition to college was

interrupted by the then presumed category 5 Hurricane Katrina. Due to the path of the

hurricane, the course of Christina's life shifted at this point and her narrative weaves

around the experiences of Katrina. Her narrative spirals, so to speak around Katrina.

There are images of spiraling, whirlwinds, and instability during this time in her life, and

the events that happened thereafter. It is this time that the theme of home undergoes

intense disruption. Before Christina even begins to talk about her first days on campus,

her memory (and her narrative) goes straight to Katrina. Her narrative from this point on

in the conversation is weaved together in the context of the impact Hurricane Katrina

had on her and how it shock up her world. This part of the narrative is very critical, as it is the turning point of her life thus far. This is the reason in which, Christina's narrative is called "When the Levees Broke".

The metaphor of a whirlwind emerges during this point in the narrative. Several times in the narrative Christina refers to this particular time as a whirlwind. Christina appears to be in a state of shock and disbelief as she recalls the events in her life during this time. Christina's story is now joined by her tears, as the emotion of her experiences takes her back in time. I the listener/ partaker in the conversation am also struck by the heavy emotion of that time. We share this moment together, as I too begin to tear up. Christina has lost her sense of normalcy and spoke often about the way in which things work together. I have included her story without any commentary, because it is truly the heart of Christina's narrative and is critical to consider in understanding the essence of who she is.

> We moved on campus had convocation and then I remember our university president saying the university is going to be closing at 5 pm and we knew about hurricane Katrina. But when you are from here, hurricanes are a natural thing. You ride some out and then sometimes you actually evacuate. There was one time we evacuated and nothing really happened so we were casual with Katrina. I only packed five days worth of clothes and I took my computer and everything else was in the dorms. I was like ok I will probably be gone a week max. So I wasn't too worried…. and then Monday happened…. and um I remember, sorry I get (crying). I'm sorry and I was watching the news cause they were doing aerial shots of the city and I saw Six Flags. It was maybe only about 5 or 10 minutes from my house and I saw that covered, and they showed a picture of East Over which was a subdivision right across the street. I saw two story houses flooded and that's when it started hitting me. I think I was in denial the whole time. We googled our house and saw nothing but water and maybe the top of our minivan which was parked closest to the house so that's when we knew ok yeah, yeah, it's serious. When that happened you kind of grow up early.

After the storm, left in the wreckage caused by Hurricane Katrina, Christina understands that she had to grow up early. She had to enroll in a big state public university where she maintained a 4.0 GPA that semester. Here the metaphor of a whirlwind is introduced. Ironically she describes the whole ordeal as a good thing, and here is where the narrative shifts; she again realizes the significance of family, especially extended family and the important role that they play. This is the first signs of resilience in her narrative:

> I would say it was a good thing that it sort of happened because it gave me my own personal testimony. When I came back I definitely grew up after that. Some people their freshman year wild out and do God knows what but when I came back here I had am mission. I had a focus that most people don't get until their sophomore year when they declare. So that was a pivotal moment. I grew up, I matured and I had a goal and I had this set path already.

Transition to College Part II

Unlike the other girls that I interviewed, Christina was the only one that transitioned to her freshman year twice, so to speak, well multiple times. The discussion about her transition to college can be separated into pre and post Katrina experiences. After she returned to her school the spring semester following Katrina, she relived this moment as a "born again" experience where she was able to experience things as if they were new. Her parents did not move back to the city of New Orleans after the storm and Christina had to adjust to the fact that her home base/foundation was gone…ironically the foundation of her entire world in New Orleans was no more. This is the point at which the theme of home is redefined in her narrative. The theme of her home has metaphorically been blown down. I ask Christina to take me back to the first time she

stepped back on her campus, for her to paint me a picture of the sights and sounds, what

was she thinking, feeling, and observing. The following is her response:

> I would say it was a little nerve racking. I wasn't too sure what the condition of the city was. My house got five and a half feet of water. So this was really the first time I came back. And I was a little nervous just cause everything had changed. My parents decided to stay in Alabama, they moved so a lot of the base in my foundation was gone here. Our church was flooded, it is in the lower 9th and so that got about 12 feet of water and a lot of people I knew at the church were scattered about. I was a little nervous that I didn't have the base that was convenient of staying here. But when I walked on campus to see it still standing and still strong and having everybody come back and sharing their experiences I would say we all bonded.

The transitional word "but" in expressing the happy emotions she experienced while

coming back to her campus makes up for her somewhat sense of foundational loss in her

family's move. The theme of "home" has redefinition and Christina's narrative at this

point reflects this.

When Christina arrives back to campus there is a spirit of hope and unity. Within

this section of the narrative she tells many different stories about her time back. She

describes this time as pure excitement. From concerts on the lawn and all the

enthusiasm and pride that all of the students felt upon their return. Her descriptive

language during this time paints a clear picture:

> We had convocation again and it was a time we all reflected and shared our experiences and our hopes and fears and things like that. I remember um there was a sign that said (UNIVERSITY) campus lives. Everyone was hopeful and there was a spirit of hope on campus and unity that I had never felt and then to say such a big and so many people together um that's what made my transition really easy. It was cold I remember I was tired.

After Christina finishes telling the story of the unity and pride on her campus after everyone returned from Hurricane Katrina, her narrative spirals down…Christina uses the transitional phrase of "fairytale no more". As if the unity and coming together that she had experienced that semester back after Katrina was not rooted in reality. That was the fantasy. With no guidance from me through a question or push toward a certain direction, her first thoughts of the break in unity are directed towards her experiences with being Black, this discussion spawns several stories about the breach in unity. Breach flowing with the metaphor of the hurricane:

> But after this sort of fairytale this freshman year semester, that is when I started to learn a lot. That is when I sort of saw that people did have racist stereotypes of Black people ; just some of the comments that they would say. I remember walking to class and I think it was the World Cup soccer and Kenya beat some European sort of soccer powerhouse. They were saying Kenya beat them, and maybe it is because at home they don't wear shoes. I turned around and just gave them this face. Sometimes white people around here say the dumbest things, the most ignorant things you could think of. They are very open about their prejudice.

Christina's narrative takes a drastic turn at this point in time. The beauty of narrative research is that it elicits a story telling atmosphere (Ochberg, 1994). I as the researcher was no longer asking questions and requesting answers, but I was amazed at the way in which the narrative shifted and transitioned into Christina's life and experiences as an African American female on her Predominately White campus. Christina begins to understand her campus environment in a different light as her administration and students begin to put the pieces back together after Katrina. The narrative takes on a much more powerful and antagonistic tone.

College Life as a Black Female

As Christina continues to discuss some of her negative interactions with Whites, I steer her in the direction of making it clear for me. I desired to know what exactly the campus environment was like. I asked her to once again paint me a picture of her campus life. The first description of campus life is centered around the people (the players in this world on her campus). The euphoria from returning days after Katrina are gone and now her narrative depicts the heart of the campus and the heart of this research about African American undergraduate females.

> Definitely a lot of people stay with their cliques here. Even the ethnic people sort of like minority cultures tend to stick to themselves. Like the Indians and Asians tend to stick to themselves and the Black people stick to themselves. There aren't many Hispanics. The White people depending on class and where they are from they tend to stay together and then you have people that can have friends that are a mix and things like that but when you look on campus you will see Black, Indian, Asian, White, that's sort of how it is. Or you know you will occasionally have one of those minorities that doesn't really recognize that they are a Black or Indian so they tend to hang out with the White people. They tend to have that one that is their poster child.

Christina begins to discuss the lack of diversity in the faculty and how this is a major frustration of hers. She discusses the structure of the relationships between students as being plagued with racial cliques. She paints the picture of all groups existing separate from each other, except for, "Occasionally we have one of those minorities that doesn't really recognize that they are a Black or Indian so they tend to hang out with the white people." A central part of her narrative explains that the diversity within faculty exists in that there are several Indian and Asian professors. This comes about through her experiences within her major.

> They do have African American professors here but they are few and far between. Like my major is cell molecular biology and I have never had a Black TA, never. That department is a bunch of old white men and women. I had maybe mostly white male professors for my genetics class I had an Indian lady, she was very sweet and then I had a lot of Indian and Asian TAs. At (UNIVERSITY) there isn't a lot of African American diversity here with the students and the admin.

She discusses the shift in her administrations priorities after the storm. Much of the funding to rebuild her school took precedence over other issues. She talks about the differences of priority between the administration and the students. The administration's focus was on rebuilding the university…centered mostly on the physical rebuilding of outward structures, while the students' priorities were centered on building campus life. She also discusses the lack of urgency in replacing the position of the Director of Minority Affairs. She states that this implicitly demonstrates to her and other students that the university does not value diversity:

> With the students and the admin there has been a little sort of schisms just because the university is trying to come back from a great financial lost after Katrina. They spent I think about 860 million just trying to fix up everything. And they lost 30% of the endowment in investments. So it's been up and down the past couple years. So a lot of their priorities are different than some of the student's concerns and needs. I think that is the biggest issue. I think financially the university is trying to prepare/secure itself for another Katrina. But I do not understand why they won't fill the vacancy for the Director of Multicultural Affairs. How can you say we are a diverse community, yet the main office of multicultural life, and not just catering to black people, it caters to LBGT, religious life, Asian and Indian cultures, they are the cornerstone of student affairs, yet our office is empty. This should be their priority.

She offers some statistics to back up her frustration with the lack of diversity on campus while she discusses the implications of this lack of diversity on campus environment and student life. The lack of Blacks enrolled means that Black

organizations on her campus will suffer. Organizations that historically provided a

network of support for Black students, no longer exists because there are not enough

students to keep them going. Especially the African American sororities and fraternities:

> This past freshman class there were about 1,565 students. It is the biggest since, my class and that was about 1, 400. And I would say about 80% of us came back after Katrina. 2010 was 965 and 2011 was about 1200 and then you have this huge 1500 almost 1600 class. Only 36 were Black and that included athletes. So when we got that number last year in April we were like what the hell is going to happen next year and then with these numbers it affects all of the Predominately Black organizations. It affects the African American Congress which is like the BSU; it affects men of color which is a minority male group. All of our numbers are down. It affects African American women society it definitely affects the Black Greeks.

Christina has not completely made sense of all of this. She struggles to reconcile

the ways in which her university, which "claims" diversity is an institutional priority and

her knowledge of the dismal numbers of African American entering freshman. It is

interesting to note that Christina's narrative has taken a very diplomatic tone. Like a

statistician Christina describes the problem in s quantitative, positivistic manner that is

very matter of fact. There is no sugar coating taking place, for the numbers can not lie.

And, I sure did some research of my own to see if Christina's statistics were accurate.

Not that I doubted her, but I was so shocked that only 36 African American students had

enrolled in her university that fall. She was in fact near perfectly accurate about the

facts. The picture had been painted, the backdrop (campus life) clear, the foundation had

been set for our conversation to merge into her own identity development and her

location as a member of her campus community

I then posed the question: "Who are you? What words would you use to describe yourself as a member of your campus community?" What follows is Christina's response. It is somewhat brief but I was able to help her dig deeper through some of my follow up questions. I observed that when Christina begins to talk about who she is on her campus, she subconsciously begins to give advice to others. This is the nature of our conversation:

> I am very visible with students and administration. I work in housing. I am a senior resident advisor. President of AKA, president of NPHC. I work a lot. I did research downtown at the medical school. A lot of people call me you know when they try to do a lot of Black Caucus trying to get our opinions or try to get the Black voice out. Oh I was the only Black person in awhile to be on homecoming court this year. That was a good experience. I just had a mission to improve the campus life. And it is stressful at times just because you try to get a lot of Black visibility for Black people. I would say a student leader really focusing on campus life cause you know you can really excel academically, but socially you can be dead you know. Most of the education lies outside the classroom. And if you are not working to better yourself and to become more well rounded, you are not going to survive out there. So I definitely tried to improve the campus life and the student experience. Because a positive student experience will reflect academically.

Lived Experiences

Christina's entire discussion about her lived experience spirals and is centered around the dating scene and her experiences with Black and white men. She sees her lived experience in terms of her interactions with the opposite sex, which I found to be very interesting. Her narrative does not reflect the strength she just described of who she is within this world on her campus, but yet in comparison to the white women on the campus. I was fascinated by this shift in the narrative. As we spoke of her strengths, her impact on her campus, and the person that she is viewed to be within her campus. I was

fascinated by the way Christina reveals how she views herself. The first words out of her

mouth were straight to the point: "It is hard being a Black female here."-

> When you go out sometimes you have white guys trying to holler at you
> like you are a prostitute and they will hop up on you like it's a joke. Just
> drunk. His friends are laughing, he's laughing and you know he may see
> it as innocent but you are degrading me just because I am thicker than the
> average white woman. I have breasts and I have a butt. Some white guys
> say some pretty degrading things. With Black males here…
> UHHHHHH!!! I think the biggest issue here and if you're looking for
> something serious it is very hard to find someone of substance. Most of
> the Black women here you know well me, I just stick to my work. I stick
> to improving myself as a person like I have learned not to rely on guys
> and things like that and its tough.

At this point in our interview we are interrupted by the fire alarm demanding us to

immediately evacuate the building. This completely stumps the flow of our conversation

as we begin to pack up quickly and exit the building. As we were exit the building we

decided to go to lunch. Interestingly enough, I did not want to stop the flow of our

conversation, so we proceeded to walk and talk. I simultaneously kept the tape recorder

on as not to lose any precious data. As our conversation continued about the lack of

suitable mates and potential dates, Christina indicates that she has really begun to

question herself:

> Is it because I don't have the long hair, is it because I am a size 10/12
> and not a size two? Am I intimidating? That is the biggest thing. Usually
> people say you are always smiling, ok so why can't guys approach me?
> Is it I am too focused, is it physical attributes or because of my spiritual
> and religious convictions?

This narrative is very telling. Christina's inner voice has emerged with many questions

that she does not at any point try to answer. I observed that her demeanor and sense of

self-confidence evaporated as she focused on her outward physical attributes. I had to

make note in my head that I had asked her about her experiences as an African American woman on her campus and the focus had turned in this direction. I struggled within myself to answer the questions for her, because I knew that I had had this conversation with my own self many, many times. I could totally relate to everything she was feeling. I wanted to try to encourage Christina to make meaning out of all she was saying, but I was trying to help myself make meaning of my own plagued thoughts.

As we approached the door of the cafeteria, I turned the tape recorder off and we began to engage in an authentic conversation. No filters, no contrived research questions, simply two Black females who have lived the PWI experience having lunch. And as I reflect on this part of the interview, I so wish that I did have the tape recorder playing because that conversation produced the most candid and genuine conversation.

Analysis

Global Impression

At the onset of Christina's narrative about her childhood she explained that her narrative is representative of her life at home. Her family is a pillar in our world and the bonds of family were truly tested during Hurricane Katrina. Christina has come to understand herself as a contributing member of her campus community. She knows that she must leave a legacy and work diligently to ensure that her legacy will impact the future experiences of future African American students. She is often wrestling with her desire to be in a fruitful relationship and is worried about the prospects of marriage. She understands her life on campus in relation to the attention she receives from men. Christina exhibits resiliency at the utmost level. Her perspective is genuine and unique.

Though her life was truly turned upside down, she still holds the belief that all things happen for a reason. Christina has attempted to maneuver her campus life by being a very visible, active leader on campus. Not only is she a leader within her academic major of cell molecular biology, but she is a voice for change and progress.

Major Themes

Home/Hurricane/Healing

The major theme in Christina's narrative is the impact of home in her life and development. Her narrative is structured around the destruction, redefinition, and resurrection of home. Throughout my analysis of Christina's narrative, it is apparent that the theme of home encounters some change and development, as she develops as a woman. At the onset of the interview Christina describes her childhood very picturesque, paying close attention to the physical appearance of her home and backyard. This is the very first narrative that emerged in her story. During her transition to college, she left her house and moves to campus to another home of sorts.

After Hurricane Katrina, her physical house is destroyed and her community or sense of home is no more. Christina interestingly depicted the image of a hurricane through her language: "Oh it was a whirlwind!" Hurricanes do in fact have strong winds. In the narrative she reveals that her parents did not move back to New Orleans after the storm and everything that she has known to be home does not exist. This is the point at which home is redefined. She begins to embody her campus world as her home and finds the community on campus to do so. Christina has come to make meaning out of the situation of her home. She makes reference to growing up and learning a lot about

herself. Home is resurrected at the point at which she learns that home is truly where the

heart is. She internalizes that her family and their support is what makes up the essence

of a true home. After the incredible experiences with the changes in home after the

hurricane, Christine is able to work out the process of healing.

Support Systems

The theme of support systems is the tie that binds Christina's narrative together.

Christina learns a lot about her support system as the very foundation of her support was

disturbed by Hurricane Katrina. After her family remains in Alabama, and her church

and other community affiliates were shuck up, Christina pushes to find a sense of

community and support on her campus. Not only does Christina rely on support from

others, but she is a great support and network for others. This is illuminated within her

narrative when she described her roles as a resident advisor, and the president of many

influential organizations on campus. Christina frequently refers to her support systems in

her success. She also, demonstrates that when there is a problem or tension within her

support, she has to reconcile it in order to keep going.

Resilience

In the discussion of the whirlwind of events that Christina encountered her

freshman year. The impact of Hurricane Katrina on her family structure and the

structure of her world is a true indication of the resilient nature of her perspective. It is

one thing to see a person bounce back from a difficult situation, but to watch someone

have an optimistic outlook on their future and attribute the negative experiences of their

life to their growth and development indicates a very mature perspective and one that

rings true of Christina. Her resiliency is evident in much of her conversation, for example "I would say it was a good thing it happened, it gave me my own personal testimony." Christina even alluded to the fact that her experiences were a good thing, because they made her who she was.

Body Consciousness

The theme of body consciousness emerged early within Christina's narrative. Her early physical maturation brought about an awareness of her existence that came up at different points within the narrative. The impact of her body image is presented in her discussion about maturing in elementary school. This body consciousness is woven throughout the narrative, especially when Christina talks about her experiences as a Black female on campus. She attempts to reconcile these feelings about her outward appearance as she tries to understand her lack of dating options and future prospects for relationships. "Is it because I am a size 10/12 and not a 2?" Christina is often trying to manage her body image and is working her perceptions out within many points of the narrative.

Narration of Self

Christina's narration of the self is that of a change agent. The self is committed to fostering awareness and advocacy around Black issues on campus. The self is also acutely aware of the importance of maintaining strong numbers of minorities on campus in order to keep minority organizations within the school community thriving. The self is often defined in relation and comparison to others. The self is also illuminated in the ability to bounce back from difficult and challenging circumstance. The self is also

narrated in relation to who I will become in the future versus where I am as of now. There is a definite progression of the self and great points of growth and development. The self also shifts through time and space in the narrative. Christina definitely utilizes various reflections of the self in the past, while imagining an I of the future. An example of this is portrayed when Christina discussed her home growing up in New Orleans, while imaging herself in the future, away from this home. One of the most profound representations of I is that I is in no way narrated in a selfish manner. I is extremely passionate about others, especially the future Black community at her university. I does not have a problem or issue with being the "Black voice" rather views this positionality as a means by which to bring about great change. I is constantly learning, constantly growing, and constantly seeking to improve the quality of life for her community. I is also managing the feelings of an "Oreo". Within the narrative the self-attempts to balance the stereotypes thrust upon her by the concept of an Oreo.

CHAPTER VI

ELLA

I Am Not a Statistic-Other, Check Narrative

Ella was another informant I met through work. I traveled to Ella's, Pennsylvania school for another counselor visit. The mixing of work and study is a true reflection of the phrase "hitting two birds with one stone. I figured one of the ways in which I could identify a suitable Black female on that campus would be to network through my sorority. I called the Office of Greek Affairs and the receptionist gave me Ella's information, for she was the President of our sorority on her campus. I figured that if she would not be able to participate in the study, then she could at least direct me to some other African American women who might have been interested. Immediately, Ella was very warm and so excited about the opportunity to participate! I was beyond blessed to have found another excellent informant.

I had no idea the impact that the interview with Ella would personally have on me. Out of all of the informants, our personal narratives collide at various points in our lives. I attribute most of this to the fact that Ella's school is located fifteen minutes from the town that I grew up in. It was as if I was completely immersed in my own narrative, due to the impact of my surroundings. I remember my Dad would take me to Ella's campus to ride my bike and run around as a child. My own experiences made the mood of our conversation very interesting, because I was working out parts of my own narrative as I listened to Ella's story.

Ella is a twenty year old junior from New York/New Jersey. She described her growing up as diverse which included the schools she attended as well as her diverse socioeconomic community. Ella attends a medium sized private university in the Northeastern United States. When I asked Ella how she would identify herself, her answer was quite interesting to say the least: "I would say I am a 20 year old college junior from the Bronx, NY, probably. I may not just use the words African American, I just may, depending." From the onset of the interview it is clear that Ella has an interesting perspective on her identity. She stated that she may or may not describe herself as an African American. I knew that this was going to be a topic that I was definitely going to explore more throughout our time together. The next few stanzas of our conversation proceed as followed. I include the transcriptions because it helps to illuminate our conversation on this issue.

Ayana: So what would you say? Would you use any type of…

Ella: …Descriptive words in my ethnic background? Um, NO I wouldn't. I mean I would if it was a biography. No, no I wouldn't, just a woman.

Ayana: Just a woman?

Ella: Yeah, just a woman.

Childhood

My conversation with Ella began with her life growing up in the Bronx. She lived there until she was eight years old and then moved to New Jersey. Throughout her narrative I noticed that she considers New York her home, even though she spent a significant amount of her life growing up in New Jersey. Ella noted that at the age of ten

she became a big sister. This is the first point at which our narratives collide. I too did

not become a big sister until the age of nine. We exchanged our stories of growing up

with an only child mentality and then boom; pushed into big sister mode:

> So it was quite interesting that I became ten and had to transition with this little one coming. I lived with my mom and dad. They got divorced when I was sixteen. My dad moved to NY, my mom stayed in NJ

Ella admits that her parent's divorce during her very important teenage years was a

significant transition. Within the narrative she described her strong relationship with her

mom while she tried to manage the seemingly strained relationship with her father. She

refers to their relationship as experiencing some "rocky patches". As she attempts to

make sense out of her parent's divorce she also tries to make sense of her relationship

with her other siblings. I do not get the full story on the relationship with these siblings

but she makes note that she had to transition from a traditional family to some very

interesting dynamics:

> It's not a traditional household. I was born to a traditional household but at twenty I have entered this kind of hodgepodge of a family and it is pretty interesting.

Ella described her education growing up as rigorous and she did not feel that any of her

education was compromised. While describing her experiences in middle school she

makes note that she attended a very diverse school. She explains that it is not "white

washed" as other schools: "So people automatically assumed that it wasn't that great." I

thought it was very interesting that Ella brought out the stereotypes associated with her

school. Although it was a good school, she noticed that outsiders judged based on the

racial makeup of the school. Ella admits that she took many AP classes, was in the GT

program, and had a gamut of community service activities and organizations. She quoted

that she "didn't lack anything."

Adolescence

Ella structures her narrative in a very interesting manner during her adolescence.

When I initially asked her about this time in her life, her response is in comparison to her

same aged cousin. While telling the story about her cousin, she realized that her

pathway will be different. Pathways is definitely a theme within this narrative and Ella

discusses various paths in latter points in our conversation. I will explore the theme of

pathways later on in the analysis.

> Although I moved from NY to NJ I still have a lot of family in NY. I would go back there and it would be friends and I would see them every so often or even my cousins and you could see the paths that we were on even when we were younger was different. I remember when I was taking my SAT, the same day my cousin was having a baby shower. We were the same age; both 16 years old and it kind of signaled to me how different our lives had become. We grew up together. We would always play and be outside and do various activities, and then it came to a point when our lives weren't going to be the same anymore. I couldn't talk to her on the phone for hours about her baby. See I didn't have experience with that I didn't know how to deal with that and it was awkward.

Ella's parents' divorce is a critical point in her narrative about her adolescence. Ella

refers to her parents' divorce as the event that "changed her life forever" and at this point

she realized that her life would not be the same again:

> Yeah it (adolescence) was really awkward for me and was a big point in my life and the separation of my family and people I was close to at one point and had to get away from. Another big point was my parents' divorce when I was 16. It happened when I was in high school growing up and it just changed my life forever. It was something I wasn't broken over, I wasn't like oh I hate my dad or I hate my mom for not being together but it was my life will never be the same. You know at some point I always felt divided at some way. I could never have family

functions and have my mom and dad there. Or even my dad's family was always an issue and that kind of shaped who I was as I grew up as well and I became close to my mother because if it.

High School

In the midst of the transition she emotionally encountered after her parent's divorce, Ella has established herself as a well-rounded student and works hard through high school. She refers to herself as being popular. At this age Ella is acutely aware of the impact and importance of relationships. It is as if, she desired to strengthen her network and focus on her personal growth. Within her narrative it seems as if she utilized her disappointments and frustrations about her parents' divorce and utilized this divergence on her "path" (theme) as a motivational catalyst. What follows is Ella's narrative about her time in high school:

> I was all about development and growth, building my network of people. I knew even when I was that age. I feel like that was something that was big to me and I didn't understand why, but now that I am a little older, I can definitely see the benefits from it. If you were describing me I guess you would say popular, but at my school I felt everyone was popular it wasn't like you had a popular crowd because it was so diverse. I didn't hang out with these one types of people. I would know the athletes, I would know the artists, I would know the kind of artsy people that wanted to sit outside and dread lock their hair. It was that kind of school and I got to know each and every one of those different kinds of people.

It is evident that her multicultural/diverse high school experience had a great impact on her. It is especially telling the way in which her school prepared her to transition to her university.

Transition to College: No Tears

During this part of the conversation, I made several connections to my own narrative about my transition from high school to college. As Ella explained her move

to Philadelphia and starting school, I was thinking about my transition away from Philly.

I was leaving the place that was my home and Ella was now making my city her home.

In my narrative I discuss the desire to maintain some sense of tokenism. Upon my arrival

to UNC, I was struck by the fact that almost all African Americans were pretty much

like me. Ella makes the very same reference in her narrative:

> It was I don't know I can't find the word to sum it up but looking back on it now, you kind of feel like you are everyone else. You meet people and they are just as smart they were just as involved and just as active I was. Everyone was active; everyone was involved, everyone pretty much if you put their resume side by side everyone had the same kind of experience. Everyone was pretty much at the top. You weren't dealing with people who were slackers or who just sit by the wayside, no they wanted to be the best, strive for the best and now you are with the best and it's like wow ok, where is my place where do I fit in?"

Ella's last statement "Where do I fit in?" demonstrates that she had to negotiate her

world in order to find her place. Ella paints a clear picture of her first moments on her

campus. She captures details and she constantly keeps referring back to the fact that she

did not cry. Although her emotions were running high and she was in the heart of the

transition, she does not cry. Throughout our conversation about her first moments on

campus and the transition, Ella begins to discuss the feelings of invisibility. This is a

theme that is pervasive throughout the narrative.

> I remember the first time I met someone. You know, you meet people at events and random parties and you see them on campus. Then they don't speak and it is like did they see me, did they not see me? I know I met them, I know their name, maybe they didn't see me. I think now that I am in my junior year I realize that people have tunnel vision. They don't see you, you are kind of invisible if you are not a part of their clique and if you are not a person they are looking for or looking out for you are NOT visible and it is weird and shocking. It's kind of like do I exist for them cause it's like if you are with some other friends, they always see

you, they always say something and you are like, why is it not the same? Why do I see that difference?

Within the above narrative, Ella expresses her frustrations with being made to feel like she is invisible and insignificant. Ella's narrative spirals around the theme of invisibility. It is subconsciously linked to various other experiences that she discusses in her campus life and that I will explore more in the analysis

College Life

I engaged Ella in a conversation about who she is on her college campus. I situated myself as an observer taking a "bird's eye view" of her interactions on campus. Ella described who she is on her campus. What is interesting about this point in our conversation is that I contribute my own experiences from earlier in the day. During my counselor visit, I wrote down several of my own observations in terms of what I perceived student life to be. I noted that it seemed to be very one dimensional and "white washed". Several counselors referred to the campus as being called (Vanilla Ville) (Alias) because of its large White student population. Again, I found that Ella and my narratives merge and I was interested in the way that Ella defines who she is in the context of her White environment:

> The first thing I would say is personable, because well everyone you meet can be friendly and nice, but not everyone is personable and not everyone is truly interested in what you have to say and about who you are. And I think whenever I try to meet someone and present myself to someone new I want them to think that I am personable, that you can come to me and talk to me. And that's huge in building who you are. And the second thing I would say kind of I wouldn't call myself crazy but kind of eccentric. I am that girl that says what she wants to say, I am that girl that is going to give it to you whether you want it or not, like girl that shirt does not look good on you today or you've got a bugger in your nose, I am sorry, but you do, and I don't know if you want to hear that but

> that's just kind of the person I am, I am real and I would like to say that I am a real person and we all have flaws and all make mistakes.

One of the most interesting metaphors during this time of the conversation is Ella's comparison of her campus to that of a bubble. I was fascinated by this and definitely wanted to explore this. What unique things took place within this bubble? How did someone gain access to the bubble, especially if it was impenetratable as she discussed.

> It's not real life, this campus. Although the composition may mirror what it looks like when you go out into the workforce or when you go into the real world. Although more companies are becoming more diverse. And I meet a lot of HR people and they give us the statistics of the population of women the population of ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds they will tell you all that. So although it is changing, a lot of people here are privileged. They don't have to work, they have never had a situation when they have been in the projects. People haven't even seen what the projects look like and coming from my situation I have been in the projects. They don't know what it is to not take a summer vacation or not to have a summer home. I have never had a summer home I have never been on a yacht. I just haven't had that kind of experience like I haven't been that fortunate, I have been very blessed in my life but I haven't been that fortunate to be that privileged, it just hasn't been that way to me.

There are several dynamics that I want to dig into in this above narrative.   First she described her campus as not being real life, but mirroring the real world which appears to be seemingly a contradiction.   As she explores the diversity that is emerging in the corporate world, she quickly transitions back to the privilege of students on campus. In this section of the narrative, she exposes that she has been in the projects and thus her experience can transcend the middle class life that she lived. She also makes some pretty specific examples of what she considers to be privilege…. Having a summer home and being on a yacht. Her perspective is unique and I find it very interesting that she did not consider herself to be privileged in this way. Although, others may in fact think that she

is privileged because of the education she has received and the prestigious university that she attends.

Once again while describing more of the intricacies of campus life, the metaphor of a bubble merges again:

> It's a bubble and its sheltering, its sheltering. I feel like people who come to (UNIVERSITY) have been sheltered since they were little. They kind of all think the same. You get the same comments from people. That's primarily because of the type of catholic institution and you have people who are already religiously affiliated in some way. And so with that comes, moral and ethical backgrounds.

Another interesting point is that Ella described her classroom experiences as having to prove herself within the context of the academic environment. She explained that the issues of a one dimensional experience are often brought up in classroom contexts and she has sometimes embraced the position to speak for those who have been silenced. :

> We talk a lot about it in class and you'll have teachers who favor in one way or the other. So unless you're willing to speak up, unless you're willing to SPEAK for the other side, you're side won't be heard and no one's going to listen to it, no one's going to care. What they know is what they're comfortable with and that's going to be the end all be all. I had to get used to being the only Black girl in my class. I had never experienced that before. I kind of saw it coming, but I didn't experience it. I don't think anyone could have prepared me to be that voice. And so I have to kind of speak out in that way and kind of answer questions or kind of bring my experience to the table when I come into a classroom. I feel like NO, I'm not just some Black girl sitting here, who hasn't had experience. I've worked at investment banks, let's talk about it. Let's talk about it, if that's what you want to talk about. I know firsthand what that looks like. It's just kind of having that pressure, its pressure, and it pushes me in some ways, but in some ways, it's like… it's stressful, it's stressful. I have to do this presentation really, really well because I'm going to present it. It's going to have to be the BEST. I want to be the best presenter. Yeah we have good ones but you're going to say, THAT was the best one.

Managing Identities

After our discussion on who she is in her university world, and some of her life

on campus experiences, I again wanted to push her on the fact that she did not identify

herself as an African American at the onset of the interview. Here is the nature of this

conversation: This conversation sparked much discussion and debate about her identity

development and the factors impacting her development. I have included our

conversation in detail because it truly frames the way in which we got to the root of her

identity development and understanding.

> Ayana: So I am going to push you a little bit. I want you to be real, as candidly as possible now I have to go back to the first question I asked you. You didn't identify yourself as an African American woman so I want to learn more about that. That was very interesting and I was intrigued by that. When I ask informants the next question, I usually say something like "As an African American female what is your experience been like?" but you did not identify yourself as an African American female so I don't want to ask that specific question of you.

> Ella: So why did I do that? The reason why I think I didn't identify myself as that is I didn't want to limit myself, I didn't want you, I don't want people to when they look at me, when they see who I am to limit what my capabilities are or where I came from or judge my background before ever knowing anything else about me. And I feel like when that, that color, it's a color, yeah it's an ethnic background but it's a color is placed on you, you're automatically pigeon holed, oh she came from here, oh she did this and yeah I may be very typical of what an African American kind of female looks like maybe, or what she sees or what her experiences are but at the same time, that's not where I am going to stay or it is not where my, where my vision is for myself it is just not. My vision is not always to be THE African American female, that ONE African American female representing all African American females.

The above quote has so many layers and this is one of the most profound statements of

this entire study. What is presented above is a young woman who has negated one of the

components of her make-up. The literature speaks of the interlocking nature of race,

gender, and issues such as class or sexual orientation, however, Ella does not see the interlocking nature of these experiences. In fact, she wants to devoid herself of her African American self. I in no way believe that Ella is not proud of being an African American; I sure did not get that sense during our interview. What I do notice clearly within this text is that Ella is trying to make meaning of her location as an African American woman. When she very adamantly states that it "is just a color", I do not get the sense that she has come to terms with her location as an African American. Earlier in the interview she was very clear about identifying herself as a woman. This was a source of great pride for her. It is interesting to note that she believed that her race "pigeon holed" her more so than her location as a female. She clearly does not want to be the "voice" of the African American woman. I capitalized "THE, and ONE" because her voice on the audio –recording was very striking and enthusiastic when she said these words. This is an interesting location that Ella is in as she tries to make sense of all of this.

I also found it extremely interesting that Ella finds her identity wrapped up in her major and future career aspirations. It is her drive to be successful that stifles her from identifying herself in the way she would like. This part of her narrative is extremely telling.

> Where I am, there are not too many people in my major that look like me. I tried to now remove myself from the color because I feel like if I didn't I would be intimidated. In the field that I am trying to go into, not just finance but also commercial real estate, there is NO ONE that looks like me. And if I identify myself as THAT African American female it's kind of like oh, oh, ok…it's like oh ok… I have never seen anyone that looks like you achieve what I have already achieved so I don't think you can do it. And people don't explicitly say that, but its underlying it is SAID. It is

said when I look at the web page and NOONE in the entire staff looks like me whether they be female or just Black (stomping hands on the table) they just don't and it is like ok. I will present myself as if you can't even see my color that's just how it is going to be you are just not going to notice that I am Black until after and you are like wait, what was she like you know it's a sense of I want to say confidence almost., I think as an African American you start off on a different playing field, you just do, you just do. In high school I remember someone said to me you are a double minority.

Wow, as I just read through this narrative as I am writing this text, I just started to cry. There are so many layers in this statement, so much that I can relate to in Ella's narrative as a Black woman myself, and as I type this, I am trying to make meaning of it as well as the meaning for myself. There are several different contradictions in this text. She has stated several times that being Black is "just a color", but a few stanzas after she has internalized that as an African American, she starts off on another playing field. The most striking statement from this narrative is that she does not want to be "THAT" African American woman, yet I am still not sure how to make sense of her struggle to manage these locations. Another contradiction is the fact that she wants others not to notice that she is Black…and then she says it is connected to her confidence. What I find contradictory in this statement is that full confidence should compel her to embrace her race and gender and not devoid herself of either to get others to recognize her other strengths.

This conversation spun into a long discussion of the term double minority and the impact this statement had on her, given the fact that it was a White student who granted her this knowledge. The entire tone in the interview becomes tense and her emotions are strong and her passion is overflowing.

> Double minority? I was like what does that mean I think at the time I was like and you are a blue eyed devil! What do you mean by that? So what I am a double minority what does that have to mean about who I am as a person? That doesn't identify me in anyway. That I am a female and an African American, that's a statistic you're giving me. You are putting me automatically in a statistic, that's why you are asking.

This narrative took Ella back to this moment and she spoke as if she was speaking to the classmate who called her a double minority. What I am trying to understand is the reason Ella is not aware that she is a female and she is an African American. She has come to understand these locations as statistics. She has internalized that these identifiers are merely statistics. I found this powerfully important to further dig into. During this heated conversation, I asked Ella in the simplest form I possibly could about what box does she check in questions about her racial identity. "Do you check other, do you check Black? What do you check? Her response

> It depends. Honestly there have been times when I have checked some random thing. I look at those things as a joke, honestly and I have probably messed up a lot of people's studies and a lot of people's statistics because I will check ANYTHING. Sometimes I have checked Native American and named a tribe. Sometimes I have named Caucasian it, its' going crazy, going nutsy… Puerto Rican or Latino decent and I don't have Latino decent. I probably shouldn't do that, but I do, I do.

I decide to push her a little more and I asked her straight up if she identified herself as Black. I feel like we are getting a little more under the surface of her identity development and Ella was trying to make sense of the heart of what I was asking her to reveal:

> I identify myself as Black. It isn't that I don't identify myself that way at all, but I don't want someone else who doesn't know me to put me in that statistic, I don't want you to, I won't allow you to. In that sense. I feel like. I put my GPA down, I put my race, my class, and now Black and what does that matter, like really? So now I know you are going to make

> a percentage/statistic about that. You are going to say…35% of these African American females have an average GPA of so and so, NO, just don't do it, OTHER, now you can't do it, now, now I have taken myself out of this statics all together

I then ask Ella if she checks Black when in fact it could benefit her such as in financial

aid:

> Yeah, it kind of does and there have been times when I need financial aid and I know there is financial aid for Black people then I check African American…when it benefits me I won't lie I will do it. I am not going to sit here and say I wouldn't do it but I feel like if it is benefiting someone else or discouraging another student, then I won't do it.

I wanted us to explore the double minority perspective one more time. I asked her if she

embraced this as a negative or did this title of sorts have a different impact on her: It is

obvious through her passion that the label such as double minority is a force that propels

her to work hard and reach her potential:

> I think for me it only pushes me more when someone looks at me and automatically thinks I can't do something or aren't capable of something because I am a double minority. It only makes me say... I can do just as much, or even more or even better because I am. It's not a deterrent in anyway, like when he said it to me I wasn't like does it mean I can go here, can I go to (UNIVERSITY), will I be comfortable there? It was like NO, I can bring something different to it. Yeah like you know, it was kind of just like…me approaching it like I feel like I have the upper hand…I'm different and you're not.

Ella alluded to the fact that she is able to negotiate worlds. This is a theme observed. It

is interesting the way in which she subconsciously slides in and out of worlds. She

described the way she acts in different situations and with different groups of people. An

interesting story emerged concerning her negotiation. She described a phone

conversation/interview for an internship to highlight the way in which she negotiates and

shifts according to the situation. She admitted to changing her voice to make it sound

more high pitched and about consciously thinking about using proper grammar (no slang). Also, when people meet her in person they are often shocked that she is a Black woman based on her voice. What was interesting to note is that during this part of our conversation Ella was working out this negotiation: "Ok, I am going to be who I am, that took time though, and it took A LOT of time.

Ella definitely had an interesting perspective on the campus' push to diversify. While describing a scene of African American prospective student tour, she highlighted that although the campus "looks" very White, the minority influence is strong. She spoke of the strong alumni network and how in fact that network inspired her to attend her university:

> People who graduate from (UNIVERSITY) are so about bringing diversity here. It is so interesting. A friend's boyfriend reached out to me and was like 'You're going to (UNIVERSITY). If you need anything call me, if you want to go somewhere call me. I went to (UNIVERSITY, I'm an alumnus, here's my phone number.' The alumni are all about progression and (UNIVERSITY) alumni come back and they want to see things get better. They want to do things.

Our interview came to a close with much reflection about our conversation. One of Ella's most powerful statements centered on her "transformation" throughout the interview. She thanked me extensively for letting her be a part of the study, although I knew I was grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to capture her experiences. Her words are striking. The interview came full circle as Ella, developed throughout the interview. Her development of self-identification as a Black woman was a progression, especially considering that she negated herself of any racial/ethnic marker in herself identification at the onset of the interview:

> I want to thank you! Honestly, I didn't think I would be as open or as amazed by the things I would say and how you would interpret them. But I have been and it has been an experience for me so thank you! I truly appreciate it! (With tears in her eyes.)

This statement is a true testament to the power of narrative research as Ella was able to make meaning within her own narrative and her own lived and perceived experiences.

Analysis

Global Impression

Ella's story is a beautiful display of a very accomplished and successful woman who has been up to the challenge of beating the odds. Her narrative does not focus on the negative and struggles, but there is great detail and attention to the fight to be the best; to persevere and ignore the negative circumstances. Her narrative is also a picture of a woman managing her various locations and situations. She is attempting to manage her location as a woman and an African American, yet not wanting her race to play a part in her identification in instances when she may fall prey to stereotypes or negative interaction. Her narrative is a story about a very ambitious, hard working woman who desires to test boundaries and reach heights that someone like her have not accomplished. Often silent within her narrative is a coherent dialogue about her family and support structures. This seems to be a means by which she is attempting to negotiate her new family structure after her parent's divorce.

Major Themes

Pathways

The theme of pathways was introduced early on in Ella's narrative. This theme glues her narrative together because it produces a clear beginning, middle, and end as

Ella walks along her path. When Ella compares herself to her cousin, who is her same age and pregnant, she alludes to the fact that her path will diverge from those whom she has grown up with. She makes reference to the differences of paths that they will take in their lives. The theme of pathways is also illuminated within her narrative about her parent's divorce. She stated: "I always felt divided." This statement is an interesting perspective that ties into the theme of pathways, because her parent's divorce was in fact a sort of distraction along her path. As she was positioning herself to move onward and upward on her path to success, she feels divided, a sense of having to split between two families and two different experiences.

The theme is also referred to when Ella talked about her identity as a Black female and the implications that came along with this location. She states often that nothing is going to stray her off of the path of her dreams and future career aspirations. Much of Ella's narrative appeared to be structured like that of a continuous road. Her narrative was not very cyclical and this theme is a representation of this straight and narrow route of her life. Another representation of the pathways is in her discussion about her connection to her university once she graduates. She sees herself coming back to help other Black students along their individual paths.

Networking

Another theme in Ella's narrative that is semi-connected to the theme of pathways is the theme of networking. Ella makes reference to the importance of building and maintaining a strong network even from a young age. In a conversation about her high school experiences she admitted that she knew it was important to build a strong

network of people: "I was all about development and growth, building my network of people." She especially draws close to the theme of networking after her parent's divorce. It is this incident in her life that she reaches out to build support and guidance in other arenas and with other people. The theme of networking is visited several times in her discussion about her life on campus: "I have found a network of people here. If I need something here or have a question about something I can reach out to others and they are more than willing to reach out to me and guide me and take me to the right people. The multicultural center that we have here has been my first resource and then from there from meeting the people that they have directed me to. I met so many people that if I need something I know I can reach out." When Ella talked about growing in her career, she again referred to the networks that she has built during her various internships and opportunities. What is very interesting about this discussion is that she gives her university almost ALL of the credit in providing a strong network for her and providing her with the necessary tools to be successful.

Dual Identity

Much of Ella's narrative is centered around the theme of double consciousness. This theme was illuminated at the very onset of our interview when I first asked her to identify herself and she only stated that she was a woman and would probably not identify herself as an African American. Throughout the findings section of her narrative, I discussed her negotiation with her identity as an African American woman. Ella is committed to the fact that she is a woman and is extremely proud of this position. She doesn't see her position as a woman to be a possible hindrance to her success.

However, her position as an African American is one in which she tends to struggle. Let me preface this statement with the fact that I don't believe in any way that she is ashamed of her racial background, but she has come to interpret her racial background in a very intriguing way: "I don't want people, when they look at me to limit what my capabilities are, or where I came from, or judge my background before ever knowing anything about me. And I feel like when that color, it's a color, is placed on me I am automatically pigeon holed. I try to now remove myself from the color because I feel like if I didn't I would be intimidated."

Her social location as a woman and as an African American possess great source of tension within her narrative. Ella is even more adamant about not representing a race of women: "My vision is not always to be THE African American female, the ONE African American female representing all African American females. This theme in a sense wove her narrative together because it seemed to be a source of great frustration and self-awareness and negotiation. This theme is also seen in her discussion of shifting roles and modes of speaking during different interactions and situations. In essence Ella is compensating her location by negating her race and embracing her gender.

Narration of Self

The self in Ella's narrative is definitely narrated in reference to others. Ella often makes many different comparisons in order to position the self in the narrative. It began very early in the narrative when the self had to transition when her younger sister was born, and the self had to adjust from a traditional family to a hodgepodge family. The self is once again compared to her cousin who got pregnant and did not take the path that

the self took. Another point at which the self is narrated in comparison to others is when the self feels kind of invisible and not acknowledged by others. I is also spoken in conjunction to the self's position within the network of sorts. The self is narrated from a very strong and powerful position and a future perspective of the impact that the self is going to have in spite of the circumstances or situations. Nothing will hold the self back from being the best and accomplishing the best. Even as the self explains the rationale for negating the African American positionality, The self is narrated in comparison to others. In a story about what the self wants others to say about her accomplishments: "I will present myself as if you can't even see my color that's just how it is going to be. You are just not going to notice that I am Black until after and you are like wait."

CHAPTER VII

MARIAH

I Am One Person, There is No Splitting Narrative

Mariah was the third young woman that I interviewed. Our email exchanges were full of energy and excitement. She was extremely enthusiastic about her participation in the study and I was feeling very blessed to have "stumbled" upon her. Mariah came to be in the study by a very "tiny" snowball effect. I had set up a quick meeting on campus to speak to a girl about the possibility of her participation in the study. We were sitting outside in front of the student union talking when Mariah walked by smiling and practically skipping to work. She was a university tour guide and it was very apparent that she was so excited to be one. Her friend told her about my research study and encouraged her to participate. Mariah was not a hard sell, and immediately agreed to participate. Ours was a random chance meeting but her perspective is so unique and quite beneficial to this study.

Mariah is a nineteen year old Nigerian American. Her narrative is weaved from her unique perspective as a Black female, but a true "African American" in the purest of senses. When asked how she would identify herself she states. "I am 20 years old, I am Nigerian and currently reside in --------, Texas and I am a Bobcat (Pseudonym for her university mascot). I found it very interesting that she identified herself as a Bobcat. Immediately I made note that she has a lot of school pride. The importance of her school in her narrative will be illuminated throughout this chapter.

Childhood

In a conversation about elementary school she talks about her transition to the United States and her experiences as an immigrant from Nigeria. The experiences from her childhood had great impact on her, even now. It was amazing to engage in a conversation with Mariah about her childhood. I appreciated her candidness and her reflection of her journey to the US when she was eight years old. She explained that she grew up with her father and some other relatives in Nigeria while the rest of her siblings grew up in London; she was treated like a baby and for sure was "daddy's little girl". As she reminisces about her time in Nigeria, she quickly transitions to America:

> And then we came here and then I had to toughen up and I got made fun of by some kids because of my accent or whatever. What happened was I thought I would get made fun of by the White kids but it was actually the other way around. I got made fun of by the Black kids and so I didn't like Black people. So it's cool I had to get over it.

The transitional words "and then" indicate a shift in the narrative. When Mariah reflected on her days back in Nigeria and her childhood, she shared happy memories. It is her move to the United States when and where she first experiences a sense of difference. A very unique theme in her narrative emerges at this point in the conversation; othering. She experienced othering from the African American students rather than the White students, and therefore did not like Black people. I noted immediately that she does not include herself in the "Black people" that she admits she did not like. She has come to understand Black people to mean African Americans or Black Americans. I was somewhat intrigued by the nature in which she blows off this

statement "So it's cool." I know immediately that I am going to have to diverge from

my interview questions in order to explore this dislike for Blacks, and this is what I did:

I asked Mariah "At what point do you believe you started getting over it (her

dislike for Blacks)?" Her response is very telling as I can decipher by her body language

and the long pause before her response that she is still pondering whether or not she is

truly over it. Then she admits that the "getting over it" was a process and she digs back

to the situation in which it became apparent for her that remnants of dislike still existed:

> Well I didn't officially start getting over it until freshman year in college. I mean, I would say there were points in middle school, no, a little bit in middle school where I saw a different side. I started looking not as a whole but individuals. I had never officially admitted it to myself until freshman year at a retreat that we went to. And I realized I had just never really liked Black people.

I then asked Mariah if she considered herself to be Black. It is apparent from her

response that "Black" is not a part of her identity construction:

> First and foremost when anybody asks what are you? I'm Nigerian. I'm Nigerian American. I'm Nigerian first. The thing about our culture is a lot of people seem to be, well the younger generation seems to be forgetting where they're from and just say I'm African-American bla bla bla. But they're forgetting their culture and their past which I don't like at all."

Mariah is adamant about the fact that she is Nigerian. She makes a clear distinction

between being Black and being Nigerian. Her identity is centered around the fact that

she is Nigerian and that she will not waiver from this identifier. Her frustration with

Nigerians who claim that they are African Americans is a striking point of interest.

Mariah feels strongly about her culture and this cultural pride is evident in her narrative.

As she explored her culture and heritage, our conversation flowed into the relationship

she has with her siblings and I tried to steer the conversation back to the interview

questions that were written in my notebook, although I have been sucked into her narrative and the abovementioned discussion. It is then that I learn about Mariah's parent's divorce and her siblings. She discussed the reunion with her siblings, that they are all together now since the separation during her early childhood noting that "I am the favorite."   I noted that she really did not speak about her mom at all, but this silence will illuminate later on in the narrative.

Adolescence /High School

Our conversation about Mariah's adolescence was very telling. She dips back into her childhood to bring some context to her adolescence. It is this time in her life that she explains the various changes she went through. I connected to Mariah's narrative when she described herself as a bully, her defense mechanism from the othering she experienced. I too became a bully in middle school to deflect some of my inner issues, and therefore I was able to relate to Mariah's narrative:

> In elementary school I was kind of timid, stuck to my own. And then in middle school I started becoming the mean one because I was like I hated being made fun of so I was like, you know I'll show you and I became a bully... semi-bully. I went through a lot of changes after we moved from my old middle school to a new district, and I was like okay, time for something new. I was just going to be kind of in the middle. Not necessarily too nice but not too mean; just kind of straightforward. And so I made a couple of friends and some people weren't as mean.

During high school, Mariah discovers that she had found her place and she begins to develop relationships that reflect her sense of personal acceptance. This is the time that she begins to find strong connections with friends who shared her same African heritage.

> In high school I guess I kind of found my niche. I had my certain group of friends and I was more involved in sports and afterschool activities. And so I realize people were good for different things and I found myself. I liked to talk to people and then I found out I was more prone to be friends with Nigerians or Africans in general which is still true now. Or more so just when somebody is like themselves so I guess I'm still growing, still learning.

In this narrative Mariah explored her relationships and what she received from having strong relationships with her peers. An interesting point is "I realized people were good for different things and I found myself." Here she makes note of the process of self discovery. What is beautiful about this statement is that she makes reference to the process of finding herself as she admits to still growing and learning.

Her narrative about her adolescence and high school also reveal the value she places on relationships. She speaks about the impact her relationship with two of her best friends had on her back then and the value of the relationship she maintains with them today. She also reveals that she experienced some difficult times in high school with the deaths of several people during this time. She does not elaborate on who all passed away, but she does indicate that there were some teachers. As she reflects back to this time a story ensues about her favorite teacher in high school and his impact. Another influential experience during this time was her involvement with the marketing program Decca. This program was instrumental in her professional development as she learned how to present herself and how to prepare herself for the business world.

Transition to College

Mariah's transition to college is a very interesting part of the interview. Several stories emerged from our discussion about her decision to attend her university and the

influence of her family in her decision. Sometimes parents urge their children to stay close to home, but this was not the case with Mariah. Her father encouraged her to go away from home because her family really depended on her to do things for them and around the house. Her father encouraged her that it would be good for her to go away. She noted that she originally wanted to go out of state, but her university offered her a full scholarship, "And I was like YUP, that's where I'm going!" She mentioned that she was not homesick:

> I didn't keep in contact with my dad as much as I should have but for the most part, like the first time I went home was I think, a little before Thanksgiving so like I was away from home for a while. And of course when I got home it was can you do this, can you do that.

Campus Environment

I asked Mariah to describe her campus from a bird's eye perspective. I was very interested in the dynamics of her school, especially since I had personally heard many negative things about the experiences of Blacks and other underrepresented groups. I was very excited for her to confirm my hypothesis of the somewhat racial intolerance and covert and overt signs of racism. What ensued from her narrative, truly illuminated my own bias and I found myself having to silence my negation of her narrative. This was quite a process for me as the researcher as I managed my bias and reminded myself that this was Mariah's story and not my own.

Mariah described her university as a welcoming place that was very friendly. She described a place of tradition where people walk by and greet each other with a traditional/special campus greeting and smile. Occasionally one may encounter a mean/unapproachable look, but that is not the norm. She explains that her teachers are

always willing to help and that she has enjoyed the close relationships that she has had

with several of her professors. Not receiving the "answer" that I wanted, I specifically

asked her was the University a welcoming place for minorities. As I reflected on this

interaction during my reading of the transcriptions, I again saw my bias emerge as the

researcher in what appeared to be me trying to coax Mariah into an answer that I wanted

to hear. As the interview continued Mariah was true to her story. I am so thankful that

she did not give me the responses that I was soliciting, because her story is rich and so

important.

Complete Bobcat

I proceeded to encourage her to answer questions about her racial identity and

racial community on campus. I wanted to dig more into the reasons why she viewed

herself as a contributor to her campus and not so much from the perspective of a Black

student impacting this contribution. I found this to be very interesting. Her location as a

tour guide and her total embracement of being a Bobcat also demonstrated that her racial

identification is not her main focus. Her perspective is quite unique. I pose the

question; "For the most part do you feel like it is a very welcoming place for minority

students?"

> I would say just... okay, from just hearing about it from other people you
> would think it's not, but when you're actually on campus it is a friendly
> place. The only thing is that you might meet those couple of people that
> have never been around minorities and that are shocked and they might
> say some things that they shouldn't say maybe like something that they
> say back home but I've come to realize it's just like some of them don't
> know. Like they've never been exposed to it and once they know, then
> they know oh, I shouldn't say this. I've never encountered any like racial
> slurs or anything like that but for the most part my friends, like my
> roommate is White. And like we get along completely.

Much is revealed in this statement. First, Mariah makes mention of the fact that when her University is referred to, the general feeling is that it is not a welcoming place for minorities (my own perception included), but to her it is a very friendly environment. She then talks about the few people on campus who may "say things they shouldn't" in reference to minorities. She gives them some "grace" discussing that they probably say things that they have heard in their lives and then they learn they should not say it. It appears that Mariah can easily downplay these instances and forgive their ignorance versus the seemingly lack of forgiveness she has given to Blacks. The statement "I've never encountered any racial slurs or anything like that **but** for the most part my friends like my roommate is White." I noted the "but" which supports the fact that she has not had any negative experiences, because most of her friends are White.

I transition our conversation about her campus to who she is as a member of her campus community. I wanted to get a feel of who she is within the context of her campus environment. I referred back to the way in which she identified herself as a twenty year old Bobcat at the beginning of the interview. I asked her once again to identify herself as a member of her campus community and how she fits into that community. Her response is truly telling:

> I'm a complete Bobcat because I work in the visitor center and a lot of people always see me, even people that I just have classes with. They are like you're the tour guide! I saw you walking backwards the other day. And so people know me as the tour guide, I always talk about (UNIVERSITY). I'm excited about my job because I love, especially the fact that when Black people come to campus and they are like oh my gosh there's a Black tour guide, there are Black people here. And so I'm known as the Bobcat I'm always talking about traditions.

I noted that when she talked about her embodiment of the spirit of her university, she has completely taken on the Bobcat persona. She sees herself as a representative for Blacks on campus, noting that she loves when prospective Black students see her and she becomes a symbol of Black student life on campus for prospective students. This is an interesting point considering that she has separated herself from being "Black" earlier on in the narrative. Her involvement in the African-American Leadership Institute has been a great support in her growth and development although she starts the narrative off with "it's just basically" which kind of sounds like she is blowing it off, although the sincerity in her voice demonstrates that it is not the case:

> It is just basically where we learn to grow. Like we understand we're in a Predominately White University but we have to shine too, we have to show that we can like hang. It kind of shows us how to deal with ourselves in certain situations and learn that not everybody is the same and you have to learn how to deal with different people.

She also refers to herself as the random, weird, friendly, mean girl. She explains that she is very friendly, but can also be very mean. Also, she often says and does random things and usually does things that make no sense which makes her weird.

The Retreat

During our discussion of who she is within her campus environment she describes her time at a girls retreat for African American women her freshman year. It is during this time of our conversation and one of the most poignant parts of the interview that I asked her to once again confront her bias against Blacks. She admits that the retreat was the first time that she dealt with her dislikes for Blacks head on. I had also noticed that throughout the narrative, Mariah sometimes referred to Blacks as "them".

She makes a clear distinction between Africans and Whites and then discusses Blacks as if they were in a category of their own. The following narrative depicts the scene when Mariah finally confronted her bias and dislike for Blacks. This story is very significant to her identity development as well as her transition to college. She explained the various videos that they watched about identity development for Black females, including discussions on skin color in the Black community. She then stated that the conversation turned to how people make fun of Africans and below is her reflection on her comments at the retreat:

> I was made fun of and I didn't like that. The worst part was it was the people of my same skin color because I came from Nigeria and most people you see are Black people. So to come here I'm expecting. Oh, you know we're going to be cool. But it was the complete opposite. Even when I was little I was kind of to myself, I never told my parents anything, like my parents don't know any of this. I was on my own dealing with things myself. From elementary I made friends with Africans and White people and not until middle school which was Predominately Black and Hispanic, and so I got to know them a little more and I was mean because I was still kind of made fun of.

We dive deeper into her narrative about her experiences with other Blacks. Mariah is truly digging into her narrative to make meaning of a situation as she stated above, she has always dealt with on her own. She explains that she was never given a chance by Blacks/non Africans so she was drawn to Whites and Africans…no Blacks or in betweens. An interesting dialogue takes place. Note, the "them" she speaks of are Black Americans

> I just felt like they never just like gave me a chance to be me, and it seemed like it kept going on like it wasn't just like third grade and that was it or fourth grade and that was that it was like, it kept going on and like new people and you're still doing it. It's like you haven't known me that long but you're already making fun of me and so I didn't like that at

all and so I guess I kind of stayed away from them and kind of kept to more of my own little circle.

I then asked Mariah how was she dealing with things now. She admits to now being more open and giving everyone a chance and then interestingly turns the conversations towards her frustration with other Nigerians. She eluded to this frustration earlier on in the interview but, it appears once again in the middle of her discussion about giving others a chance. Instead of her focus on the negativity from Black Americans she talks about some of the prejudice in her own Nigerian community:

> Some Nigerians or just Africans in general are probably a little more bias. The ones that are either born here or lived here a really long time talk about Africans that are just coming here because they have their strong accents and you know they're deeply rooted in what they're talking about. They'll call them fresh off the boat. I'm just like, really? I hate that! There's an African organization of African-American Student Association on campus and I was interested in joining and I was talking to some upperclassmen who are Nigerian and I was like y'all should join it too and they were like no. Those people are all fresh off the boat. And I'm like what does that matter?

I then ask Mariah how does she manage being Black and Nigerian and if she ever experiences having a dual identity. Immediately she says No! She explains that all of her friends know that first and foremost she is Nigerian:

> I'm one person there is no splitting so it's like you know me as Mariah, you know me as Obi (Alias for her African name) but it's still the same person and you will know I'm Nigerian. Like when they say you look African, I'm like oh I'm 100%, I was born and raised! I was having a conversation with somebody and they're like, but you're Black still. I'm like but first and foremost I'm Nigerian like it's just something I was raised with. I just can't be like oh I'm Black, it's not what comes out your mouth it's like I'm Nigerian. You talk Black and that's what I fill out on the applications but I'm Nigerian first and foremost

Black on Campus or not

　　After this conversation, I explain to her that she has told me a lot about her development and her perspective on disliking Blacks as well as some of the issues she encounters with other Nigerians. So I begin to transition the conversation so that Mariah can tell me specifically about her experiences as an African American woman on campus. I recognized that even I changed my statement of calling her an African American and I switch to ask her about her experiences as a Nigerian American. Her narrative is very interesting. She states: " I get along with everybody on campus so I don't necessarily see prejudice against females or being an African American on campus" This is quite interesting that she does not see nor acknowledge that her position as both a female and an African American does give her membership into two marginalized groups, she has not made meaning of these locations and once again brushes over those complexities. She does admit that the only time she noticed any racial tension or prejudice was during the 2008 presidential election. She explains that a Conservative group on campus had an anti-Obama carnival that got out of control:

> They had pictures of Obama's face and they would throw an egg at his "policy" but his policy was nowhere around, like they were throwing eggs at his face basically. And then you had these little heads were on sticks and you saw the rings around it and I looked at it and it looked like a noose, that's what it looked like to me. And I'm like does that make sense? Like you know that (UNIVERSITY) is already known for a bad reputation for things like this and then you do it and it's done at (The Plaza), the place for like free speech and everybody goes through there. And me being a tour guide how am I supposed to bring little kids in this area and see this. We had middle school kids there that day. I wasn't on tour because I don't think that I would've been able to do it but I saw these little kids there and like they have to look at this and it's like why, why would you do that? And that upset me and then it was just like stupid like

they were just being stupid and I felt like that was one of the first racial things I've ever seen.

I asked her to explain the university administration's role in the incident above. She commented that they really did not do anything. She noted that the organization's advisor was an important person in student affairs and so they had pull. The organization was known for doing outrageous things and everyone was pretty much waiting on them to do something along the lines of what happened in "The Plaza".

This narrative paints the picture of Mariah's first encounters with overt racism, which does not at all reveal any of the possible covert situations that may be occurring on her campus. The statements directly following this story she appears to separate and distances herself from the incident that she has observed which makes for an interesting analysis of the way in which she has come to manage contradictions:

> I don't see anything that discriminates against me in any of the organizations that I'm in or in my classes. Technically in classes you are like one more face cause you have over 300 students in the class and unless they come and talk to you the teacher doesn't know who you are. They might see your name and be like okay. But I mean they spot you, especially in smaller classes, they spot you when you're not there because you're probably one of the two Black people in the classroom and so they can tell who you are and I think, unless you actually meet a racist teacher which I haven't met yet. When you're one of those two people and you go into their office hours and talk to them, they actually kind of like you more because you know, you're making that extra effort to be noticed. But I'm really trying to think, I have not experienced anything.

Mariah has addressed her hypervisibility/invisibility in the classroom environment. At first she notes that in class you are one more face, and then she contradicts this and says that they spot you because you are one of the few Blacks in the class. She makes an interesting point about professors liking students more for going to office hours and their

appreciation of the extra effort. I found it interesting that she described the classroom environment in this way. As she continues to describe her experiences being an African American female on her campus she reveals that she does not like to stay in a little box, only with Black people, but rather she likes to explore all aspects of college. In describing her friends, she explains that she is the one that brings a lot of them together: "I have my Indian friends. I have my Hispanic friends and I have my White friends and I always try to bring them all together." In this statement she does not make mention of any of her Blacks friends.   This is not to say that she does not have or value her Black friends, but I am making note of the absence of Blacks in the "bringing people together" statement in this part of the narrative.

As our conversation nears to a close, I ask her to imagine herself at her graduation and to try to reflect on her college experiences and all she has accomplished and become. The very first statement brings the interview full circle as she again makes reference to being a Bobcat: "I am still a Bobcat with my Bobcat ring! I'm waiting for my Bobcat ring because that definitely is a network opener. I have my Bobcat ring which is going to open a lot of doors for me, I have a connection, I am part of the Bobcat family."

Analysis

Global Impression

Mariah is a young women that definitely is who she is and does not apologize for it. Her cultural pride is evident and she has completely embraced her Nigerian American heritage. Her identity is wrapped up in the fact that she is a Bobcat. She does not

address issues of her identity related to being a women or a Black American. The various discussions about her dislike for Blacks is quite interesting. She often attempts to separate herself from being Black and to illuminate the fact that she is Nigerian American, which somehow is different from being Black. An interesting example of this is the narrative about someone on campus telling her that she was still Black. She quickly rejects this and again makes it known that she is Nigerian American.

Also as she discusses racism and prejudice on campus she admits to never experience either although she was quite offended by the scenario in the Plaza during the presidential campaign. The interesting thing is that she cannot escape her "blackness" even when she makes the claim to her Nigerian heritage. The retreat is a very significant location in her narrative as she was first confronted with her dislikes of Blacks. It is quite understandable that she has come to manage these experiences on her own. A silence within the narrative is about her mother. She is a part of this campus community and wants so much to be a part of the Bobcat family, but she does not really talk about her own family and their influence and impact. The few times she did mention her family in the narrative she explains that they are shocked that she is attending such a "white" school as her (UNIVERSITY). Another silence is the intersection of race, gender, and ethnicity. She simply does not talk about it. She briefly discusses visibility/invisibility within the classroom context but again does not discuss its impact.

Major Themes

Othering

At the age of eight her euphoric sense of membership within the black community upon arrival to the USA quickly disseminates as she is teased by the Black students and finds refuge in the White students. Her experiences of othering form her childhood and adolescents causes her to in fact dislike other Blacks. She distances herself from Blacks and makes note that she is Nigerian American and not Black or African American. She has a soft spot for Africans/Nigerians who are recent immigrants and tries to protect them for others. She even is frustrated with Africans who have separated themselves from other Africans and who are trying to gain full membership into the African American/Black American world.

This theme of other is prevalent throughout the narrative. It is evident as she talks about the campus environment and especially in the story about the presidential campaign. Although this blatant act of violence and intolerance were openly and publically displayed, Mariah then states that she personally has not experienced any negative incidents but does not see this incident as being directed at her for the fact that she is a Black person. This notion of othering is weaved in and out of the narrative. When she speaks of Blacks, she refers to them as "them" and "they"….which illuminates her separation from the them. It is interesting to note that she does identify with being Black when Black prospective students come to campus. She explains how excited she is to give tours and to represent the Black Bobcat population. But throughout the rest of her narrative this is not evident.

Campus Pride and Identity

Another theme that prevailed throughout the narrative is Mariah's sense of identity that is wrapped up in her campus identity. Her job as a tour guide and as a very involved, engaged member of her campus community has impacted her identity in a great way. Throughout the conversation, Mariah referred back to embracing her school mascot and her school traditions. The literature has demonstrated that on PWI campuses, the traditions and campus activities usually reflect the White majority perspective and leave underrepresented groups feeling ostracized. What I found in Mariah's narrative is the complete opposite. She has immersed herself into the campus community and is a Bobcat. Interestingly enough, Mariah consistently referred to her Bobcat network and family. She connects with those who share her same passion and pride for her campus and again this has an interesting influence on her identity development.

Independence

Another theme that emerges throughout the narrative is the theme of independence. Mariah often discussed her maturity and her dependable nature in which her family greatly turned to her. It was quite interesting to note that according to her narrative, she did not tell her parents about her struggles growing up and getting made fun of by Black students. Later on in the narrative she even explains that her parents still do not know about those situations. Her independence is a theme that is presented on in discussions about her family background and her life on campus. This sense of independence appears to have emerged after her move to the USA. She realized then that

she could not depend on the community of Blacks at her school, because they had

othered her, leaving her to negotiate her world here in the states.

Narration of Self

In Mariah's narrative the self is constructed as a full member within her campus

community. She does not see herself as an outsider of any kind. She has embraced the

culture and tradition of her university without truly questioning some of the implicit

symbols that would point to a possible outsider within status. The self as she has come to

identify and understand herself is as a Nigerian American Bobcat. Even as she imagines

the future, she holds tight to her membership in the bobcat family and what this

membership could mean for her future networking opportunities. This is evident in her

excitement about receiving her Bobcat ring.

Also the self is narrated as the person who brings others together. She notes that

she is the link between her friends of various ethnic backgrounds. The self is narrated as

a contributor the campus community and not so much as a Black student contributing to

the campus community. "I am a tour guide, I love tradition, I am a Bobcat." In reference

to Black Americans, the self is narrated in opposition to "them". Words such as them

and they reflect the distance in which the self is narrated in comparison to Blacks. In the

same vein, words such as we and us are not used when speaking of Black Americans,

rather an inclusive we and us is narrated when speaking of other Nigerians/Africans or

other Bobcats.

CHAPTER VIII

CHLOE

Four Hundred Years Narrative

Chloe and I met on a hot summer day. Our interview took place outside so we were surrounded by the sounds of nature, and this was the perfect backdrop for our interview. Chloe is a nineteen year old sophomore. When I asked Chloe how she would identify herself, her response is straight to the point: "I am a first generation Nigerian American from Houston, Texas". Her narrative commenced with her memories of moving a lot as a child: "It was really hard to get your little feel or your balance, so I probably went to ten different schools between starting school in seventh grade and high school." A few stanzas after the story about bouncing from school to school, tragedy strikes:

Childhood

> When I was in third grade and I was about eight my father died. He took a trip to Nigeria and he had a heart attack there and he died. So that changed a lot of stuff because my parents are, well they just had a divorce so they were going to separate us and I was going to live with my mom and my other siblings were going to live with my dad. And after that we all stayed together and we really kind of bonded.

This story of her father's death at the age of eight sparks a story and the metaphor of a cardboard box. She spoke of the time that she spent with her siblings as if it is a cardboard box because they are were all enclosed together in her sisters room talking and bonding.

> So now it's like you can put us in a room with a cardboard box and we can just talk for days and we all came home for spring break and we all like gravitate to the room my sister is in and we will all just stay there and

just talk and were just really like silly. My sister kind of she was kind of a second mother. She did the cooking, a lot of the cleaning and you know she was kind of…it was the hardest for her because she was the first generation, the first child, the first teenager in this role. Nigerians raise their kids very differently so my mommy married in 2000 when I was about 10 or 11, and um that was really weird too.

Her mother remarried and Chloe discussed her life with her stepfather and the relationship between her family members. Her Nigerian roots and upbringing are extremely interesting in her narrative. She makes strong reference to her experiences as both Nigerian and American. She attributes much of her upbringing in America to the importance her family placed on respect. Chloe describes the way in which she attempted to manage the expectations placed on her from her family as a Nigerian female, while the independent nature of Americans were at war with one another.

It was very weird because you're living in America but in your home it just doesn't matter. I was raised with a lot of respect. When you have guests you greet them, you prepare food. That's why I hate it when guests come over because of course, you know bring out the tray, get them drinks, ask them what they would like. You don't open the drink before, you have to open it in front of them, you have to pour for them, you have to ask them if they would like a napkin. You're like a servant just standing there, like would you like anything else? But it really teaches you a lot so I guess I was brought up with respect.

This narrative displays the tensions Chloe experienced growing up as she attempted to make meaning of her two cultures. She also spoke of the assumptions in her culture that she would not do drugs and that education was inevitable. Despite her father's death early in her childhood, all of her siblings and herself have been very successful.

As I continue to engage in this conversation with Chloe, it is very evident that she is very transparent and open about her experiences. She demonstrates a maturity well beyond her years. I so appreciated her ability to be candid with me about her

experiences. Her discussion about her childhood and life growing up helped me to paint

a picture of her life especially in the context of this research. In this point of the narrative

the theme of self esteem emerges.

> Growing up in school for me was kind of difficult. You didn't have the best clothes and I was made fun of a lot when I was younger so it was just really weird. Moving really damaged my self-esteem when I was little because you can't really keep friends so I always moved, I always moved. And it was so hard but it worked out, you know."

Adolescence

Chloe's depiction of her adolescence reflects what some may call a master

narrative of teenagers; A search for who she is and the attempt to navigate her world.

Her narrative is very honest and telling. It is representative of the struggles that most

teenagers may encounter during these years:

> I was so confused. I had no real sense of who I was. I had no sense of how I was supposed to act or what I was supposed to be. Also for the fact that my culture and the American culture and certain things that I grew up knowing how to do. You have to learn how to blend and make it all work for you. I was very unsure of who I was or how I was supposed to act and then you start kind of playing a role. And I think that's the age where you kind of start watching MTV and BET and start trying to figure out this is how I'm supposed to dress, this is how to look. Then you start really trying to interact with boys to try to feel your way and figure out how I'm supposed to be. It was really like kind of testing the boundaries.

What is evident in this narrative is that Chloe learned early on in her adolescence to

manage her various locations. She explores the need to fit into what society is saying is

right and how she should be. Chloe's analogy of blending it all together to make it work

for her is an interesting perspective on her adolescence. Her use of the words playing a

role and acting support Ochberg's (1994) perspective that we live out our lives in storied

form and as actors on a stage.

High School

There is a clear turning point in the narrative when Chloe attends two different camps. One camp was at a at a local college campus. Chloe describes this camp as a place with "underprivileged youth and students." She does not associate herself with this label, as she explains in the narrative that her father was a professor at the university. Throughout the narrative Chloe makes reference to "feeling cute". She expresses having feelings that she was "hated on" by other students and that everyone told her that "she thought she was cute". Chloe admits that she began to take on what others were placing on her and she began to take on the role of the "fly, prissy girl." She also admits that she was somewhat "conceited" and very much into her looks.   After her story about her experiences at this summer camp, the narrative begins to shift tone as Chloe discussed a humbling experience at a very different camp. It was this experience and moment in her life where she truly began to accept herself and build her self-confidence. What I found to be very interesting is the way in which she explains the development of her religious self:

> High school is where my life really changed. The summer before I think junior year I went to a Christian camp. I've always been raised in the church but I think that's when I really got saved and gave my life to Christ. I came back completely different. I was just caught up in God and learning who I am in Christ and my religious self. So I really started focusing on me and I really stopped caring as much about what people thought. I started forming my own opinion about who I am and how I am. I really started dressing for me and doing things for me and trying to figure out what made me happy. What would make God happy and how I can grow in him. A lot of things stopped mattering.

The reflection on the experience at this camp and her spiritual awakening elicits an interesting story/narrative about a random day in the cafeteria. This particular walk down the hall represents her literal transformation…self-discovery and security. What used to be a walk of fame or shame now became a walk of "I don't care what you think of me":

> I remember one day I went to school and the big thing was in the morning everyone has to sit at the cafeteria and you get to see who's who. You, get to pick people out and you always worry about their outfits. So you always have to have your walk right. If someone had a wack outfit that's when you see the outfit.. So, you're always worried about that walk. But when I came back I was like I just honestly don't care. I don't care if you like me and I don't care what you think. It was a lot of pressure off . I focused on who I was in Christ and how to reconcile those things. And I really stopped worrying about the external things of how I was supposed to look and how I was supposed to dress and how I was supposed to be and I really just started focusing on what do I want."

After this conversation about Chloe's high school experience and the process by which she came to accept herself and forget about the perspective of others, I was eager to learn about her experiences in college. I was so intrigued with the level of confidence she exhibited in the interview and was certain that this level of self-assurance was going to translate to her experiences on campus. What her narrative reveals is the opposite.

Transition to College

Chloe discussed her transition to college with her memories of rejection. She was very candid about the college application process and the lack of support she received from her family. Within this narrative she reveals that her father was in a sense very strict and controlling, and she was eager to go away to college. She explained that NYU was her first choice and her family openly told her that they did not want her to get in. When she was denied acceptance and it broke her heart, she reflected on her parents'

happiness. She stated that they did not care about her hurt feelings, but were openly

happy. She was even more so opposed to attend her college because it was her father's

alma mater.   Once she arrived on campus, she remembers being transformed into a true

TIGER (alias for school mascot)

> I had heard about (UNIVERSITY) connection and that it was one of the
> top two schools in my state but it really didn't mean anything until I went
> to freshman orientation which is when I realized I love this place.
> Somehow by the end of orientation I was converted and I was a Tiger, I
> was a diehard Tiger. I thought, now I know why I went to this school. I
> was so transformed.

Chloe's narrative about her transition to college begins to wrap around her

appearance, and "cuteness" once again. It appears that her understanding of herself and

her worth is wrapped up in the way that she looks, just as it had during the early years of

high school after attending the first camp. During her reflections on freshman

orientation, she realizes that this is the time she began to compare herself to White

females. This is also the point in her narrative when she first discusses body image:

> I looked so cute and they were like oh you're cute but there was just
> something different about it. There were these other two girls that were
> my friends; one was blonde, one I think was a redhead. They got so much
> attention, and not even to be vain, but I was just so used to being like I
> don't know... guys trying to talk to me or just having that attention or just
> having that spotlight. It was just something different and I just, I didn't
> feel like I really connected or vibed with anyone.

After this experience with her White friends, Chloe reveals that she longed to make

connections with Blacks. Her story continues with her first event on campus with other

Black students. Once again this conversation is centered around her appearance.

> I had on a tank top, shorts, and some flip-flops, a normal outfit I would
> wear around my White friends and I realized you don't wear shorts
> around black boys unless you want attention. It was like YES! I did want

attention. You just know that you are actually on the list, like you are an item on the menu. It sounds horrible and degrading but there's something about it, at least you are like included in a certain way. Like they actually look at you and try to talk to you.

This narrative is very telling, for within the transition from high school to college, the sense of self confidence that she had embodied after returning from camp, had escaped within her transition to college. It is very interesting to note that Chloe made a direct reference to her White friends and the attention that they were receiving. She wanted this attention and it is reflected in her need to be in the spotlight and to have men notice her. I find it also striking that she stated it sounded degrading and horrible, but she wanted to be noticed and recognized by the male students on campus anyway. This is an interesting contradiction. As her narrative continues she exposes that she experienced difference and a sense of otherness in comparison to other females. It is this understanding of her uniqueness that begins to paint the picture of her understanding:

> I felt so different, like just so out of place. I don't really do clubs but I realize that's where everybody hangs out. It was the weirdest thing transitioning into a social life that was really around things that I didn't really find myself that into. Like I loved hanging out and the only reason I would even go would be to look good and be around friends because that's... you look cute, you have your best little outfit on, your best dress and you are around friends but that was really the hardest thing transitioning"

Life on Campus

Chloe's narrative is going far beyond the questions that I have asked of her. I am completely immersed in her story and I am no longer guiding the conversation. She is on a roll and begins to explore in great depth her experiences as an African American female on her campus. As I listen to her story, I am amazed at the level of understanding

and awareness she exemplifies. I was in no way, shape or form as informed about the

social phenomena that came along with being an African American woman when I was

her age. Chloe's narrative powerfully displays the sentiment and frustrations that she has

experienced on her campus and I have included a good size portion of the narrative

because it depicts clearly her voice. I do not want to attempt to give Chloe voice through

my own commentary or narration, however her own words do in fact speak for her. In a

discussion about who she is on her campus, a narrative emerged.

> My political consciousness is a lot different than I ever thought it would
> be. Being Black matters a lot more to me than I ever thought it would
> because before being Black was just a race. I didn't really understand the
> implications of it and what that would mean in America, what that means
> at (UNIVERSITY). And I've always been that happy-go-lucky friendly,
> Black girl, oh, I am never going to impose my culture or, I am never
> going to ask you to. I don't like imposing anything on people, even my
> religion but being at (UNIVERSITY) I realize I am... if it offends I really
> don't care. For 400 years you had it your way. If you don't like my music,
> I apologize. I just don't care anymore. It is what it is and outside of the
> business setting I will always conform until I get what I want. (Sorry, I'm
> a finance major). I will, I am going natural but no one will know that until
> I am like, until I am like, until I have the career that I desire…

I make note that at the end of this narrative Chloe subconsciously exposes herself

so to speak. She demonstrates here that she is managing contradictions. She talks about

the fact that she doesn't care… "You have had it your way for 400 years"…etc…. Then

she says. "I will conform until I get what I want" This is connected to her major… Then

Chloe discusses why she won't display her natural hair. She states that she won't change

her hair until she has moved up in her career and has her own firm. What I find to be

fascinating is this notion of 400 years. The tone of her narrative has shifted to a very

strong, forceful tone. She appears to be carrying the burdens of the four hundred years since slavery. I am once again fully engaged in our conversation.

White Privilege

Within her narrative, it appears that Chloe understands white privilege and the cultural contexts of things. She indicates that she believes that Whites don't understand that they are themselves a color. I found the quote that follows to be very poignant:

> So it's nice when people don't see color, and I feel like a lot of white people, they don't see color because they're not color conscious. They don't see color themselves. So they don't understand that they are a color. You were not a slate and everyone else is a color. They kind of see everything else as a color and, you know, you are Black and you are... but I am just, I am just white, you know, I'm just normal and there is a huge thing where white is normal and people don't understand, white is not normal, white is not the standard, white is not the slate.

She goes on to describe that White as the norm, assumes that all others are different and out of the norm. She preludes into a discussion about the different types of Blacks and that Whites do not take the time to explore other cultures. Chloe has totally immersed herself into her narrative and I made significant notes that at times I felt just like a spectator watching as she worked all of these feelings and emotions out as she spoke. Her narrative brings much to light about race and society.

> Everything you see is white. Everything that is perpetuated is white even in movies. White is always considered the norm. I feel like they don't have a consciousness of what it is to be white because, does anyone? You know, what is it to be white, you know? And no one really makes them explore. We just tell them you know, "Your normal, you're the average." Everything else is different. That's why Hispanics are feisty and Black people are... why is this spicy why isn't that just part of their culture? And white culture in itself is very indescribable, unexplainable... I don't know what white culture is honestly, I don't know what white culture is and I don't know anyone who does

As this narrative continues, Chloe dives into more issues about race on campus. The

conversation has transitioned from her life on her campus and she is totally and

completely exploring issues of race in the greater context of our society. I do not try to

stir her back to the research topic at hand, because what Chloe is doing within this

interview is exposing the underlying rules of society, that are not often addressed,

especially in the manner in which someone of her age has explored it. The discussion is

no longer only in Black and White, but Chloe brings multiple other ethnic groups into

the discussion.

> There are Italians and Jewish people, and that's more of how the world
> really works outside of America. People associate with the nationality
> instead of a color but when you come to America you have to be white or
> you have to be Black. You're not from Barbados, you are not from
> Panama you're not... no, you are Black and they don't really understand
> that there are different types of Black, "you're all Black aren't you, you're
> all, you all look the same." You know we, we could speak different
> languages, we could be from different continents but we are all Black
> because they don't take the time to... and I really feel like America does it
> on purpose and they never try to, you know, reroute it.

Chloe is very much trying to negotiate her campus community. Her narrative

shifts to academic life and right smack in the midst of a discussion about classroom life,

she transitions once again to the impact of hair and ironically the implications of natural

hair for Black people. Within her discussion of hair, a story emerges about a professor

on campus who had dread locks. She uses this story of the professor and his interactions

with students in his class, to demonstrate that even a Black professor must in a way

justify their intelligence and credibility. This discussion about hair is worthy of further

examination because it is truly a major focus of Chloe's narrative. Chloe utilizes the

discussion of hair to again paint a picture of life on campus for African Americans in

general. She also, describes several stories of friends on campus who were persuaded by

their advisors, professors, and other leaders on campus to cut their dread locks and

braids because they were not professional. This part of her narrative is rich with stories

of individual students who experienced some pretty negative feedback from teachers, etc

because of their hair.   This type of pressure from the campus community is pervasive

and Chloe passionately addresses it within her narrative:

> I don't think people understand that I do a lot of things to my hair for it to
> look like yours and some of those things aren't healthy! If they
> understood the scalp burns, the breakage, the perming process, they
> would not even ask us to go through all that pain! I really just wish I
> could put a White person through that. They don't understand what you
> have to go through to get your hair to look like what they wake up. I just
> think it is ridiculously unfair to ask me to truly chemically change my
> hair composition to look professional. That is like asking someone to get
> surgery to change a part of their body so that they will look more
> acceptable and professional.

I am still very much intrigued by the fact that as passionately as Chloe argues about

having to change her hair to look professional and the negative experiences of other

Blacks on her campus, she still refuses to let her natural hair go free. Chloe makes

several references within the narrative that she is going to continue to cover up her

natural hair with weave until she reaches the top of her career. Again, hair is a metaphor

for conforming to the norm.

Day to Day

As Chloe continues processing campus life, she in a sense expresses that some of

her peers are simply ignorant. One interesting point that she brings up is that she has

had numerous debates with other White students about the use of "The N word". In her

debates she explains that many White students do not understand why they cannot use

the word, especially if they are singing a song with the word in the lyrics and especially

if it is with no ill will towards anyone. Chloe is very set on the fact that others have not

earned the right to use the word. She makes a strong argument for the non use of the

word.

> White kids today they see everything right now is equal and you don't understand what black people had to do to get here and now you want everything to be equal. The fact that people had to fight to be able to use the same restroom as you, and that was just a couple of years ago and you have the audacity to come and tell me that if I am saying the N word you can say it too! You have 400 years that you need to make up and white people think they have the same privilege and the same rights. No you owe me!

There is so much passion in her voice, and hints of anger. Her narrative has spun into a

seemingly frustrated account of her experience.

Black Female

Chloe begins to internalize her position as both an African American and a female. She

begins to discuss the way in which she tries to manage various stereotypes and

perceptions historically perceived of Black women:

> You can't be the angry Black woman. Even though I feel we have a lot to be angry about. If you went through all the hell black women went through you would be angry too. So whenever I start speaking in class, you're like the Holy Grail because you're like the only Black person. "Oh tell us!" "Speak for ya'll!"

Chloe also attempts to manage the various times that students have told her that she is

different from other Blacks. This leads into a conversation about what does this truly

mean in the eyes of others. She begins to question whether or not she is "representing"

her Blackness in the most effective way.

>Am I a different color? Am I not Black? There's this connotation "You are different, you are the exception." There are so many exceptions though, you would think there would start being a rule, but no, you are the exception. They say, you're not like the rest of them. It comes to the point where I ask what are the rest of them. The hardest part is not the racists that know they are racists, but there are the racists who are only racist when no one else is around and it is just you. And when I tell people that people are still racist, other say "Ya'll are so sensitive, ya'll take things too serious. I'm sorry I don't understand, I wasn't enslaved".

What was even more interesting was the way in which Chloe tied all of this back together with reference to her Nigerian heritage and culture.

Nigerian vs. African American

>There is an interesting story that Chloe tells about a memory from psychology class. In the class the professor stated that Blacks could not learn and were not as intelligent as the others. Chloe's response to this statement is very powerful. Her narrative switches to that of her experiences s a Nigerian American. Especially when her intelligence is being tested…she moves into her experiences as a Nigerian American and not simply a Black American.
>In psychology they were teaching us something about, some studies that prove that African Americans naturally and genetically they can't learn and I was like, "Excuse me! Well I am Nigerian and we have the most intelligent population in the United States and we are Black. I asked how did that correlate with the findings and he said. "Well, we haven't done studies with immigrants." But we are all Black…

After giving an example of a negative classroom experience, Chloe begins to shift her narrative to a more enlightening experience about her development and understanding of her Blackness.

>There was something I learned in Africana studies. No one taught me how to be consciously Black. I didn't grow up learning, They assume that Black people know this stuff, that we know double consciousness off the bat, you know, we came out the womb speaking double consciousness and the veil. No one teaches us how to have a Black consciousness. Not anywhere in our studies. I think we spent one day about the Harlem Renaissance in high school. I never really understood the scope about the Harlem Renaissance. I thought it was about writings and paintings until I

came and took an Africana studies class. No one teaches us how to be
Black. No one teaches us our consciousness, our history... no one. And
it's something that we have to take our time, but we always learn how to
be an American. We always learn the American history from their point
of view.

Black Out Day

Chloe brings up a wonderful point about the way in which history is often times

taught from the perspective of those in power. Her ability to break down her

understanding and make connections at this point in the interview is very evident. It is as

if she truly had to get it all out. Her narrative has a lot of layers of anger and frustration,

but at this point of the interview she appears to be settling those issues within herself. I

join in the conversation asking Chloe what is American? Her narrative centers on a

Black out day. That America would be nothing without the Black influence. Her

narrative then turns to discuss that no one can love America like a Native American or

an African America. To endure all that these groups of people have endured, and still

love the country is amazing. I too was completely drawn into her narrative and did not

want to pull myself out of her story.

> What really is purely American? Yet they take credit for everything. Me
> and my friend were talking and we said, we should really have a Blackout
> day. Like a day where all the Black inventions, everything that Black
> people did was taken away and see how America functions. A day with
> no rap, no music no streetlights no paper. Like take everything that the
> Black people gave you away and see what type of place America would
> be because no one would want to live here. No one wants to live in
> America without the Black contributions. America would be the most
> boring place. The Black contribution has been so great but it's America.
> This is how it's been since we wrote the Declaration of Independence and
> you know, you know, we knew slavery was wrong... "we were going to
> end it eventually, it was just too economically, you know, made for us"
> and we just, we wash away because America says it's okay. And I think
> no white person can love America the way I can. It's my personal belief. I

don't think any white person can love America because they truly, for the most part, they only see the good side of America and how hard is... it's like loving Santa Claus. How hard is it to love something when you only see the good side, when you only see you know they only had done nothing wrong to you but if Native Americans love America, that's like love. Like, for a Black person... you enslaved me. You, you took away my rights, you took away my freedom and for me to know everything you are and still love you, to me that is love. For a Black person to be in the army, the navy, the Marines, that is dedication. He deserves, he deserves extra.

Chloe then translates the love that a Black person can have for America despite a legacy of pain and rejection to her own love for her university. This analogy is profound:

For me to love (UNIVERSITY) I feel it's much more deep than a white person to love (UNIVERSITY) because I know the history, I know I wasn't wanted, I know I was talked about and I know still today I am not wanted by most parts, or by some parts. I just don't care. So for me to love (UNIVERSITY), understanding everything that (UNIVERSITY) is and everything that (UNIVERSITY) will continue to be and everything that is surrounding it, I truly love (UNIVERSITY) because I can see the full scope of it and I can appreciate it for what it is regardless.

Dispelling Stereotypes (Stereotype Threat?)

I was captivated by what Chloe has said. Her anger and frustration permeates the narrative. As we transition once again she begins to describe having to fight stereotypes and the way in which African American females compare with White females. Her narrative is strongly connected to her identity development, especially in terms of body image. She speaks of standards of beauty and the pressure that social forces have placed on Black women.

I have to fight assumptions before they can be placed on you. Like it's like whenever I meet someone I kind of always want to be professional, nice, kind trying to fight all the stereotypes that I am catty, I have an attitude, I'm ghetto. You know, before they're even brought up, I always kind of want to displace that and the thing is, white people never have to

think about displacing that. That is just not brought up into the equation. I always try to have to fight the Bon Qui-Qui stereotype etc.

But yet we are crazy and a white girl can do this and no one will say anything about her, no one would say anything. She's like we would never walk around with our shorts on but we are the ones who have our bodies out, we're the ones who do this and that. A white girl can do... even on campus! They will have the shortest shorts no one will say anything because they don't really have bodies that emphasize their butts but still no one will say anything. But if we have, you know, if we have shorts we have check it, make sure you have tight center that, is that... you know, it's always. Even if you don't have shorts it's always like, you have a body in the thing is your body... a lot of times your body can't be hidden and regardless of what you do, you can have sweats on, your body can't be hid. And it's always that thing, there's a name for the complex but you always kind of conscious of, you know, is my booty out, and my looking to curvaceous is it... because white women tend to be on campus so athletic, so slim and skinny, you know, so it's like my body isn't naturally shaped like that. Even when I was at my lowest weight, I was still, I had hips and I was curvaceous so it's hard to, you know, and I don't understand, I'm an overweight people really understand like my body will never really be like yours ever.

The Metaphor of America

What I believe to be one of the most profound parts of the entire narrative was a metaphor/simile in which Chloe compared her university to America. What follows is the narrative in great length. I have included the entire story because it contains some very powerful insight and strongly presents Chloe's point of view. Within the narrative emerges an activist. She also demonstrates a deep understanding of the implicit messages sent out by her university. Her words are strongly powerful and quite thought provoking:

> The thing about America is that, America puts its problems in the closet and that's another problem I have with (UNIVERSITY). (UNIVERSITY) acts like it's just the perfect school. We have the Tiger spirit and we are so loving. (UNIVERSITY) is a great school, there is a Tiger spirit but I just wish that (UNIVERSITY) was more real with its problems. That (UNIVERSITY) just sat down and said, we have a problem with race

here, we have a problem with segregation, we have a problem with this and that and this is how we are going to try to work towards it. Just like America, I feel like if America really said, you know, we did some horrible things. If America came out and was honest and said this is what we need to fix, I feel that a lot of things would be better with the race relations. If (UNIVERSITY) came out and said we have a lot of problems with race and it is going to hinder our growth as a school we could move forward. If the president could come out and just have a speech or a e-mail or something talking about the history of the school talking about the real history. Talking about how Black people were lynched and discriminated against. And how some buildings were named after Ku Klux Klan members, talk about how Richard ------- publicly advocated the lynching of Black people and he has a building here. Someone needs to come out and say these things so we understand, so other people understand why it is so difficult to be a Black Tiger. Why it is so difficult to interact in some way with people when you know some of those people don't like you, they don't... even if they're not racists, they kind of either might have, you know, a superiority complex or they might think that you're different.

Respect: Plea to Black Women

Chloe begins to discuss heavily the intersection of race and gender in the lives of African American women. Her narrative turns from an informative narrative about her life into a plea for Black women. I am especially struck by the intense passion that Chloe exhibits throughout this narrative. She makes very strong comparisons between the experience of Black women and other women in our society, even other underrepresented females. She circles back to another theme that has been discussed in her narrative, something she learned since birth and that is respect. Her plea to Black women extends way beyond the boundaries of her campus and have strong implications for the situation of Black women within the context of society.

Something that I want for my Black women, that is the one thing out of everything, respect yourself. If you do nothing else in this world, respect yourself and make these other people respect you: Black men, white men, white women, Hispanics. I don't care who it is, make them respect you

because I feel like we have lost so much respect. We have lost so much respect in this world through the videos, through this and that and I feel like we deserve the most respect because no other woman in this planet holds down the family like a Black woman, period. Black women have the hardest life, but the lowest suicide rate in the country. So no one in my opinion deserves as much respect as a Black woman.

Chloe is constantly trying to manage the need to prove to others that she has the credentials and that she does not fall a victim to stereotypes about Black women. She wants people to know what university she attends, there appears to be some subconscious or maybe even conscious awareness that her university represents the "type" of person that she would like to be portrayed as. She wants others to acknowledge and :

I've always wanted to be taken seriously, to be taken SERIOUSLY, because once someone takes you seriously everything you say is on another level. If I was just any random Black girl, you know, "oh, you know, she is from a bad neighborhood, but it's like, no, I graduated from (UNIVERSITY) , top of my class. I have this and this and that, I have these credentials, and this and I and I am presenting this from a well-rounded background, not as a typical black girl out of the ghetto and who went to Prairie View. You know, I stepped outside my comfort zone time and time again and I have excelled.

As Chloe and I brought our conversation to a close it was evident that Chloe felt like a load has been lifted. She poured so much of her hurt and heart out in this interview, that it appeared as if she had just engaged in a long session of therapy. I don't say this in the traditional word of therapy as to stigmatize her experiences. But sometimes, people just need a place, space, and the opportunity to vent. I know that this experience had been therapeutic for Chloe. It was as if all of her frustrations were welled up inside of her and this interview afforded her the opportunity to release it so to speak. I was amazed at the way in which she had internalized so many facets of her

existence as well as her strong commitment to helping others examine the role of society in our knowledge construction. Chloe's narrative was rich beyond words.

Analysis

Global Impression

It is near impossible to attempt to sum up the narrative of Chloe. She is by far one of the most enlightened and passionate women that I have personally ever met at her age. To try to sum up all she is in this global impression is very difficult. Chloe is a passionate woman who has come to learn that her life and experiences on campus are truly a reflection of the larger society. She has come to interpret the many interactions and happenings on her campus to depict the way in which her location as both a woman and an African American, have played out into her existence. She has structured her narrative in a very interesting contrast to White America. She is very much a partaker in her community, but has learned to understand herself and her narrative in comparison to the ways in which Whites have come to understand her. She does not fully wrap her narrative around the fact that she is Nigerian American, rather understands herself as a Black woman. There is so much passion and fire in her narrative. She experiences the pinnacles of both joy and then of anger and frustration. What she reveals in her narrative is social critique at its higher level. She dives back into the past and the progress of the Black experience in America. The historical context of her narrative is extremely strong and vivid in the stories she tells about her campus environment and her campus experiences. She doesn't understand her experiences void of the larger issues in society, which is quite interesting. A silence within her narrative is about her family and her support. She speaks about her family in the beginning of her childhood and adolescence,

but her transition to college and beyond are very much reflected in her experiences as a Black female on her campus.

What I also noticed is that appearance is a very important part of Chloe's narrative. Her ability to negotiate her natural hair and sacrifice showing it until she makes it to the top, clearly illuminates the larger issue that Black women face with reference to the misunderstanding of Black hair. A true battle for accommodation versus resistance. What one finds in Chloe's narrative is a call to action, and an activist herself. Her narrative when one digs deeper into it, is not only about her life story and her life. She is venting about all of the things she sees played out in society and the way in which those things have infiltrated the mindset and atmosphere of her college. This is clearly demonstrated in the powerful metaphor she uses to compare America and her university. Chloe is a woman who in spite of her awareness of racial tension and underlying issues such as double consciousness etc, in the end she stated that she will compromise all of this to reach the pinnacle in her career; again exemplifying that the narrative for most Black women is to in a sense conform to the white epistemological view of existence.

Major Themes

Reconciliation

Chloe refers to reconciliation several times within the narrative. This theme is illuminated throughout her discussion of her childhood, adolescence, and especially in college. She is trying to establish the way in which she can take all of her knowledge about the way in which society works and try to manage that realization in various contexts: "That is going to be a huge struggle trying to figure out how to reconcile what

I know, what I've learned at (UNIVERSITY) and how to reconcile it with other people

and other cultures because I feel like the South is its own culture to itself. So if you go to

the East you are going to be with a whole another culture." Her use of reconciliation is

representative of her struggle to manage different worlds. Reconciliation is an ongoing

struggle and tension within her narrative.

Theme of 400 years

The theme of 400 years is used frequently throughout the narrative. Chloe

utilizes this statement to demonstrate her frustration with Whites who in her words seem

to be attempting to act like they are entitled.   Four hundred years I believe refers to the

four hundred years since the United States was established. She adamantly proclaims

that oppression has reared its ugly head since then and that we are still fighting the

remnants of it up until today. In ones part of the conversation a narrative emerges about

her communication class. In this narrative she reviews and talks out loud, all of the

things that were stated. She explored the use of the N-word… A white students wanted

to gain access to the use of the word and Chloe is not having it. The theme of 400 years

is pervasive throughout the narrative.

> You have 400 years that you need to make up and why people think that
> they have the same privilege and the same rights, you know you can't,
> you owed it to me! They really think that they get to start off at the same
> place that everyone else does. No, you know if y'all but I do it... excuse
> me for being lynched and whipped… NO!

 Hair, as a metaphor of conforming or not

Probably one of the most interesting themes in Chloe's narrative is the use of hair

as a metaphor/symbol of conforming. As adamant as Chloe is about the lifting of the veil

and her understanding of how race and gender play a part in societal stereotypes and expectations of black women, she contradicts herself in the fact that she will not reveal her natural hair until she reaches the point of success in her career one day. I found this theme to be fascinating. She talks about hair and the difficult process that Black women have gone through and still go through in order to have what she calls the type of hair that White girls wake up to. And although she is upset and frustrated that society puts a value on hairstyles, she is brave to admit that she will conform by wearing weaves and braids. The following quote illuminates the theme very strongly. And although the quote is very long, I felt it was extremely potent and representative of the magnitude of this theme in the narrative.

> I don't think people understand that I do a lot of things to my hair for it to look like yours and some of those things aren't healthy!" my natural hair texture is. I don't know if it's going to be poofy or curly or anything like that and America is fine with us not knowing, they are fine with us not being Like, if they understood the burns, the scalp burns, the breakage. If they understood what the perming process was, they would not even require us to go through all that pain! I really just wish I could put a white person through that, like, it's not... getting your hair pressed, getting your hair curled! Oh my! Like the burning and the tingling in the back of the neck. Like, they don't understand what you have to go through to get your hair to look like what they wake up with and that they don't understand that you don't wash it every day. Like, if I wash my hair every day it's going to fall out. Like I can't do that, like I can't use V05, it has alcohol it's going to dry my scalp. Like, no one understands why you want to use Shea butter and natural products. I think it's just ridiculously unfair to ask me to change my, to truly chemically change my hair composition to look professional. I really feel like eventually, especially when I become a lawyer, eventually I want to get a case and sue because that is a serious, to change your hair, that is a serious thing to ask someone. That is like asking someone to go get surgery to change a part of their body so they look more acceptable to your company. No, I have a right to have my hair whatever way I feel. I don't know why, but until I get there I will conform. Why is your hair the standard of beauty, your eyes, your...it's ridiculous. A standard that, you're just one person in the population and I

don't think, I don't think they understand the fact that you're just white. You're not, no one, there's no heaven sanctified, you're not, you know people always think, " you know well, why are white people in control?" cause they have the biggest guns and they took it first, that's it. There's no… there's nothing that says that you are better.

Narration of Self

The self is narrated in a very strong and unapologetic manner. The self is represented to be working out the various social locations that exist. The self has internalized her situation as a Black, Nigerian, female Tiger on her campus community. All of these aspects of her identity are narrated through the self. The self in relation to others there is a great sense that Whites are definitely the others in the narrative. The self is very much connected to the overall Black experience in America. The theme of 400 years reflects the self's connection to the past. The self is narrated in true relation to the past. A past that existed long before the self-existed. This is a very interesting point of view. The self is narrated in a manner that reflects the strength of the collective we/us versus them.

CHAPTER IX

KYA

Not Black in the Same Way Narrative

Kya is an Ivy League student from Texas. She transitioned from Texas to the cold north east and entered the world of Ivy league education.   A self-identified African American female with Mississippi and Louisiana roots, who when asked how would she identify herself, only describes herself as a seventeen year old Black American. Despite her lack of in-depth personal identification and description, I am more struck by the fact that she is only seventeen, yet on the verge of completing the second semester of her freshman year. Later on in the interview it is revealed that she skipped the fifth grade and graduated a year earlier. I met Kya through one of her high school counselors. Her counselor insisted that Kya was a wonderful student who would be a wonderful young lady to interview for my study.

Childhood

Our interview began with an interesting twist of irony. The library where we had our interview played a significant role in Kya's childhood and thus provided Kya the opportunity to explore her past in a place that impacted her. The library itself brought back many memories of her past and I believe that the setting of the library was somewhat nostalgic for her. It acted as a safe space where Kya was really able to connect to and reflect on her childhood experiences. Her narrative begins with her happy demeanor as a child.   She immediately turned to her parent's divorce and life growing up with her stepfather.

> As a child I think I was happy. I was very giggly and as a child my parents got divorced early so I was between houses. I grew up with my older sister we're really close. My parents that I lived with, they both worked downtown so sort of worked a lot so me and my sister spent a lot of time together entertaining ourselves and one of the reasons I am so familiar with this library is they worked across the street and so I got dropped off here a lot. We spent hours in here, so I guess that's why I like reading so much. I kind of had to entertain myself in the library.

Her memories of childhood are also wrapped around the influence of school in her life.

Her parents truly pushed education and Kya eluded to her parents obsession with

providing a good education for her and her sister, while she became obsessed with

reading. Kya went to many different schools growing up until she settled into middle

school. Within the narrative about her "school hopping", Kya explained that she was

very smart and skipped a grade. She then gives me a summary of her childhood.

> I applied to my middle school when I was in fourth grade but I applied to get into sixth grade, so I just skipped the whole fifth grade experience I was like that's enough of that! So basically school to school, reading a lot. I was semi not active in anything but academics. I sort of wish I had not done that because there are people who can do sports and like musical instruments and I just don't have those talents which is so unfortunate.

Her story about her childhood flows into the influence of her parents. Kya is extremely

candid and might I say humorous in her depiction of her relationship with her parents,

especially concerning her relationship with her stepfather.

> Again, my mom and dad are divorced, and my dad is a really laid back kind of guy but at the same time he was like a Black panther activist and he's all about Black power and pride and all that stuff. I always thought he was one of those playa kind of guys. He's probably on his fifth wife or something, but he's looking like he's settling down so that good.   My mom is the opposite. She's like really Christian. She was raised in a Louisiana Catholic household, and she's really conservative. She thinks she knows everything but she knows a lot about like careers, success, and all that kind of stuff. So she pushes you to do a lot because she knows a lot. I have a step father who I don't know how he has impacted me. I'm

sorry, he just adds weird elements to the household. The thing about him is that like a lot of times I will admit, he has a lot of experience but a lot of times, he will make it seem as he if he has world experience. So I don't know what he has added, he has added a lot of laughter. I guess he always pushes us to do more. I guess where it's my mom, she'll like, after she says anything she'll be like I'm just doing this because I love you, he'll just do it because like he knows it's right and you're like what are you talking about. So what is he?.... Yeah, I have no comment on him.

Kya transitioned the conversation into her mindset as a young child. She is very intuitive in her understanding of the perceptions of poverty and how a poverty "mindset" truly impacted her growing up. The following narrative is very telling.

So I had a rude awakening when I started doing my FAFSA because me and my sister were raised to think we were low income; which wasn't true. We didn't get all the special treatments of vacations and nice things so I just thought was low income. Until I finished my FAFSA, I was so confused. I was like, "Why don't I have a car?" Also going to a school that was for low income students, so basically I feel like I've been surrounded by low income students and I guess I was a student with a low income mindset, but it's so untrue. It's just confusing! With that mindset I've felt like I've always had to work extra hard and that I didn't have the same opportunities as anybody with more money so I just thought that everything good that's ever happened to me has been through hard work and by chance so like everything I got I'm like, I'm blessed to have it because I wouldn't be able to get it on my own. Um, I don't even know the history, but yeah

The above statement is very interesting because it displays that Kya acquired a low income mindset and used this mindset to catapult her forward. Her description of the way in which she worked very hard to achieve her goals are very powerful.

Adolescence

Kya's narrative about her adolescence is focused on the impact of the community service she participated in through her middle and high school. She discussed the various service projects that she participated in and how meaningful and life changing those

experiences were for her. She expanded on several specific stories of moments when

she participated in service as well as the various opportunities that her school afforded

her. I found it very interesting that Kya remembered her own adolescence in the context

of her impact on others. This was very telling about her character.

> Basically I spent all my teenage years at (SCHOOL). Which could be a
> good thing, it could be a bad thing. (laughing). One of the things that I
> guess really impacted me was service. You're going to give back to the
> community that brought you up. Just being exposed to different cultures
> sort of opens your eyes. I feel like a lot of teens or maybe like a lot of
> American teens just think about a lot of problems from a U.S.
> perspective, but when you go other places you just see things like this is
> actually a whole system that's trying to get a long so it's not just like
> how can United states get along with this country, how can we get
> along… it's like how can we get along with each other. So, and then like
> a lot of teachers at my school pushed the whole "be knowledgeable"
> perspective.

Kya attended a Predominately Hispanic school. Her reflections about her high school

experiences spark a narrative about her interactions and experiences at her school. Her

perspective as an African American, a minority in her high school aided her in the

transition to her university.

> It was a Predominately Hispanic school, I don't know exactly how that
> impacted me. There were moments when the school was racist. In 8th
> grade. There were a group of them, they just decided it would be funny to
> be sort of mean to Black people but not really, and one time, a kid was
> constantly saying "niggas do this and that" and whatever. But there was
> one time where this kid told my friend to move out of the way nigger. It
> was very inappropriate. He said it like "I'm intending to hurt you". His
> dad came up to the school and was like " I'm not letting him get
> suspended over some Black people", and I was like, ya'll are straight
> racist.

I found this narrative to be very interesting, because she explained a dynamic of her

experiences in a minority majority school, but her own experience was that of a

minority. She stated that she did not exactly understand how her high school years impacted her, but it is quite interesting that she remembers the one experience above. It appears to me that Kya strikes this memory because although this one experience most likely does not exemplify her general experience at her school, this experience represented a time of othering and difference in her life.

High School

Kya's narrative about high school is very much in line with her experiences in middle school. She remembered her school to have some racial tension and as a result, she desired a Black college experience and started looking for colleges that could provide the sense of Black community that she was looking for.

> Basically there's always those jokes about Black people and it's kind of hard because there was only a few of us and you can't really say anything back. There were awkward times because me and a lot of the Black students hung out together, like not a lot, what, 6 of us?! We hung out together, and they were always like "Well, ya'll always make us feel like we can't sit with ya'll, cause ya'll have your little Black table. So that whole experience was semi frustrating and when I started looking at colleges, I really looked for a strong Black community cause I was like, I REFUSE to go through anymore struggles.

In the midst of the racial tension in her school community, Kya paints the picture of who she is within this environment. She described herself as being very focused and did not really care about what was going on around her unless she was provoked. Her basic attitude was that she was going to "get my grades, do my little community service, and I'm going to see y'all later." It is evident in her narrative that Kya has adopted a very mature perspective. She does not concern herself with only hanging around Blacks, but branches out to build relationships with the Hispanics at her school. She discusses

the way in which she began to invite other Hispanic students to sit at the Black table: "If you sit down with us you would learn and if you didn't speak Spanish the whole time we could make it work."

Transition to College

Again, I asked Kya to paint me picture of her first day on campus and to reflect on that experience. Her response is that she looked for a Black experience and she began to discuss the reason why she chose her school over Yale. She stated:

> I visited the other school and then I went to (UNIVERSITY) and was like, why do I actually like this school so much? When I went there, it's s got its own little city thing going on. So there were like saxophone players and like this man playing this weird instrument that I've never, I don't know what it is, like on the street. And then the next morning, there were people protesting and people passing out flyers and everything was just like so much more lively. At Yale I felt like everyone was either in buildings or just like sort of walking around but at (UNIVERSITY) everyone is very lively and getting you excited about things. Also the Black community. People were like you should come here because we have a wonderful Black community. It wasn't just because "oh, we're Black and we just came here because we really love the school". It's like, no, one reason I actually chose this school is because it has a strong Black community. I was like oh! Ok, good, cause I'm sort of looking for that!

It is evident in her narrative that the distance from home, sometimes proved to be challenging. She described her homesickness in comparison to her friends from New England who were able to go home often. Another challenging transition for her came about within the Black community. She discussed the dynamics between different groups of Blacks at her school.

Black vs. Nigerian

Kya discusses that although she has built relationships with other Black students, yet she feels like a minority in the Black community because she is African American.

Kya is beginning to understand what it really means to be Black on her campus.

> So although you feel connected, "Oh, my Black people here." What you don't really realize, they're not Black in the same way. When they talk about certain jokes you're just like, what are you talking about?! They're like, "Oh, it's a Nigerian thing". So basically everyone I hang around they are all Nigerian? I don't know how that happened but, yes that happened. So they definitely have been like the Black community. Big, I guess, immigrant population.

Kya revealed a very interesting dynamic about the makeup of the Black community on her campus. It is interesting that one of her main reasons for choosing her college had to do with the sense of community she experienced during a campus visit. What is ironic about the statement above is the whole notion of "Black" in a different way. Kya is experiencing a sense of separation from the "black community on campus that is heavily composed of immigrant Black students.

Life on Campus

I was intrigued by Kya's reference to the Black community in our conversation above and I wanted to get a better understanding of who she was in the midst of this community, or who she was as a member of her campus community in general. She paints a picture of who she is in college in comparison to who she was in high school. It was very interesting the way in which Kya described her two selves and how people at college view her versus those back home.

> In college I am the social, Black girl who is experienced and doesn't really know what she wants to do. In high school I was always studying but I figure freshman year is not supposed to be like this so I am always the one who is like. "We should go out." I feel like people at home take me like a lot more seriously and think of me as a more, like, good girl person and more academic. In school they sort of see me as a party person and they don't take me as seriously. They are always joking, that

> I am semi-crazy. I don't care, I'm going to get it together... I go to (UNIVERSITY)!

There are several things playing out in the above narrative. First Kya makes a strong comparison of who people believe her to be back home in Texas and on her campus. What did not come out of this narrative is who she believes herself to be. It appears that she is managing two different selves and trying to make meaning of who she is both in the context of her campus environment and back home. I found it very interesting that Kya perceives that people do not take her too seriously. What is even more powerful is that she believes she will "get it together" because she goes to her university. This gave me the impression that the name of her university is enough to make up for any other issues she may have. Later on in the narrative Kya reveals some of her self-consciousness about majoring in Sociology. She notes that others do not respect her as much because she is not a Pre-Med or Pre-Law student:

> I sort of resisted for a long time becoming a sociology major because I thought no one else is going to respect me.

This statement illuminates Kya's desire to be respected by her peers. Especially in the context of her prestigious university, status and respect are an important component of the fabric of the university. Although Kya is extremely intelligent she must attempt to negotiate her selves and her place within her campus community.

Kya again transitions into the support she receives from the Black community. Kya explained that she has made a strong network with other Black students on campus. She uses the term "using Blacks" to get the support that she needs:

> I am dependent on the advice of older Black students. They help you out and if you ever are going through stressful times, basically I just use Black people all the time. It automatically feels like a family.

This sense of family and community amongst the Black students on campus appears to have sheltered some of the issues that she has experienced as a Black female on her campus but her narrative quickly turns to the very experiences that are influenced by her status as a Black woman.

Kya's narrative about her experiences as a Black woman on campus is infiltrated with stories of the lack of dating options for Black women, especially for the fact that Black men at her Ivy League institution are prized processions, that as she states are not only desired by Black women, but all types of women. This reveals some of the tensions she has experienced as both an African American and a woman. These two interlocking characteristics are played out on her campus and are magnified for her in respect to relationships with men. The capitalization of the quote exhibits the enthusiasm in which she spoke.

> BLACK MEN ARE A CATCH AT (UNIVERSITY)! I feel like it is sort of unfair that everyone wants a Black man. Black women are second choice to Black men and no other race sort of wants you because I feel like we don't have that same like temptation to date outside our race. White guys don't see us and be like, 'Ooh, I want to get at her, like she's a successful Black women.' Like no, they want non Black women."

The tone and dynamics of this narrative reveal the frustration she feels. As an African American woman her narrative is tied up with dating options. As she continues she begins to make several different references to being Black on her campus.

> I feel like you feel your label as a Black person on campus and I don't feel like that's a bad thing. Maybe it's because I embraced it. For other people it cannot be the same way just because, you are known by other

> Black students. You can't just not be recognized. You can't be like just another student. You are basically defined by your relationship to the Black community and like for me it's like that because I love meeting like so many Black people but I guess for others that can be like really frustrating. Especially like if you drop out of the Black community to hang out with some other people, no! It is over!

Kya's experiences are again unique as she described that her campus appears to be very proud of the African American student body. She explains the positionality of Blacks on campus and how they are viewed through the perspectives of others.

> On campus they feel like every Black (UNIVERSITY) person is a representative of like the Black culture and they feel like you are an educated person. "What do you feel about Obama? How do you feel about the education gap? They just think you're amazing and like everyone thinks like you are so legit for being Black at (UNIVERSITY) A lot of people like respect that and because, I feel like (UNIVERSITY), they try to do the whole "We're culturally tolerant" or like, "We embrace everybody." So people are really, almost overly interested in your opinion as a different person. Like from, anything from like music to hot sauce... anything. They are like oh does your family use this a lot? OHHHH! It's like, like they just want to like know you so much better and like I guess it's better than being outside of schools and people like thinking they know you already but unfortunately because people feel like they…(pause), hmm, ok because people feel like, like, at (UNIVERSITY) racism seems not to exist almost until like administration gets involved. Students feel like because they are so not racists that they can say some things and you would just be like, 'that's so racist.

There are several dynamics playing out in this narrative. Kya's experience on her campus give her great sense of pride and appreciation. According to her narrative, her campus embraces those that are different and value the opinions of their racially diverse student body. What is interesting to note is her statement "people are overly interested in you.". I get the sense that she has sometimes questioned the authenticity or sincerity of some of the interactions she has had with majority students. It is also interesting the way she points out that her school believes that they are exempt from racist tendencies

but say inappropriate things. Another interesting point is that her campus generally believes that a Black person at the university is legit, simply for being a student at the university. This demonstrates a sense of general feelings of entitlement at her university.

Analysis

Global Impression

Kya is still working out who she is in the narrative. At one point in the narrative I asked her who she was and she replied " Mmmmm…. I have no idea, let's see (LONG PAUSE)." There is great self-development that Kya is undergoing and that is yet to occur as she is only seventeen. Within the narrative, she revealed that she is two different people. There is her on campus self and her back home in Texas self. This is an interesting dynamic and critically important to her narrative. From her childhood it is evident that school was a very important part of her existence. Graduating valedictorian of her high school and transitioning to the Ivy League had a great impact on her, for she had to find a means by which to exist in this new environment. This is illuminated in her discussion of majoring in sociology and feeling as if she is not respected as some of her peers who are in traditionally more "elite" majors.

Kya is also trying to manage her location as a Black female. She does this by directly making reference to the dating options on campus. Her narrative is very telling in the aspect that she explains that as a Black woman, no other race wants you. Her narrative is interestingly constructed because she admits to having a false sense of self. This is especially evident when she speaks of her lack of knowledge about her family's financial status. Kya does not attempt to navigate her campus in isolation, rather holds

strong to her various support networks and community. This is a great means by which she can continue to grow and develop and discover her true sense of self. The overall impression of Kya is that she is a work in progress and is not afraid to admit that she is a work in progress. She is very candid, open, and honest about her journey of self-discovery and it appears that her participation in this research study may be a critical factor of that discovery.

Major Themes

Community

Kya exhibits a strong sense of community within her narrative. This theme is apparent in the beginning of her narrative when she explained that due to her parent's divorce and remarriages, her sister and her developed their own strong sense of community and a strong relationship. The theme of community is illuminated in her discussion of her high school experiences. Her high school's commitment to service truly impacted Kya's desire to positively influence her community. She spends a significant amount of her narrative describing the various service trips she went on and the impact of the community service projects she participated in during middle and high school. These opportunities, especially service trips to Ghana and Ecuador taught her about various communities outside of the United States. Opportunities such as these ones afforded Kya the experience of finding membership within a community other than her traditional ones. Kya also makes reference to the strong community she maintained with the Black students in her high school, especially in consideration of the fact that her school was Predominately Hispanic. She attributes her experiences in high school to her

desire to find a college with a strong black community. Again, her use of the word community is extensive within the narrative. When deciding between Yale and her university, she decided to attend her university for the fact that she felt the Black community was strong and vibrant on campus.

The theme of community continues throughout her experiences on campus. She often refers to herself as being part of the Black community and has a strong sense of belonging and connection. She also makes note of students who do not associate with the Black community, and her impression of these student's separation from the Black community is seemingly frowned upon. "You are defined as your relationship to the black community and for me it's like that because I love meeting so many black people, but I guess for others that can be like really frustrating. Especially like if you drop out of the Black community to hang out with some other people. No! It's over! "The Black community I guess is really an immigrant population.". As her narrative draws to a close, Kya ties it all up with the importance of her support systems and community in her success.

"Major" Respect

One of the themes that emerged was that of major respect. Kya is very much sucked into the pressures and expectations of her school. Throughout her discussion of her campus life and experiences, she constantly wraps her identity up in her major. This is consistent with Kya's sense of identity in terms of her academic success and achievement. It is apparent that her academic and intellectual capability are great sources

of pride and self-definition. The influence of major and concentration of study is a great part of the campus academic climate at her university.

Kya feels that she is not sure who she is because her passions are very different from the majority of her friends on campus: "I felt that (UNIVERSITY) people sort of looked down on me. I have to act really passionate about my major or people look at me like I am psycho. There are a lot of pre-med people and people going into business and law. When I tell for instance a pre-med student that my concentration is sociology, their response is 'Isn't that one of those easy concentrations?" and I am like NO! It is only easy because people like it so much they don't complain all the time." During other points in the narrative when talking about her experiences on campus, she reverts back to her fears of losing respect from her peers because of her major. In a story about some of her challenges on campus, she immediately points to her feelings about her major: " I sort of tried to resist as long as I could to become a sociology major. I thought no one else is going to respect me, and that's what I want to do."

Narration of Self

The self is narrated in a very disconnected and disjointed way. This is not to speak negatively of Kya in any way. There seems to be a consistent self-presented in the narrative but the self is narrated in a seemingly all over the place manner. Not only did Kya admit that she is semi-scattered and all over the place as a personal attribute, but it is apparent in the narration of the self. It begins at the point that Kya described that upon her parent's divorce at age three, she was between houses, bounced around. This sense of bouncing around is also illuminated in her discussion of the multiple schools she

attended during her elementary years. The culminating event of this bouncing/skipping around in life was the fact that she skipped the entire fifth grade and went on to middle school. The self is also narrated as not really knowing many things about her family background especially in terms of the self's thoughts about her family's economic status: "I thought I was low income, until I finished my Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), I was so confused. I was a student with a low income mindset, but it's not true" The self is also narrated as having to work extremely hard to overcome the self's perception of being low income.

The self in relation to others reflects a service oriented perspective. The self is narrated in the way in which the self can help others. The self is also narrated as being transformed by the various international projects and service trips she experienced. On her Ivy league campus, the self is narrated in comparison to the Black community. Kya noted that she must actively find her place in the community because of the concentration of international Black students and diverse cultural backgrounds within the Black community. There is a splitting of selves presented in the narrative as she described that she is one person on campus and known as a different person back home. The self is narrated as still discovering and learning who her true sense of self is.

CHAPTER X

NATASHA

I'm a Black Woman and I'm Here Too Narrative

Natasha is freshman at a medium sized university in the Northeast. When asked

to describe herself, she states: "I am 19 years old, a cancer, soft spoke, VERY soft

spoken. Born and raised in Texas, so yeah words to describe me." When I first met

Natasha, I too thought that she was very soft spoken and very sweet. I was somewhat

apprehensive about how willing she would be to open up and share, but from the onset

of our interview I saw that she was warming up and willing to share her story with me. I

was introduced to Natasha by a mutual friend. My friend knew about the research that I

was doing and thought that Natasha would be a great young woman to talk to. Her

perspective is unique and quite endearing to the study.

Childhood

Natasha's narrative about her childhood displays the influence of the various

relationships in her life. She begins the narrative from her position as the youngest

grandchild and the only child. Within a few stanzas of her narrative she describes her

relationship with her mother:

> Me and my mom, we don't really have a good mother/daughter
> connection but we get along somewhat after years of fighting, bickering,
> back and forth. I don't like being told by my mom, Oh do this do that,
> but I did it anyway. I was a pretty good kid.

She then discusses her relationship with her cousins and the way in which she was teased

and bullied by them. She also reflects on always being picked on until she began to

stand up for herself. She is a self-proclaimed nerd and remembers liking school and

being very social with her friends. I note that there is no true cohesion of thoughts as she

reflects on her childhood. An interesting transition emerged when she attended a

Predominately Hispanic middle school.

Always Mom and Me

Her working class background is an important aspect of her narrative. Natasha

describes the impact of her community and the drive inside to get out of her community:

> Everyone around me is working class. You see a lot of homeless people walking around. It's kind of like I think to myself this is not how I want to be. I kind of like want to do something better for myself and for my community. And then it's always me and my mom always, since July 16, 1990. Always just me and my mom.

This narrative is very interesting because Natasha's reflection about her community and

her desire to want more for herself is connected to her relationship with her mother. As

she talks about wanting something better, she thinks about the possible positive impact

her success can have. I found it extremely interesting that she specifically noted that it

has been the two of them since her birth date. The repetition of the word always gives

me the sense that although she stated earlier in the narrative that her and her mom had a

strained mother/daughter relationship, there were so many more layers to their

relationship. This is evident in the contrast between her mom and her father:

> So it has always been me and my mom. My dad…I don't know, that's a tough situation. It's like a long story for like a rainy day. But now we're pretty cool

The conversation breezes swiftly past her father and then there are some interesting

tensions within her narrative. It appears that her narrative is weaved around her mother.

This part of the narrative Natasha seems to downward spiral as she discusses her mom's

singleness, marriage, divorce, loss of job and then the fact that she must get a job to help

out.

> She was working one job so she was able to pay for like the house, the
> car, put me in school. So everything was good until she got married and
> then we moved into an apartment. Everything was still ok because we
> could manage everything because two incomes in the house. You know
> one big old happy family, I guess, and then that's when we decided to
> move into a house. I was excited cause, it's a house, its big, it's in a
> Predominately Black neighborhood, and its closer to my best friend, and
> a lot closer to my school. And then once they got a divorce, everything
> went downhill, everything. And I was like oh my gosh! And like now my
> mom's kind of struggling because she has to like pay for a mortgage by
> herself, a car note and then put a child through college! All by herself?!

There are a few points of interest in this narrative. First she is excited about what her

mom's marriage will bring; two family income, new home, etc. I was struck by the

statement : "One big happy family, I guess". This I guess, seems to imply that it may not

have been all she expected. And then as she discusses the divorce and its impact on

everything. Again she is back to the statement that has been repeated in her narrative:

"Always mom and me." Natasha longed for those times again.

> Especially during the divorce I was just kind of like please get him out
> the house so we can go places like old times. I miss it, just me and my
> mom. We didn't have to worry about anything. She wasn't, you know,
> constantly, I wonder how am I going to pay the next bill", and all this
> other stuff.

High School

Natasha discussed what stood out for her from high school. This part of her

narrative is centered around her race and the comparison of race in her high school. Her

high school experience really created for her an open mind about meeting and learning

to work with people of different races. She discussed her high school experience:

> In my senior class, there were only 8 Black people out of the total of 78 students. So that just made me think about life isn't Black and White. It's just like a whole mixture of everything. And so that just made me be more open minded to anything and I was able to accept everyone for who they are. I learn from you, you learn from me. It was kind of like a give and take kind of thing. All of my friends are Spanish speaking people. So I speak Spanish.

Natasha makes note of the difficulty she experienced during high school, as it was the time that her mother's divorce happened and she had to manage the struggles at home with her desire to create a great future for herself. She expressed that she took everything in and tried to run with it to somewhat escape her "creepy crazy life outside of school." She admits to meeting with teachers and counselors who often gave her the space to talk about what was going on with her and offered her great encouragement. She tried not to hold it all inside because she admits that it would have made her go crazy. In the midst of our conversation about high school and her adolescence, Natasha again begins to speak about her mom. She spoke of her mother's immense influence in her decision to go to college. It is her mother's support in spite of the challenges at home that truly encouraged her to pursue her dreams. It is evident in the following narrative that she has begun to reconcile her relationship with her mom and to make meaning of their relationship. Here it is once again illuminated, the integral role her mother plays in her life and subsequently in her narrative.

> My mom really helped me because she always kept telling me you can do it. Just work hard and don't give up. My mom's the best and as much as we fought and sometimes she irritates me, but that's what parents do! She's just playing a parent role and I understand that and at the same time if it wasn't for her, I don't think I would be here right now. My mom helped me a lot in high school because so many times I thought I can't do it and I was going to give up. I didn't want to go to college. I don't want to go to college, college is not for me. My mom told me, you don't know

the potential that you have. So she kept pushing me and pushing. I was
like you are right because I believe if I stop now I'm going to regret
everything in life.

Transition to College

Natasha's university paid to have Natasha visit for a multicultural program the

spring of her senior year. She admits to feeling tricked by all of the minority students

that she met. She also recalls that it was seemingly cold in April, quite an adjustment

from the weather she was used to in Texas. She also explained her transition to college

from the perspective of her summer program. She spent the summer before her

Freshman year in a college prep program that aimed to ease the transition for minority

students. Once again, she admits that she felt misled about the nature of the minority

experience on campus, from her experience that summer. She spoke of the advice that

she received from upper classman who warned her that her diverse summer experience

was not going to be like the real deal. Much to her surprise her experience immediately

changed with the semester began and she came to realize that she was the only Black

person on her residence hall floor:

> I was the only Black girl on my floor. It wasn't that bad. I was like, they
> don't bother me, I don't bother them and I actually got along with them.
> So fall semester I was like, there's too many of ya'll and so little of us.
> And the only reason, (and I thought about it), I was like the only reason
> they gave me that much money is because they needed to increase their
> minority of population. You win some and lose win some. You increase
> your status quo, I'm getting a free education! I'm not going to complain!
> I mean, hey!

Natasha speaks of the pre-college program that was geared towards minorities. She

alludes to the misguidance of the program in giving her a sense that her school was very

diverse. What I noticed in her narrative is very telling. She explains that she is the

ONLY black female on her floor. There is some tension within this narrative because she discovers that she is making an effort and that things are not too bad. However, within the next few sentences she starts to realize throughout the semester that there are so many of them and so little of us. The them and us she is referring to is most likely too many White students. What is even more interesting throughout this narrative is some of her inner thoughts come alive.. "The only reason they gave me money is because they needed to increase their minority population." This is a powerful statement as Natasha tries to make sense of her location as a Black female on her campus and if the university really wanted her, or only wanted her to diversify. She then tries to rectify this statement with the fact that she is receiving a free education which will help her in her aim to change the status quo. I love how she ends the narrative, with "I am not going to complain" She has settled it within herself that she will take advantage of this opportunity that she is given although she also recognizes that she is one of few.

Life on Campus

Natasha admitted that she is not too involved with campus life. Her main focus is her education and maintaining a high GPA. She has not truly found where she can make the most contribution to her campus community, and her focus right now is doing the best she can with her school work. Natasha seems very mature about her decision to get a grasp on her academics before she ventured into other arenas of campus life. She admits to promising herself that she will become more involved in the community and campus activities in future years.

One of the most poignant aspects of our conversation emerged during this conversation about campus life. Natasha engages in a discussion about the various dynamics among Blacks on her campus. She makes comparisons between Black males and Black females, African Americans and Africans, and Regional Blacks (Northern Blacks versus Southern Blacks. She makes a very strong statement about Black men entitlement. "I am a Black woman, and I am here too. Doesn't that count for something?" This is one of the points in our conversation that I enjoyed the most.

> Seeing as my school is up north and most of the Black people come from New York City, well most of the kids who come from New York City are not Black. They're either from the Islands or from Africa or their parents are from Africa so they're descendants. I am from the south and that's two different mentalities. When I come to UNIVERSITY it's kind of different because they don't understand me and they feel like I don't know. New York has this mentality where it's just like we owe them something. They are very egotistical and I'm just like you don't have to be that way. It's just weird. Just the Black people in itself, it's different. Especially the guys. They make a big deal because they are a Black person in college… well, I am a Black female in college, does that count for something as well? Like just cause you're a man in college, I mean, ok and? We both should get credit here not just you.

I want to dig deeper into this narrative for it is rich and has so many layers wrapped up into it. First Natasha makes reference to the difference in experience and as she describes it "mentality" between northern Blacks and Southern blacks such as herself. She makes a very interesting point when she separates the "island and African" students from New York and states that they are not Black anyway. It is evident from her narrative that she does not have a good impression of fellow students from New York and the north as she alludes to them behaving egotistical. What I found to be extremely telling is her reference to African American males in this narrative. It is very interesting

the way in which she has come to understand the intersection of her race and her gender in this narrative. She alludes to what may be an even bigger issue in our society. The fact that a Black male in college receives much more "press" do in part to the challenges that Black males face in general as members of our society. What Natasha does so powerfully here is put her own seal of accomplishment when she says: " I'm a Black female in college does that count for something as well? She has exposed the nature of a system that sometimes excludes the experiences of Black females.

As our conversation progressed about her experiences on campus, Natasha tries to make sense of a conversation she had with a friend. The friend of hers explained a study group she was in with an African American male and two Asian males. What ensued from this conversation was an interesting perspective in the narrative. Natasha paints a picture of what happened in this scenario:

> It was my friend, two Asians, and a Black guy and somehow they started talking about color and racism. Basically the Asians said they don't like Black girls! (Coming from an Asian, I was like wow, I love Asians, they are the coolest people I could ever meet). My friend asked him why he didn't like Black females, especially since she was one. He responded that black women are intimidating, rude, and loud. My friend asked him if he had ever been around black female who was loud and ghetto and he said no. The worse part about it was the Black guy that was there said that he agreed with the Asian guy that black women are angry and loud. He just sat there and did not defend us.

This narrative reveals the various stereotypes and misconceptions about Black women that Natasha admits to constantly having to dispel and overcome. Her inclusion of this story in her narrative depicts a broader range of ignorance on her campus. What is even more startling from this narrative is the way in which the Black male did not even stick up for Black women, rather perpetuated the misconceptions held by the Asian men.

Natasha makes note that although the situation did not happen to her directly, it really impacted her and more specifically her friend. Natasha makes several references to her frustration with dating and not understanding why Black men do not like to date Black women.

Analysis

Global Impression

Natasha has begun to understand the intersection of race, class, and gender in her life. Her narrative depicts a young woman who is trying to make sense of the various layers of identification in her life. Her relationship with her mother is a very important part of her narrative, as she walked me through the various tensions in their relationship. Natasha has forsaken the social and cultural climate of her campus in order to focus on her academic success. Within this lack of extracurricular involvement, it appears that Natasha is still longing to build deep and meaningful relationships on campus. What is also highlighted in her narrative is her need to succeed for the greater impact it will have on her family overall and her community. She is focused on progressing in her career and overcoming significant challenges. Natasha is trying to balance the multi dimensions of racial interaction on her campus. She speaks of the regional differences between the northern blacks on her campus and herself, a student from the South. On top of managing her location as a racial minority, she is also trying to manage and find her place within the Black community.

Major Themes

Race, Gender, Class

One of the major themes in Natasha's narrative is that of race, class, and gender. Each of these are presented in the narrative, but not necessarily at the same time. One of the interesting points of reference is that Natasha understands that all of these positions in her life, ultimately impact her development. Issues of race are presented in her narrative especially in the context of school. Race was a great focus of her narrative in middle and high school. She constantly refers back to being one of few Blacks at her Predominately Hispanic school. "My high school made me think about life. It isn't just Black and White, but a whole mixture of everything, this made me open minded." The impact of these experiences transcended her college experiences as yet again she is the minority, but able to adjust to her PWI environment. Race is also strongly presented in her discussion of the tensions on her campus between Whites and Blacks, but also within the black community. "The Black people in themselves are different." She illuminated the tensions between Black Americans and African first and second generation immigrants. These tensions of race are played out throughout her narrative.

Gender is also a theme in her narrative. This theme is quite striking when Natasha described the way in which Black males are entitled on her campus. She discussed the way in which they were a prized possession and received a great amount of positive attention. What one finds in the narrative is her passion for the fact that she is a Black woman and should be just as prized and admired on her campus. She speaks of the invisibility of Black women on the campus. However, Natasha wants to shine too.

Class is also illuminated in Natasha's narrative. She described her upbringing as working class. When she described her neighborhood she painted a picture of her socioeconomic situation: " It is very old. It has old buildings and a lot of old people. You see a lot of homeless walking around." The scene that she just painted above is one of many in reference to the influence of class in her narrative. It is her community that in fact motivates her to do better. She wants to do better so that she can positively impact her community. Class is also tied into her narrative about her mother's loss of jobs and the fear attributed to the cost of attending college.

Theme of Mom

Natasha's mom is a major theme in her narrative. This important relationship and support network for Natasha is a critical component of her narrative. The theme of Mom is the glue that binds Natasha's narrative together from start to finish. It is very interesting to note the way in which Natasha consistently throughout the narrative states: " All the time it was me and mom, always!" She even makes this connection between the day in which there relationship began; her birth date-July 16, 1990. Mom is a constant in Natasha's narrative and although their relationship experienced and continually experiences some turmoil, Natasha is acutely aware of the strong bond between her mother and her. Natasha's drive to succeed is tied back to the theme of mom. In a sense, her own success will greatly affect her mom. When Natasha is weary and wants to quit and give up, mom holds her together and encourages her with love and hope; again, exemplifying the way in which mom holds the narrative together.

Narration of Self

There is a continuity of self throughout time and throughout Natasha's narrative. The self is also narrated in its relation to others, especially in terms of the influence the self can have and the impact the self can make on the community. The self is also narrated in comparison to who she does not want to become: "I want to do something better for myself and for my community." The self is narrated in conjunction to her mom. When events and life circumstances affect her mom, the self is also greatly affected. After mom's marriage, subsequent divorce, and the financial struggles that ensued, the self undergoes a sense of maturity. "I'm going to get my own job. I'll pay for my clothes. I'll put my own gas in the car. The self is narrated on campus in comparison to the Black community. The self is narrated as an outsider to some degree based on her Southern roots. The regional and often cultural differences amongst the Black community poses some tension for the self. When undergoing episodes of self-reflexivity, Natasha has a positive opinion of the self, noting that she is a good friend, daughter, and sweet caring person. The self is steady in comparison to other outgoing friends and the self truly values relationships.

CHAPTER XI

ALEXIS

My Wounds Are Scars Now, My Motivation Narrative

I was introduced to Alexis by a mutual friend. My friend reached out to her about my study and insisted that she would be a prime candidate for participation. I am not sure why I did not heavily recruit Alexis initially, but after a chance meeting one evening. I know that this research study would not be complete without her life story and experiences. Alexis's deep internalization of her life and the meaning of everything she has experienced truly shined through in the interview. I was intrigued by her sense of self and the confidence she exuded. When asked how would she identify herself, Alexis paints a very clear picture:

> I would identify myself as 19. I'm an African-American of course. I'm pretty funny I would say. I am a very outgoing person. I have a lot of friends and I like to talk and I'm very smart... well I think I am pretty smart. And I have many hobbies. I 'm like an artsy kind of person. I like to scrapbook. And I'm very involved. If I'm not involved in anything I feel like, like my life isn't going anywhere. Like I have to constantly be doing something, so I'm kind of like I guess a busybody kind of person. And I like to be here and there and do all kinds of things, but yeah, that's me.

Childhood

Alexis' story is compelling and profound. If looks could deceive, she is by far the most put together young woman. Hers was a life of tragedy and despair which began with the death of her mother at the age of seven months. With no father around and her mother's life cut short, Alexis is left to maneuver the world without the woman who carried her in her womb for nine months and nursed her for seven. Without even the God

given opportunity to lay eyes on her mother in a manner that would register in her

memory and hold the memory even now, she sits before me smiling and the joy of her

presence has brightened up my day and made my heart feel joy! And then there is

grandma, the beacon of hope, the caregiver and friend who raised her own children but

to repeat that cycle again when she raised Alexis and her two brothers. This is Alexis'

narrative of childhood:

> I am pretty much the oddball of my family. I've always liked school and
> I've always liked completely different things from my brothers. My
> brothers were in the street, gangsters and I am like quiet. I was the quiet
> child. I was a little butterball... always chubby. And I was spoiled,
> because I was the youngest and reminded my grandmother so much of
> my mom. Growing up I didn't have the support of my dad. I only had my
> grandma and there's certain things that your grandma can't teach you.
> She's from a completely different time than you're from and some of the
> things she tells you are like so outdated and so old. I just became an old
> lady, I guess. (laughing).

Although Alexis lost her own mother at seven months, she became a surrogate

mother at the age of twelve. A child without the guidance of her birth parents, forced to

take on the responsibility of raising her nephew. A childhood stolen, arrested by the

unasked responsibility to raise her nephew. But with no one else to step in Alexis speaks

of raising herself. She refers to her grandma as mom in the narrative:

> It was pretty hard because I pretty much had to raise myself because I
> would go to school in the daytime and my mom would always work at
> night. So she would work the graveyard shift and I would hardly get to
> see her. So pretty much like my brothers and me all by ourselves. Around
> 12 years old I had to start raising my nephew. And we got him when he
> was fresh out! He had to be like two weeks old and even if that, like, my
> grandma decided to take him because apparently his parents were unfit or
> whatever, but I ended up raising him from the time I was 12 until now.
> And that took away a lot of my childhood so I couldn't go places or do
> certain things because I was stuck at home raising my little nephew.. And,

pretty much had to grow up fast, learn how to do things on my own, learn how to live.

Although Alexis admits to feeling a sense of loss of her childhood, her grandma was very influential in instilling many values into her. Alexis attributes her time in church as another great influencer.   It is amazing that even though Alexis' grandmother was not home often to raise her and care for her in the way in which children are traditionally raised, Alexis' respect and admiration for her grandmother is beautifully portrayed in the narrative. She constantly refers to her as her beacon of light, a profound metaphor:

> She kept me in church, she kept me busy, motivated me which is more than I can say for a lot of parents. And, that's kind of where I get my attitude from. I know sometimes you'll come into like hard obstacles or whatever but I just learned to laugh and I just learned to get over it. That's why I'm the person that I am today, really silly. Even though a lot of things are going on in my life, I learned to look towards the brighter side because God didn't have to wake me up this morning. I would be somewhere else if it wasn't for my mom. So I learned to just stop worrying about all the bad things that's happened and focus on the good and be thankful for what's bad because out of the bad comes good. So yeah, that's pretty much my life and even though I've been going through some really hard things, over the past year, I'm still growing to know who I am and come to terms with who I am and be comfortable with who I am.

Although we have not been long into our interview, Alexis is already making meaning out of her life experiences. She immediately discusses that she is going to make the best out of her life experiences. It is profound the way in which she has come to terms with who she is.

Christmas Gift

A very heartfelt narrative emerges as Alexis shares the story about one of the only times she spent with her father.   It is his absence in her life that she attributes to some of her present issues and negative experiences. The following narrative gives the reader a glimpse into this moment. It was a profound story and it spun an interesting conversation later on in the interview.

> A lot of pain from my father. I still thank God for my grandma because without her I really don't know what I would've done especially since my dad didn't care enough to even give me a Christmas gift. The one present I got from my dad I was so happy to get it. He married a white lady and his kids are mixed and he treats his kids with her way better than he treats us. He doesn't care to be in our lives, he cares about them. Now that he knows that I am in college, now that he sees that I'm going somewhere with my life, he wants to be a part of my life to get what I have. And I'm like no. So this one time I spent the night at his house, he bought me the Christmas gift that I wanted. It was a doll. I was playing with it and my little sister, she started crying and she really wanted the doll but it was my doll, it was my Christmas gift and she had all these presents that she could play with but she wanted my doll. So she threw a tantrum and my father came to me and said he was going to buy me another Christmas gift. He took my doll and he gave it to her and I was there with nothing. I never received any gift from my dad all my life. He has probably given me $25.00 my entire life, my entire life!

There is so much that can be pulled out of this story about the one Christmas she spent with her father. First off, at the onset of the narrative she acknowledges that there was a lot of pain that she experienced from her father. This story of the Christmas gift is quite symbolic. It demonstrates her excitement about receiving a special gift for herself from her father. An interesting spin in this narrative is her reference to her father's White wife and her racially mixed half-siblings. The tension in this story is very real and very heartbreaking to listen to as Alexis relives that moment when her mixed sister was given

the only present she ever received from her father. I made note that Alexis is explicit in her details of this story, especially the fact that her sister had so many other presents, yet yearned for hers. What one finds in this story is a heart exposed. Alexis has exposed herself to me and we have only touched the tip of the iceberg with this story, for her vulnerability in this interview is unmatched.

Adolescence

Alexis' adolescence was marked with much sacrifice, responsibility, and inner passion to pursue her dreams. Alexis describes the hard life she experienced at home. She was taking care of her nephew and trying her hardest to do good in school. She makes reference to the fact that her brothers did not care about school and her love of school was often a point of ridicule in her life. She utilized the ridicule to push herself to succeed:

> I was the only one in my family who was like I am going to go to school and make A's. I'm going to college. I want to do this! My brothers would tease me about it and on top of that I was chubby, so I got it all. They were kind of an inspiration. Not an inspiration but a motivation to keep doing what I'm doing, keep making good grades and everything. Especially since my brothers and their friends were in gangs. It was really hard to see the light. Their friends slowly disappeared, as in gone…like died and that was a big motivation for me because it would seem like seeing their friends die would be a turning point for my brothers but it actually made them worse and they got deeper and deeper into the streets and more aggressive. That's when my relationship with my brothers kind of split.

Alexis explains that when she thinks about her adolescence she witnessed a lot things that people should not witness no matter what age, such as watching people get shot and killed, fights, and drugs:

> I have this motivation, this vision of where I want to go and what I don't want to become. My main motivation is I need to get out of here. I can't continue this cycle. I need to get out and make my grandma and my mom proud of me.

High School

Alexis displays the power of the experience she had at school. She attributes much of

her success and motivation to her school:

> (SCHOOL) has made a really big impact on my motivation and everything else. Without (SCHOOL) I would have never known that I could reach that potential that I'm reaching right now. Even I can go higher, like high.

As our conversation continues about her high school experience she digs deeper into the

racial climate of her high school, making note of the tensions between Blacks and

Hispanics. It was this time in her life that she realized that racism at any level is wrong

and offensive. She uses an interesting metaphor to explain what she observed to be the

relationship between Blacks and Hispanics

> There was a silent competition between both minorities. It was like crabs in a barrel. The minute I try to climb out you pull me right back down. It impacted how I feel about the other race and how I feel about myself because we had the same history. We come from the same places. We have the same experiences as minorities and we still try to find superiority over each other. Instead of putting each other down why don't we try to build each other up, but it's not happening.

She goes on to explain that the instances of racism and discrimination that she

experienced during this time in her life really did hurt, but these experiences have truly

given Alexis motivation to overcome obstacles. I can't help but sit back and take in

everything that Alexis says about overcoming hurt in life. I was so inspired by her words

and knew that her words were the essence of her narrative and her resilience:

> It hurts but a wound will turn into a scar which lets people know where you've been. Like me, racism, experiencing it in my neighborhood at my school has like created wounds, they are scars now, and I can tell people that I overcame, my spirit is not dead. I'm still alive and I'm not going to let this bring me down and the positive outcome is that I am more motivated because of what was said to me. I'm more inclined to better and I'm more ambitious because of the things you said because of all the hate you. I have scars but I'm here and I'm doing a lot better and I'm going to keep doing better and I'm going to keep climbing forward because every time I feel like giving up I'm going to remember what she said to me and I'm going to keep going. Some try to keep me down but I'm not, I'm up!

What is interesting about this narrative is the way in which Alexis seems to speak directly to those who have hurt her in the past. It was evident that the use of the pronoun "you" strongly got this point across. As the researcher, I am deeply moved by this statement and must regroup myself as I began to tear up. I transition the conversation so that we can talk about her transition to college.

Transition to College

As I stated above, I tried to transition our conversation to her own transition to college, because I was very much wrapped up in the emotions and the power of the interview with Alexis. I cannot describe how this interview truly impacted me. I simply sat back and totally let Alexis talk. It was a true conversation and exchange of wisdom. Alexis' transition to college is unlike anything that I have heard. Two weeks before Alexis was to go off to college in the Northwest, miles from her family, tragedy struck her family again, and left Alexis with the pressure and decision to sacrifice her dreams for college to remain with her family and support them through the tragedy.

> One morning, we got a call. It was something we've been dreading forever. We got a call that my brother was killed and I couldn't believe it. This was two weeks before I was supposed to leave for school. Even

though me and my brother didn't have that great of a relationship he was still there for me. He was still like the father type in my household. I understood him and he actually took the time to understand me. He was five when my mom died and he had been haunted by that his entire life. There were times when I had to hold a gun away from his head to keep him from trying to kill himself because he felt that nobody cared about him. Another time he overdosed and tried to kill himself and was in the hospital for a week. And it finally happened two weeks before I was suppose to go to school. It broke my family apart, completely apart. And I felt like, and still feel like I betrayed my grandma because I still left for school.

Life on Campus

Alexis described in great detail the sights and sounds that permeated her senses as she stepped onto her campus. What is most interesting is the attention she placed on nature and the environment:

> When I first got to campus there were a lot of hills, a lot of birds and black squirrels. It was really beautiful and there was this waterfall, waterfall of the Holy Spirit, like a sculpture. I was scared but I was like excited at the same time. I saw a guy on a skateboard. I did not see anyone outside. Everyone was indoors because I realized it was finals week and I thought to myself this is going to really suck.

I then ask Alexis to paint a picture of who she is on her campus. When I thought about all she had shared with me about her past and some of the difficult situations she overcame in her life, I was very interested to learn of who she was on her campus.

> I would say I am the advocate for unity. I am always trying to get people together. I wanted to make a unity garden. It was going to be right there for real! Yes I wanted to have it and then people were like "We can't get people to keep a garden! I was like I will do it myself! And, I wanted to make an international festival on campus to get everybody to know everybody's cultures. I am kind of the involved person. On Saturday I teach kids how to write essays for scholarships. I am more of the unity, getting everybody together, talkative, make everybody laugh kind of person on campus.

Alexis' description of herself on her campus and the contribution that she makes to her

campus community is profound. It is again very interesting to look at the way in which

she has constructed her identity on campus, and the way in which she is passionate about

being a unifier. Alexis also identified the support system that her university provides

for minority students. Her take on the program is quite interesting and addressed some of

the implied messages of the program:

> As far as academic on campus, we have this thing called student support
> services which is strictly for minorities and people from low income
> households. It is kind of like wow to me because, are you expected to fail
> when you get there?! I am not saying that I don't like or appreciate it but
> that's almost, if you are saying that you are strictly for minorities, are
> we... do we have a predisposition to failure?

I transition the conversation to the heart of the interview and my research.   I asked her

to speak on her position as an African American woman on her campuses, providing an

inside view to her life experiences and perspectives as Black women. Alexis' discussion

about her experiences on campus spirals back to her narrative when she discusses the

impact of her absent father. Her narrative about her experiences is very telling and

provocative in exposing the difficulties that she experienced on campus

> Ok let me start off by saying: (UNIVERSITY) is less than 2% Black
> people and half of those 2, less than 2% left this year. Like we lost a lot of
> Black people.   It was a huge culture shock. I mean, even though people
> say you shouldn't be shocked or whatever because you went to a school
> that was all Hispanic but there is a difference between people you identify
> with and people with different experiences from you. I will have to say I
> kind of dealt with it fight by fight. I don't really too much like interracial
> dating. I don't think I am a racist person, but I like to think that we are a
> strong race. I feel like not necessarily that Black needs to be Black and
> white needs to be white but it's the fact that especially like what I
> experienced with my dad, treating his interracial kids better than he does,
> his full Black kids. He could care less about us but he will give the world
> to them and I feel like there are enough of us strong Black women out

there, like why can't you find a strong Black woman? What was going on there? And the people, person… one person in particular, he was like, "I'm not dating anybody with skin darker than mine because its ugly," and I'm like, oh.

I "semi- abandoned" the interview questions about her life on campus to try to push Alexis to begin to make connections between her past experiences and her current thoughts. Alexis's begins to uncover some of the underlying issues that have impacted her thinking at this moment. I push her to dig deeper to pull out the source of her frustrations. Alexis continues on with her narrative about her father. She is uncovering several layers of hurt, and I can tell that this is a freeing process for her. As she continues to dig deeper into her narrative about her father, much is revealed about her identity development. Her use of the pronoun "you" is as if she is directing her anger towards her father. The narrative continued:

> You treat your light skin kids better. Light skinned, good hair kids better than your Black kids, your dark skinned kids. And it's like we are both your kids but you choose them over us. And,the fact that my uncle was saying all this bad stuff about Black women and not caring because I am a Black woman and I am your niece and you feel like it's ok for you to say this to me, which means you're saying it about me. And no matter how much you want to, I can't change who I am. I'm Black and I'm a strong Black woman and you have a problem with that and you feel that you need to go outside your race to make it less complicated with a Black woman?

In the midst of this narrative, Alexis flips back to her experiences on campus. There are several stories playing out at the same time within her mind as she works through this narrative. She shifts back and forth from her father's interracial marriage and children, the negative comments her uncle has expressed to her about Black women, and then she transitions back to college. All of this takes place within the same story.

>It's difficult because I never know what the other person is thinking. You never know what that person is thinking in the back of their mind or whether you're getting off easy. Cause I've heard it all at my school. Like you, "You only got in here cause we need more Black people," or, "We need this and we need that and you only got the scholarship because you're Black," and I'm like, ok do I need to show you my transcript? Do I need to show you all the AP courses I took? Do I need to show you all my extracurricular experience? Do I need to show you my GPA? Cause I'm very sure that I have that, if not higher than yours. So you're telling me I got a scholarship that was open to whites and Blacks because I'm Black I got it? Why didn't you get it?! And they respond, "I didn't even apply for it."

Alexis reveals a lot in this narrative about her struggles being a Black woman and also some of the stereotypes she has to overcome on her campus. What is most interesting is the way in which she speaks in the second person. This again appears to me that she is managing her frustration with others and attempting to work out this frustration by seemingly speaking to them in the discussion. There is the sense of having to prove to others on campus that she has the credentials to be a student on her campus and that others have made her to believe that she is there simply because she is Black. Alexis provided profound insight into the plights she has faced as an African American women.

>When you come into a college atmosphere as an African-American or a person of color, no matter how much people say it is not true and they don't feel that way, I think you are automatically labeled as inferior than other people when you come in. You do have some of those college people who are going to be like, "You only got in because you are black and we need to meet a quota, or we need to have a certain amount of Black people at the school, and you got off easy." And I know this is true because I heard it. It's like being black and being a woman, I guess because you have to work... like me! I feel like I have to work 10 times harder than the kids in my class.

In the above narrative, Alexis identified the intersection of race and gender. As her

narrative continues she makes several other notes of the impact her race and gender

attribute to her need to overcome negative perceptions of her abilities. She made a

strong reference to the academic environment within the context of the classroom and

the way that she needed to overcome her own feelings of insufficiency:

> My first semester, in all of my classes I'm the only black person… girl in
> my classes and all the kids were so smart. I remember thinking I cannot
> do this, I can't do this, people around me are just way too educated. But
> then I realized, hey! I am educated too, what am I talking about? I know
> this stuff, why am I sitting in the back of the class and not answering
> anything? When I came to that realization, every time I went to class I
> always had my hand up. I ended up being one of the stronger students
> out of the class because I wasn't letting myself feel like I was inferior
> anymore. And trust me, there was this girl sitting next to me who
> reminded me that I was inferior to her every day.

The conversation about her feelings of inferiority began to flow into a discussion of

class. Alexis began to understand the intersection of her various locations, race, gender,

and class. She started to internalize her life in comparison to others and her need to

educate others about her various obstacles in life:

> I realized that a lot of the kids at the school are rich and they don't know
> what it means to be poor and have nothing. I remember I was humiliated,
> but I was grateful for this opportunity but at the same time I was kind of
> embarrassed because I had to explain to my introduction into college life
> group. My counselor made me give a speech to everybody telling them
> where I came from, my experiences and how I made it out. My whole
> background. I know it seems weird, but I am actually grateful that I got
> the opportunity because a lot of people do not know what it's like. Plus all
> those people there are all rich and living in nice neighborhoods. They had
> a different view of me once I finished talking about it.

Analysis

Global Impression

It is almost impossible to sum up Alexis and to gather a global impression of her. Her story and narrative alone, are a true indication of a young woman who has completely beat the odds and every statistic that would attempt to determine her future. In spite of the challenging circumstances in her childhood that she has revealed in her narrative, and the daily struggles to overcome her experiences, Alexis is definitely an overcomer. Alexis has learned to remain confident and hopeful in her future. She knows that college is her way out of her neighborhood and her chance for a better future. Alexis is an inspiration to those around her, and a great asset to her campus community. Despite the dismally low numbers of other Black student on campus, Alexis is able to strive and be a source of light for those around her. She is a unifier on her campus and wants to bring the community together.

Relationships are very important to Alexis and she often refers to the various relationships in her life. The negative impact of her strained relationship with her father is a critical component of her story and a source of great pain. During conversations about various different stories in her life, Alexis often "dips" back to the story about the one Christmas she spent with her dad. This one incident had a profound impact on her life and is reflected within her narrative. Alexis is also managing her feelings about interracial relationships and her dislike of such relationships. These feelings are a direct result of the interracial marriage and children of her father and her uncle. She is

attempting to manage the negative stereotypes of Black women and is determined to create harmony within her own self.

Major Themes

Resilience

The theme of resilience is very strong throughout Alexis' narrative. Alexis' ability to bounce back and push forward in the times of great tragedy is a reflection of the influence of resilience in her narrative. What one finds within her narrative is the onset of tragedy at the age of seven months. The death of her mother and the total lack of a relationship with her father, would make for a seemingly challenging and failed life. This is not to say that Alexis has not had a challenging life, but the way in which she is able to overcome her background and neighborhood of violence, crime, and poverty to achieve the things that she has, much of her success must be attributed to her resilience. The more I dug into her narrative and the more she revealed about her relationship or lack thereof with her father, her brothers, and her grandma, the more the theme of resilience became magnified. "I know sometimes you will come into hard obstacles, but I just learned to laugh and I just learned to get over it. That's why I'm the person that I am today…really silly." Plus, Alexis is able to lean on her strong sense of resilience within her PWI environment. Although she is challenged within her major and as one of very few Blacks on campus, her resilience and ability to overcome obstacles with great strength and positivity is a key characteristic and theme within her narrative.

The greatest picture of her resilience is demonstrated after the death of her brother. His death, two weeks before she was going to college is a tragedy that would

have many people paralyzed and unable to push forward. What one finds in Alexis'
narrative is the complete opposite. "I have to look at all the things that I overcame in my
life so they can keep me going because I have to say I made it this far why stop now.
And I had to tell myself like okay my brothers in a better place now because he always
wanted to be with my mom and now he gets his chance." Her faith plays a great part in
her ability to be resilient. "It's all in God's plan. There is a plan and things happen for a
reason. Sometimes when I feel like it hurts too much to smile I still smile because he
was good to do it for me."

Motivation

The theme of motivation is pervasive in the narrative. Alexis frequently talks
about motivation and inspiration. I highlighted the use of both of these words
extensively throughout her entire narrative from childhood to her current experiences on
her PWI campus. Many quotes within the narrative reflective the theme of motivation.
Alexis is motivated at an early age to go to college. She admitted to being the only one
in her family that wanted to go. Despite being teased for having aspirations to go to
college, she used the negative experiences to motivate her. Also, as her brothers became
deeper and deeper involved in gangs and displayed more and more aggressive behavior,
this motivated her . "I've seen fights in my neighborhood, drugs, everything. And that
was my main motivation to get out of here." Her high school was also a major
motivation that appeared often within her narrative. Alexis would refer back to
counselors and teachers in her life who had supported her and motivated her to keep
pursuing her dreams although the world around her was telling her otherwise.

An interesting twist on the theme of motivation emerges when Alexis realizes that she herself is an inspiration and the motivation for others. She encourages others that if she is able to get out, then anyone can.: " I am getting to be an inspiration to myself!" She noted that she constantly has to look at all of the hard things in her life that she has overcome so that they can keep her going, especially since she made it this far…why stop now.

Grandma

Grandma is the "beacon of light" that penetrates Alexis' world. Her narrative reflects the important relationship between her grandmother and her. Her grandma is a major theme within the narrative because at all the stages of her life story, grandma is there. When Alexis narrates the passing of her mom when she was a baby, and the influence her grandma had on her, it is apparent that the theme of the impact of the relationship with her grandma would emerge. This theme is exemplified in a story about her grandma: "My grandma has been like a beacon of light. I know a lot of kids in my neighborhood are raised by their grandmother in a single parent home, and they don't have the support I have. They don't have the opportunities, that light that I was exposed to. People don't realize how important it is for children of color especially to have role models in their households. Not looking to BET and videos, but they need positive role models in their house. Without out my grandma I really wouldn't care. If she didn't support me I would be like a lot of my friends, pregnant, strung out on drugs, in abusive relationships. I thank God for the grandma that I have, even though she couldn't be there for much, not much of my life, but all the milestones even though I had to have "sit in"

mothers, I still thank God for my grandma because without her, I really don't know what I would've done."

One of the hardest things for Alexis to do is the decision to leave home and go to college after her brother's sudden death. This decision completely broke her heart and is another example of the way in which Grandma is woven throughout the narrative. "I kind of in a way betrayed my mom (grandma) because I left her. I still left. I left when she wasn't done with it and I left her to take care of my nephew by herself." Alexis' love for her grandma is quite evident. Alexis views her pursuit of her education as a way of possibly changing the course of life for her grandma and her nephew one day.

Narration of Self

The self is narrated in a strong continual matter. The self is consistent and remains steadfast throughout time, despite the various pain and tragedy that surrounds her. There is not a sense of the self-splitting or shifting, rather a strong confidence in who the self is. The self in comparison to others is the outsider, especially in comparison to the relationship with her brothers. . " I am the oddball. I liked having and doing completely different things. I was the quiet child. I was the little butterball, always chubby." The self is narrated as an overcomer and a fighter. The reflexivity of the self-portrays a positive moral evaluation of the self as other. "I've been going through some really hard things over the past year. I am still getting to know and grow to know who I am and be comfortable with who I am. The self is narrated as an example and inspiration to those around her. The self is also narrated as the unifier amongst the campus community.

CHAPTER XII

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The research findings presented in this study provide a space for greater

discussion concerning the experiences of African American females at PWIs.   In

consideration of the scholarly literature that has already been done on African American

undergraduate females at PWIs, the narrative inquiry methodology of this study affords

the opportunity for the first person accounts of life experiences to be presented. The

stories of the women in this study highlight their unique position as African American

women on their campuses and in our society. In the previous chapters, I analyzed each of

their narratives in isolation. I gathered a global impression, deciphered major themes,

and analyzed the way in which the self was narrated in each woman's individual

narrative. This chapter, however; discusses the themes that emerged across all seven

narratives. This chapter will also highlight implications for future research, institutional

policy development and action, recommendations, and the limitations of the study.

Findings

Each individual narrative contained an in depth analysis and theme excavation.

Each woman's individual story was presented in a manner that demonstrated her unique

perspective and life story. This was a space for each woman to have her voice heard and

to speak to the matters unique to her. When all seven narratives were taken together it

was evident that similar themes were highlighted. There were several places in which

their narratives collided. These particular points of "theme collision" will be the focus

of this discussion.   The three major findings that emerged in this study are the

Negotiating Worlds, Managing Subjectivities, and Redefining Selves.

Negotiating Worlds

The narratives indicate that these women have learned to negotiate their worlds.

They are acutely aware of floating in and through various systems. What I found to be

most interesting is that these women are what some would say "using the system" to get

what they want. Chloe was very clear in discussing that she would utilize the system

until she reached a level where she could be self-employed. Ella as well talked about

negotiating the system, but taking it to another level and manipulating the system. This

is definitely apparent in Ella's discussion of messing up statistics and data when she

refuses to label her racial background. There are several sub findings that relate to the

overall finding of negotiating worlds. These sub findings offer the women great

opportunities and support to negotiate worlds and systems within the context of the PWI

environment.

Cultural Capital

The knowledge and skills that these women acquired whether in childhood,

adolescence or as a coping mechanism once on their college campuses had a great

impact on their ability to seek out the appropriate resources and support. All of the

informants attended rather rigorous high schools and had the opportunity to participate

in college prep curriculums. They all stated that they felt pretty academically prepared

for college, even though the academic transition for most students is often challenging.

The women seemed to have pre-existing tools to be able to navigate the system. Much of

these tools were supported by their own drive and confidence to actively seek out help

and opportunities to contribute to their own campus experience.

Shifting

In order to negotiate various worlds, all of the women have mastered the art of

shifting (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) that was presented in the literature review. This

ability to slide in and out of different modes of acting depending on the social context or

group of interaction is an interesting way in which these women negotiate worlds.

Several of the women referred to "acting" or "playing the part" in their narratives. They

all identified some sort of negotiation of their personalities and perspectives in order to

maneuver various situations. Ella in particular has also mastered the art of shifting and

negotiation. In her narrative she talks about changing her voice, her appearance, and

other attributes to fit into the scenario or situation. Kya experienced the art of shifting as

a member of her campus community and then shifts to maintain the person that she is

known as back home. The findings in the narratives of the other woman display

extensive examples of shifting.

Support Networks

The women in this study all created and maintained strong networks and support

in order to negotiate their campus environments. Some of the girls relied on strong

family and friend ties back in their hometowns, while others really gleaned off of the

support networks they were able to build on campus. All of the women except one were

heavily involved in their campus community and organizations, and most of them had

sought out relationships and mentorship with faculty members. This finding in part

negates much of the research that discovered the African American females at Predominately White campuses are often isolated and uninvolved in their campus communities; rather the women in this study were the complete opposite. Each of them held leadership or "on the road to leadership" positions on their campuses, except Natasha who admits that her social life must take a back seat while she gets her GPA and academic self together. She does believe that she will get much more involved in her upperclassman years. Alexis, for example was elected president of the black student association in her Sophomore year, Christina was the president of three major, multicultural organizations on her campus, and Ella was the president of her sorority and numerous multicultural business organizations on campus. Mariah has built a strong sense of family as a Bobcat on her campus. The women in this study had strong social networks from their family, friends, and for a few of them, their relationship to their teachers and counselors at their high schools provided a great web of support. These strong networks helped them to negotiate worlds.

Majors

The women in this study have acquired another set of negotiation tools as the majority of them are in majors historically underrepresented with Black women. The majority of the women are science and business majors on the track to become lawyers, real estate agents, doctors, nurses, and physical therapists. Kya, who is a sociology major repeatedly describes her sense of fear of the lack of respect she will get for choosing this major. This finding adds to the literature discussion that demonstrates that African American women are traditionally concentrated in the social sciences,

education, and the humanities (Moses, 1989). What was found in this study is that these women are representing a new trend in Black women's major choices. The women in this study provide an interesting spin on the ability to negotiate worlds, as their variety in majors allows them to infiltrate worlds (majors) historically underrepresented with African American women.

Hair Conformations

The theme of Black woman's hair emerged in the research findings. This section is entitled hair conformations because several of the girls discussed the need to bypass the natural state of their hair in order to conform to some of the unspoken rules of society. Hair conformations plays a significant part in the negotiation of worlds because it is also tied into the art of shifting. In the narrative of Chloe, she admits to keeping her hair in its natural state by not using the straightening chemical relaxers, however she masks her natural hair with weave in order to fit in to the expectations of professionalism within her major and desired career path. Ella, makes the same exact connection to her hair and professionalism. She comments that she would like to know what her natural texture is, but knows that in order to move up the career ladder, she must also conform. Ironically, both of these young ladies are Finance majors. This theme is in line with the literature that reveals that African American woman's hair is a point of great discussion (Banks, 2000, Caldwell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The way in which society has interpreted the meaning or the identity of a woman because of the way in which she chooses to wear her hair is profound.

Bank's (2000) work *Hair Matters* illustrates the way in which hair shapes black women's ideas about race, gender, class, sexuality, images of beauty, and power. Also, Caldwell (1995) examined issues of Black women's hair styles in the law, when black women brought cases against their organizations for requiring them to not wear braids or more Afrocentric hair dos or reprimanded them for ways of wearing their hair. My research findings are in line with these parameters. The women in my study felt very strongly about the implications of the way in which they chose to wear their hair.

Managing Multiple Subjectivities

It is a peculiar sensation, this 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.- W.E.B. Dubois

Managing multiple subjectivities emerged as a strong research finding. The notion of dual identity and double consciousness were prevalent in the women's narratives. What I found even more striking is that the narratives depicted dual identity when it came to the women's' professional lives and their school work. It was as if the women had figured out what must be done in order to be successful in their perspective careers. Within the literature it is also very pervasive the ways in which African American women have experienced the double consciousness and dual identity. What I found to be very interesting is that a few of the woman such as Mariah did not feel that there was any semblance of duality taking place in her life. In fact, Mariah stated that she was not "splitting".

 A unique twist on the dual identity perspective is that the women spoke of no longer having only double consciousness, but *always* consciousness. They commented

that they were always conscious of their surroundings and the various situations that they were in. This always consciousness often is and was a great burden to carry. Alexis referred to it as being exhausting. For the most part they were often aware that their locations as African Americans and women played a major part in their lives. Ella, for example really struggled through how she could separate herself from the characteristics that she believed could inhibit her growth and success in her career. For her, her location as an African American posed a great threat to her success than her location as a woman. There are several supporting findings within managing subjectivities.

Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender

The intersection of race, class, and gender is highlighted in all of the narratives. Each woman in her own way is attempting to manage the various societal influences of their status as African American women. The women discuss the implications of these intersections in various ways, such as their experiences in the classroom, in social settings, and professor and peer interactions. Almost all of them referred to their "double minority" status as a great challenge on their campus. These findings are truly in line with the literature documenting that African American women, unlike others must manage their membership into two often underrepresented and marginalized groups (hooks, 1981; Stewart, 2008; Winkle-Wagner, 2009) .

What I found in the narratives is that several of the girls dealt with race in different ways. For example, Ella resisted race entirely in her narrative as she managed her location as a woman striving for success within her field of study. Mariah and Chloe attempted to work out their racial heritage and background as Nigerian Americans.

Mariah, the more passionate of the two in terms of resisting being labeled Black, for it stripped her of her location as a Nigerian. Natasha's narrative revealed the most salient reflection of the intersection of race and gender in the context of her campus community. Her narrative revealed the frustrations that she has experienced as a Black woman, especially when the Black male is esteemed for being a student on her campus. She stated several times that she was a Black woman and that her voice should be valued and appreciated.

These findings mesh well with the historical context of the African American women's narrative. Kya, Alexis, and Natasha highlighted the impact of their socio-economic status and its intersection with race and gender. Not only did they find themselves being spokespersons for their race and gender, but also the voice of students from seemingly meager upbringings than their peers. Still Kya's perspective is unique has she managed her misinformed mindset of her financial background. The intersections of race, class, and gender are playing out in the narratives and lived experiences of the women in this study. These women are managing these various locations and intersections of their existence.

Managing Roles

The women in this study are also managing their various roles in life. These roles include their positions as daughters, sisters, friends, students, girlfriends, employees etc. Bloom (1998) discussed the need for women who narrate their lives to look at their subjectivity: "When women are deprived of the potential for complex self-representation as a means through which to gain self-knowledge, their complex subjectivities are

masked and the power and energy they may derive from such self-knowledge is not allowed to be a source of nourishment and strength (p. 68)." The ability or sometimes lack of ability for the women in this study to manage their multiple roles has a great impact on their experiences. As each of the women in their own way strive to be the best at all they do, they admitted that it is hard to keep it all together. Their roles are in constant competition with each other. For instance, they may be focusing a lot of attention on their school work and may be a stellar student, but this may come at the expense of not being a good friend or daughter. African American women at PWIs need support and tools that can help them manage the multiple roles in their lives.

Relationships and Prospective Mates

Another theme that is prevalent in the findings is the fear that most of the women had concerning their ability to maintain dating relationships and find a suitable mate with Black men. Much of the literature discussed the striking statistics concerning Black men that can contribute to the limited choices for Black women. First, a large percentage of Black men are incarcerated, while often lower numbers of Black men are enrolled in college, especially PWIs. What was fascinating about this discussion is the way in which the narratives portrayed the fears held by many individual African American women about not finding suitable relationships, especially with the more success that they obtained. Their stories indicated that they did not feel as though their time on their college campuses would and could breed more opportunities for lasting relationships.

Even more notable is the way in which the dating status of these women played into their own self-esteem and self-confidence. There were undertones presented of

wanting to be accepted and loved by Black men, but many found it difficult especially when Black men often dated women from other races. Kya, was very specific about the fact that it was hard being a Black woman, because as she put it, "Black men don't want you and no other race wants you either." These issues of dating and finding a suitable mate are important to the discussion of managing subjectivities because these women are trying to work it out within themselves to manage the various roles they must play in order to "snatch" a Black man. Chloe, Natasha, and in particular Christina especially asked many questions of herself in her narrative about the reasons for failed attempts at love. She displayed great fear about the future as she talked about maybe having to sacrifice her career to become the type of woman a Black man would want to marry. Alexis contributed to this finding as well as she attempted to manage and come to terms with the various interracial relationships of the Black men in her life, such as her dad and uncle. These are interesting tensions and equally important to the managing subjectivities discussion.

Black vs. African

An interesting theme that emerged was that of Black versus African. Interestingly enough with the perspective of two Nigerian born informants, this theme brought about much discussion. For Chloe and Mariah, their Nigerian heritage plays a great part in their managing subjectivities. Both women have to manage their Nigerian culture and expectations and the "American" ways of living and knowing. Both women make the great distinction between being Black and African. This theme is extremely resounding in Mariah's narrative. It was interesting to note the notion of Black versus

African was also addressed in the other narratives. Kya's narrative was the most interesting as she discussed her Ivy league experience and the lack of Black Americans on campus. Her insight into the stereotypes held by people about Blacks and Africans was equally interesting. Her view was from the perspective of a Black American feeling as if she did not fit in because the majority of the "black community" on her campus were represented by international Blacks such as students from African and Caribbean countries. Natasha expressed similar sentiments about her sense of disconnection with the black community. She also attributes these feelings to the international , diverse population of black students on her northeastern campus. She touches on the differences in regional perspectives as well. Often African American students are all grouped together and considered part of one collective black community. "Intraracial differences or interethnic differences are not considered, as the Black race is seen as homogeneous (Barnett, 2004, p. 65)."

Redefining Selves

Another strong finding in this study is that of the redefinition of self. What is most interesting about the resounding sound of this theme/finding is it is definitely reflective of what has been presented in the literature. The redefinition of self implies that the self has historically been defined elsewhere and thus a "re"-defining must take place. When I examined this finding in conjunction with what has been presented within the literature concerning the identity development of African American women, much of the prevailing literature discussed the ways in which African American women identify themselves; the factors influencing their identity development. Much of the historical

definitions of African American women have been established in comparison to White women and stereotypes of African American women have flooded our society creating a so to speak image of Black women. What I found to be extremely profound is the women in this study found it essential to "redefine" the African American woman on their PWI campus.

Tearing Down Historical Definitions

A great place to begin the discussion of this finding is to return to a powerful statement which I referenced earlier in the study. Hill-Collins (2000) contended:

> Within US culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal, and inevitable. In this context, certain assumed qualities that are attached to Black women are used to justify oppression. From the mammies, jezebels and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to Black women's oppression (p. 5).

The women of this study are not ignorant to the historical "definitions" and portrayals of African American women throughout time. In fact, several of them refer to these images in their narratives. Society's fascination with such caricatures as the ones that Hill-Collins (2000) makes reference to, Aunt Jemima, Mammies, Jezebel, Sapphire, etc., have in a sense defined Black women, often pigeon-holding them to fit into one of these categories. The women in this study are tearing down these barriers in many ways and through several means.

There is a tearing down of historical definitions and portrayals of Black women throughout the narratives. In order to rebuild and redefine, the old must constantly be

replaced with the new until the old is remembered no more. This image, paints a picture of what the women in this study are doing on their campuses and in their worlds. They are creating change, challenging the status quo, and tearing down stereotypes by excelling academically, emerging as respected student leaders on their campus community, maintaining relationships with key stakeholders, and educating others about the Black woman's experience. This finding supports the literature because the historical context is an essential jump off point for knowledge construction in so that the African American female must know her history so that her history can inform her present and impact her future.

One of the essential components of this discussion is that race is the major factor at work here. Indeed, the intersection of race, gender, and other axis of oppression are significantly impacting the Black female experience, but what I found in this study is that race is the key characteristic that is most impacting the redefinition of the self.   For example,   Ella attempted to devoid herself of race altogether: "I am just a woman." What she has done is taken race out of the "race" so to speak in terms of her definition of self as just a woman with no racial or ethnic background. As I dug deeper and analyzed her narrative around this, I believe this is Ella's way of redefining the historical definitions of Black women: "I don't want people to when they look at me, when they see who I am to limit what my capabilities are or where I came from or judge my background before ever knowing anything about me." She is presenting a "counter-caricature", but sadly she is compelled to remove herself from her race in order to

achieve the success she desires. This thinking on her part has definitely been influenced by society.

Re-Definition and Self-Definition

Hill-Collins (2000) stated: Black women who struggle to 'forge an identity larger than the one society would force upon them are aware and conscious, and that very consciousness is potent. Identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition. Black females' refusal to relinquish control over their self-definitions: resist by creating their own self-definitions and self –valuations (p. 114).

Once the historical definitions have been torn down, the process of self-definition can take place. The women in this study are truly at different stages of the redefinition and self-definition process, but what I will say is that they all are engaging in this process in some form or fashion. Several of the woman indicated that they felt it to be their duty, and responsibility to become a living testament of a re-defined Black woman. Replacing the negative portrayals listed above with positive, uplifting images of Black woman. These woman are also prime examples of the model minority discussed by Kaba (2008). The women in this study are contributing to the progression of this new idea, a Black woman as one to be emulated. In Kaba's (2008) discussion, he specifically suggests that education is the key factor to the African American woman's success and the upward trend in her social location. The women in this study are in fact using their educations as a means to move up.   Each woman in her own right is attempting to work out her various selves (race, class, gender) and redefine who she was. Rejecting historical and stereotypical portrayals of Black women and creating a self which is

unique to her own experiences and her own perspectives. Again, race is the key component.

It is evident throughout the narratives that these women have utilized their involvement on their college campus and have dedicated themselves to blazing a path for their future that sets them apart from others. The strength in redefining themselves is portrayed throughout the research study. Ella, Christina, Chloe, and Alexis in particular are very adamant about the need to redefine themselves and to define their own paths of success. Chloe's account of redefinition is powerful. During her time at college she begins to understand her surroundings and the implicit messages of her school. Several things change during this time. She makes an interesting comparison, she compares her transition from high school to college to being on a football field; quite a poignant metaphor and the theme of redefinition is illuminated in the following statement.

> Coming to college I had to redefine a lot of who I was because so many things changed. Especially getting older and being myself, I realized I am not the same person I was in high school and I felt like, I was more stable in high school than I am at this point in my college career because in high school you know everything, you're the king of your domain. You have your friends, you have your church friends, you have your family. In college, I feel like I have been put on a football field like the same football field I've been on all my life but all of a sudden the lights are turned out, I have no clue where I am. And it's just very different. You really have to feel yourself out all over again.

Kya makes note of her ability to define herself on her campus. She admitted that her friends on campus know a totally different Kya than her friends and family at home. This identity creation is important to the narratives of African American women, because it demonstrates their proactive and active force in taking back the hegemonic and stereotypical modes of oppression and discouragement that have historically defined

African American women's life experiences. They are filling spaces with positive, intelligent, and influential representations of Black women.

Conclusions

The findings of this study are in line with the conceptual framework that was presented within the literature review. What this study adds to this conceptual framework is the experiences of African American Undergraduate Females in another dimension. One can view the three findings as three circles, one inside the other. *Negotiating Worlds* is the outside circle and represents the various tools of success that Black females can utilize to negotiate their worlds and systems. The subthemes cultural capital, shifting, support networks, majors, and hair conformability are points along the outside of this circle. Next, *Managing Subjectivities* is a circle within the various worlds. This represents that the Black female most manage her multiple roles and locations (role playing) within the context of her various worlds in which she is negotiating. Surrounding the managing of subjectivities is the intersection of race, class, and gender, managing roles, relationships and prospective mates, and black vs. African. Within the middle of these two circles is the African American woman *Redefining Herself* (Redefining Selves). She may pull off of any of the tools within negotiating worlds or the ability to manage her various subjectivities as a means by which to redefine who she is in the context of her campus environment and the larger context of society. As she undergoes the process of redefining herself, she will in turn impact her community and the world around her. The research findings are represented in the figure below. The figure is encapsulated in a circle because it is a continuous process to

negotiate worlds, manage subjectivities, and redefine herself, depending on the world

and the various subjectivities in which she plays.
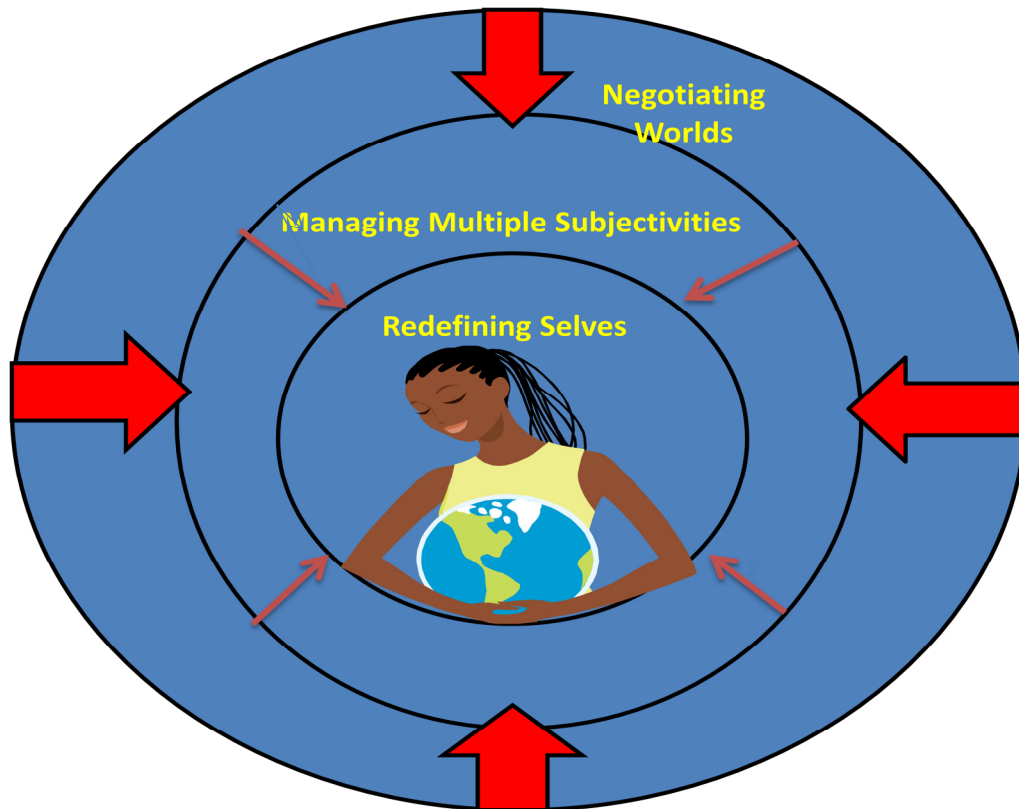
Figure 1. A Framework of African American Females at PWIs.

Recommendations

This study provides great insight into the first person accounts of the lived experiences of African American females at Predominately White Institutions. I recommend that first and foremost high schools, university administrations, student affairs offices, and other stakeholders take "stake" in the important perspective of African American females. These women need to be acknowledged and celebrated as meaningful, important, contributing members of their college communities, and their voices should be heard. Beyond the "hearing of their voices", there are several recommendations that have emerged as a result of this research study.

Programmatic Initiatives

I recommend that high schools invest in programmatic initiatives that will prepare the African American woman to thrive at a PWI campus. These programs should include rigorous academic as well as social preparation. These initiatives should also commit to bridging the gap and building partnerships with college admissions and student affairs offices to support the Black female experience. The women in my study attested to the fact that they were academically prepared to be successful at their respective universities. All of them had been blessed to have attended academically rigorous high school programs. The literature has shown that academic preparation is essential for African American women to be successful (Moses, 1989), but there is a need for programs that will support their social and emotional transition to their PWI environment.

Once African American women matriculate to their institution, it is imperative that programs are in place that have a mission to support the African American woman throughout her tenure on the campus. The women in this study spoke strongly about the need for mentorship and academic, social, and emotional support. The women in this study demonstrated that their success was in part attributed to the positive relationships they were able to build and maintain with their professors when possible, staff members, peers, and the campus community. I also recommended that campuses continue to celebrate the cultural spaces on campus such as Black Cultural Centers and Women's Centers that often become safe spaces for Black women.

Celebration of the Black Female Perspective

What I find to be the most powerful is that African American women truly have the self-power to change the course of history by simply sharing their stories. The power of narrative research is displayed here because it truly offers a platform for African American women to influence those that come after. Just as the powerful words and testament from the stories I will share in the Epilogue, I was inspired to keep going. It is the voices from the past that compel African American women to persevere. Another recommendation is to listen to the voices and stories of African American women. Theirs is such rich experience and perspective when one takes the opportunity to listen to their perspectives and can encourage them to pursue any obstacle. Also, when institutional policy and practices come up that may affect the experiences of Black women, solicit their feedback and their unique perspective. Universities need to include them in the decision making process.

Implications for Future Research

The emerging themes and findings in this research study reflect and greatly support the work that exists in scholarly literature and conversations concerning the experiences of African American undergraduate females at PWIs. What this research study has provided to enhance the literature is a narrative analytic perspective of the experiences of these women; and the narrative approach is a valuable tool to understanding their experience. Chase (1995) states: "We serve our theoretical interest in general social processes when we take seriously the idea that people make sense of life experiences by narrating them (p. 22)." The experiences of these women are unique and there is a need to explore more first person accounts of experience.

The literature could benefit from more research on the implementation of successful programs that support the African American female student on campus. Research on institutional initiatives to recruit, retain, and graduate African American women is needed. The voices of the women and their stories in this study are not solely for the use of other African American women. But their voices are equally important for all constituents on the campus to hear. These research studies would have a great impact on the literature, but more importantly if acted upon, could greatly impact the direct experiences of African American women. The advice offered from the informants for both their institutions and other African American females at PWIs (presented in Appendices) is ripe for more exploration and attention in the literature and in institutional practices themselves.

There is still the need for more studies focused on successful African American women at PWIs. This study produced the stories of seven successful females who truly had great ambition and success in their respective fields of study. Their stories of success have great implications for further research and practice at secondary and higher education level, especially in light of their resilient characteristics and self-efficacy. Carter-Black (2008) provided an autobiographical narrative about her personal journey over the span of forty years. Her story takes the reader on a journey from her entrance to college at the age of eighteen to her tenure-track professorship at the same university. Such longitudinal research and narration of life experience is a great asset to the research literature and this type of work has great implications for future research.

Beyond the scope of studying African American women, the literature would greatly benefit from research on Black women from a global perspective. The unique perspective of two Nigerian American participants in this study truly awakens the conversation about international perspectives of Blackness, along with the intersection of gender and class. A study, similar to this study could be conducted in an international collegiate arena. For example, the literature would benefit from the experiences of African women in higher education institutions as well as Black women of Hispanic and Caribbean decent. A comparative analysis of Black American women and Black women from international communities would push the literature forward.

In conjunction with the statistics that were presented in Chapter I to imply the signifance of studying black women, these same statistics provide a great jump off for more qualitative studies on Black men. With Black women making up the majority of

bachelor degree recipients out of African Americans, a great attention should be put on the issues with African American males to successfully complete their higher education programs. Also, it is equally important to further research the impact the lack of African American males on campus have on the African American woman. In terms of the issues brought about in this study about the fear of finding a suitable mate, and the lack of attention from Black men, for their attention to women of other races, black women have had to encounter many issues affecting their self-esteem.

Summary

It is with great humility that I engaged in this research study. At the onset of my research, I believed that I could truly impact and inspire the women in this study because of my location as a previous African American female on a Predominately White campus. What turned out to be transformative for me, was the great impact that these women had on my life. When I talked to them, I saw a "me" that did not exist when I was an undergraduate. The level of self-awareness and self-confidence that these women portrayed and exuded in this work was incredible. What stroke me the most from all of their experiences was the ways in which they had conceptualized that their stories were only a tip of the iceberg so to speak of the experiences of African American females at Predominately White campuses. These women truly had an understanding of our society that I had never experienced.

What is even more profound about this work is the powerful platform it provides for narrative research. Narrative research is a transformative force because one can not hide behind a calculation or a number. Words truly do speak in a way that resonates with

the human soul. Numbers cannot do this because they devoid the individual of his or her voice. I can definitely say, that I have been transformed and deeply moved by these women. The experiences of African American females at PWIs are a force to be reckoned with. These women are blazing trails on their college campuses and truly effecting change at the highest level. They are a true representation of the new model minority that (Kaba, 2008) described in his work. Johnson-Bailey(1998) quoted Sonia Sanchez : "Through our shared dialogues and reflections, we have moved beyond racial, gender, and class consciousness that centers on Whiteness, maleness, and economics to a collective consciousness that is centered on who we are as African American women and what that means in our lives (p.155)." This quote is the essence of the work that has been done in this research study. It has become a space for African American college women to tell their reflective stories in a shared space and provides a great push towards success.

CHAPTER XIII

EPILOGUE: AYANA

My Oreo Cookie Existence

Welcome to my world. In this gallery the reader will enter the life of the researcher. I will unveil myself to the reader. When I first had the unction to study African American undergraduate females, I brought this interest to my committee chairpersons. Their response to me was that in order to engage in meaningful dialogues with these informants, I first needed to know myself. I began writing my story and then analyzing my life in a narrative analysis class. I do not think I ever could have known the transformation I would undergo, not just as a researcher but as a Black woman. I am a 30 year old African American female from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Here is my story, my voice.

Narrative Framework

My narrative is representative of an introspective narrative which Ronai (1992) explores in her paper: *The Reflexive Self Through Narrative*. I was strongly impacted by her work, thus desiring to engage in this introspective process and narrative structure. Ronai (1992) contends: "Introspection is conscious awareness of itself, a social process of self-examination involving conversations with oneself. I use multiple layers of reflection-a layered account-shifting forward, backward, and sideways through time, space, and various attitudes in a narrative format (p. 103)." Ronai's (1992) research catalyzed my interest in the layered account of experience. As I sat down with my computer and engaged in a conversation with myself through the writing of my

narrative, I too (like Ronai) began to uncover the multiple layers of my existence; and in fact shifted forward, backward, and sideways through time.

My story employs various concepts of narrative. There is a definite beginning, middle, and end structure reflective of a traditional plot. Although my life and story is a dynamic work in progress, the written narrative does end where I stop typing about my present experiences. The narrative is constructed like that of a story as I walk myself through the first day of kindergarten up until my experiences as a PhD student at Texas A&M University. The narrative is sequentially structured around the theme of my "Oreo existence" which I will explain later. The narrative maintains coherence through the prevailing themes: otherness and acceptance, navigating multiple subjectivities, and perfectionism which will be presented in the analysis section. These themes are woven into the narrative from its onset to its end; and are essential to the ways in which the self is narrated through the story. Clark (2001) discussed the illusion of coherence: "It's as if we need to believe that things in our lives hang together, add up, make sense, for the most part, all the while experiencing contradictions that would otherwise give the lie to the outer sense of coherence. The thematic coherence is obviously a complex and fluid construction that provides a degree of solidity to our lives. But what happens beneath it is also complex and fluid and highly creative, in the management of contradictions (p. 24)." This statement is representative of the challenges I encountered during the analysis of my narrative.

Analysis

In order to take part in the analytic process, I had to exchange my subjectivity for a more distant objectivity. I went into the analytic process consciously aware that my feelings, emotions, and bias must be set aside in order to purely extract implicit meaning within my story. This was a difficult process to undergo; and thus I turned to Gee (1999) for organizational guidance. I carefully read through my story with all of its grammatical imperfections, spelling errors, and multiple run ons; trying desperately to fight the urge to spell check or edit along the way. Luckily, I "resisted temptation", for I desired to analyze the narrative in its "pure" form. As I read through the narrative, I began to divide and link together various sections into stanzas; titling each one. Though Gee's (1999) approach was not the central analytic tool used in my narrative analysis, it was instrumental in my discovery of key themes. The central themes found in the narrative are: otherness and acceptance, navigation of multiple subjectivities (Oreo phenomena) and perfectionism.

Otherness and Acceptance

Otherness and acceptance is a major theme within the narrative. Feelings of otherness are portrayed in the narrative from the onset of my family's move to a new community where I, the isolated Black girl attempt to cope with my difference, up until the end of the narrative in which I write about my present experiences at Texas A& M University. Under the theme of otherness and acceptance are the experiences of "Otherness by Whites due to Blackness" and "Otherness of Blacks due to Whiteness."

These feelings of otherness catalyzed a strong desire and urge for acceptance in both

worlds. Quotes within the narrative itself reflect the theme of otherness and acceptance.

Othered by Whites due to Blackness

> It all began at the age of 5, when my memory connects to the past. It is
> probably October or November in 1984. My parents had just moved to a
> suburb of Philadelphia and I was being enrolled in Kindergarten. For
> some reason I remember that school had already started and kids were
> playing around on the playground and they seemed to already had made
> friends. I also noticed that no one looked like me. No one else had brown
> skin; no one else looked like me. Feeling othered, even at that age…and
> desiring so much to be accepted by my peers. I even remember feeling
> like my teacher did not really like me, or that she treated me different
> than the other children. There was no denying that I was in fact different.
> I was brown... I was not like everyone else.

 Even though this is my first recollection of entering a White world and experiencing

otherness this moment seems so significant to me as I explore my "Oreo cookie"

existence.

> 6th grade was also the first time that I was ever called a nigger to my face.
> It was during gym class. I was very athletic and very competitive…so I
> loved to win. Well, my team had won either a basketball or a dodge ball
> game, which I can't remember now… but I was of course bragging and
> cheering and yelling…when a girl who I had known since 1st grade said:
> "Shut up nigger."

Othered by Blacks due to Whiteness

> As I tried to jump rope and play with the other kids on the block, they
> always seemed to notice and let me know that I was different. I couldn't
> understand… I looked just like them... I felt a sense of connection
> because I looked like them… and I still knew that I was a pretty little girl.
> When I jumped double dutch with the other girls they would always tell
> me to stop talking white. They would say: "Yanie is corny. She talks
> White. She goes to that White school. She acts like a White girl. She
> thinks she's better than us cause she goes to that White school. She thinks
> she's cute cause she has long hair.

Even though I was somewhat rejected by the city girls in Philly… I prided myself on being able to act White: to have the cultural capital that Whites had; even though back then I did not know that a word cultural capital existed. I felt "better "than the city girls, because well I was "accepted by Whites... or so I thought back then.

Even thought I loved dancing so much… I still was othered by the other dancers. They too recognized my "Whiteness" and constantly rejected me because I had access to a better education. I was well liked by my directors, and I could escape the impoverished neighborhood where our studio was located. Many of them could not… they often teased me for having a White girls' butt. To this day, my flat butt is the area of my body in which I am the most self-conscious. I was teased and isolated by Black women…" "No Black man is going to want a girl with a flat White girl butt"…but in ballet class, my butt was the one to emulate: was it because my body represented that of a White girl?

Navigating Multiple Subjectivities

Another key theme of the narrative is my struggle to navigate my multiple subjectivities, the Oreo existence in full bloom. Throughout various experiences from elementary school to my present experiences, multiple subjectivities are highlighted within the text. I often refer to my ability to act as a chameleon in my varied social and cultural situations. Learning to navigate through White and Black experiences was a key coping strategy that I employed from a young age. Acquiring the ability to "code" switch and attempting to immerse myself in cultural frameworks of both Black and White communities was an essential tool in navigating my multiple subjectivities. Several examples of this theme are evident in the narrative:

I guess where I am going with this is that I have had to be bicultural. I learned to "exist" in both worlds. Well to the best of my ability. As I reflect now it is so interesting the way in which children are able to adapt and learn how to survive. I wonder what tactics I was able to utilize. Anyway, after getting my butt kicked by the girls on the block, I made sure to try my most Ebonics, ghettofied voice when I was around the girls in Philly. Jumping rope with as much soul and rhythm as possible. I was a great dancer so I had the rhythm down but not the "hoodish" Philly

accent. I tried not to annunciate my words. Then back in school I would switch into "White girl" mode: Valley girl talking, high hair sprayed bangs, and all that jazz.

Back to bicultural existence: I have learned to function in and out of White and Black America: never fully gaining access to either one because of my membership within the other group…" associate membership" is not quite like full membership. I could not monopolize on the benefits of my partial membership to either group…talk about otherness in full affect! Talk about multiple subjectivities…

Perfectionism

The theme of perfectionism is pervasive throughout the narrative. The narrative is full of statements about the desire for perfectionism. Perfectionism was the strategy I utilized to cope with what I believed to be deficiencies: my Blackness in White setting, and my "Whiteness" in Black settings. It is evident that much focus was placed on outward acts of scholarship and success in order to gain acceptance and attention:

> I would gain acceptance through perfection. I was going to be the smartest, the fastest, the nicest, the prettiest, the most popular… I was going to always be the best at whatever I did... and that is what I did… high school did not see the end of this! The perfectionism was really starting to wear on me. And feelings of inadequacy began to emerge. My parents realized that I was overly involved and so exhausted all of the time trying to maintain high expectations for my achievement.

> As I write this I feel that I am coming off as someone who is very vain: but I know that isn't it at all: sounds to me like someone who is very insecure and thrives off of attention and acceptance... Funny how I am analyzing as I am typing… what patterns of perfectionism and "striving to be the best" prevail within my narrative. There seems to be no end in sight…because I can think of so many other experiences in my life in which I have strived to be the best: The best teacher, daughter, friend, student, citizen etc…priding myself of my awards: Teacher of the Year, HISD East Region Outstanding Young Educator, Black teacher of the YEAR: on, on, and on… like these pieces of paper and plaques define me… plastered up in my office at home!!!!! UH!

> I sure loved feeling unique and special: but this all changed when I got to UNC: because all of the Black students were just like me: Middle/Upper Class African Americans: many of them came from much higher income brackets than I came from: new challenges awaited this Black female from the suburbs of Philadelphia... I was no longer the "token Black" Everyone was a "token Black". We all came from White schools and had White experiences… Oh no how do I function here?... I became more Black acting.. Since I was from Philly: I tried to play the role of the urban city girl from Philly. My Philly accent was prominent amongst the Southern draws of my peers and again I worked on a strategy to set myself a part from everyone else… and I pursued a new route of perfectionism!

Silence Within My Narrative

A "loud silence" within my narrative is that of the impact of hegemony and

societal influences. Bloom (1998) contends: "The task for the narrative researcher is to

be dually conscious of the individual and the societal and cultural contexts in which the

individual experiences and interprets his/her life. Theorizing the 'self' as nonunitary,

especially when combined with social critique, is particularly powerful for how it

illuminates the ways the social norms, dominant ideologies, and power relations call

upon the individual to respond in very situated ways to daily life (p. 312)." Not once in

my narrative do I indicate that the structure of society has an incredible impact on my

perceptions and experiences. I do not disclose the ways in which the media or other

pervasive measures may have possibly impacted my position as an African American

female in America. I do not speak of the ways in which our society has coined such

terms as "Oreo" and other words of ignorance to constantly divide and separate

individuals.

Managing Contradictions

Within the narrative, there is evidence of the management of contradictions. Clark (2001) discussed managing contradictions in her study of incarcerated women finding two central strategies: " The first is to construct a split self, a conscious division of subjectivity that enables them to organize contradictory elements and claim them as authentic selves. The second strategy they use is that of positioning themselves within discourses that they see as advantageous to them. We always select from the multiple discourses available to us as we construct our sense of self. The women manage contradiction by positioning themselves within discourses they see as more powerful, in an effort to balance out conflicting claims (p. 25)." Throughout much of my narrative I strive for acceptance and to be just like the people in any given social context. However, there are various quotes in the text that depict a desire for uniqueness:

> This made me unique and special… and we all want to feel unique: I sure loved feeling unique and special: but this all changed when I got to UNC: because all of the Black students were just like me: Middle/Upper class African Americans: many of them came from much higher income brackets than I came from: a new challenges awaited this Black female from the suburbs of Philadelphia… I was no longer the "token Black". Everyone was a "token Black". We all came from White schools and had White experiences… Oh no! How do I function here? I need my tokenism to distinguish myself from the rest…

Another contradiction emerged during middle school years when I stated that White's like me because I am Black. The rest of the narrative supports the fact that I am othered by White's due to my Blackness:

> Others began to really like me and I became popular in school.. I guess the cool thing was to be Black like LL Cool J on the videos etc. So I remember gaining access to the White world, but being "Black" or in their eyes being Black. I could dance, sing, play the flute,   and I could

run like lightening…fast and with such long strides. Another contradiction is found in the narrative in where I speak of being better than the other Black students at my high school. I speak so candidly of my otherness, yet never admit to my own portrayal of otherness toward them. I also attribute a false sense of acceptance of Whites. It appears that gaining access to White experience was in fact more valuable than my connection with the other Black students who too experienced the otherness I battled with.

I was the nice, smart, athletic Black girl. There were only 4 Blacks in my high school graduation class of 300…and I was the only one who was not in special education or the Vo-technical Tracked program.. So to myself and within my own thoughts I was "better". How horrible! Because I had gained access to the White world and White "culture". I actually felt better… At that time in my life I sure did.

CHAPTER XIV

SUMMARY

The narrative analysis process was at times painful and at other times joyful as I reflected on my lived experiences. The writing of my narrative and consequential analysis has taught me so many things about myself. It was in fact difficult to observe myself from a distance using holistic-content analysis and retrieving a global impression of myself because I began to wonder if the person I discovered through my analysis was the real me or was the person I have known all of my life the real me; attesting to Bloom's(1998) non-unitary subjectivity that states that we are several people at the same time. For example, I am a teacher, a daughter, a student, and a friend simultaneously.

One of the most interesting findings of this autoethnographic process is that my narrative appears to be written with the intent of impressing the reader. As I explored the theme of perfectionism, I noticed multiple lists of accomplishments and accolades. The tone of these quotes about perfectionism indicate that I am looking for some praise from my reader, although I am the only one "reading" my narrative. There is such a hint of acceptance desired, as if I desire acceptance from my reader, whoever that may be. Ochberg (1994) contends: "The identity of the protagonist/performer depends on the audience's response. It is in this sense that a life lived in the form of a story is part of an individual's public record (p. 117)." My narrative is very reminiscent of a story lived out through my actions. He continues: "Individuals do not merely regale themselves with their personal narratives, they put their lives on public display. A portion of their

self regard depends on how their audience responds (p. 137)." I am definitely living my

life in storied form: In my narrative I constantly refer to myself as a performer:

> I became more Black acting. Since I was from Philly: I tried to play the role of the urban city girl from Philly. My Philly accent was very prominent amongst the Southern draws of my peers and again I worked on a strategy to set myself apart from everyone else.
>
> I made sure to try my most ebonic, ghettofied voice when I was around the girls in Philly. Jumping rope with as much soul and rhythm as possible. I was a great dancer so I had the rhythm down but not the "hoodish" Philly accent. I tried not to annunciate my words. Then back in school I would switch into White girl mode: valley girl talking, high hair sprayed bangs, and all that jazz.

The most salient finding is that I have focused so much of my attention in life on

pleasing others and gaining acceptance from others that I have not fully learned to accept

myself. My narrative reflects a woman who is continuously searching for her identity

and working through the process of self-discovery.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMANT PROFILE

Name (Alias)	Age	Classification	Type of School	School Location in United States	Major
Christina	21	Senior	Small, private	South	Cell & Molecular Biology
Ella	20	Junior	Medium, private	Northeast	Finance/ Economics and Real Estate Minors
Mariah	19	Sophomore	Large, public	South Central	Sociology/Minor in Business
Chloe	19	Sophomore	Large, public	South Central	Finance/pre-law
Kya	17	Freshman	Medium, private, Ivy	New England	Sociology
Natasha	18	Freshman	Medium, private	Northeast	Health Sciences/ pre-Physical Therapy
Alexis	18	Freshman	Medium, private	Northwest	Nursing

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Which words would you use to identify yourself? For instance, I would identify myself as a 29 year old African American female from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

2) Tell me about your childhood growing up. Paint me a picture of your life as a young girl. Who were you?

3) Tell me about your family; parents, siblings, relatives. What were your relationships like with them?

4) How would you classify your socio-economic status growing up? What was your community like? What were your schools like?

5) Tell me about your adolescence. What are some experiences or situations that stand out for you and that you believe have directly impacted who you are today?

6) What was your high school experience like? Again, paint me a portrait of who you were during this time. What do you remember most about high school?

7) What colleges did you apply to and why did you choose to attend your university? How would you describe your transition from high school to college? Were you close/far from home?

8) Take me back to the first time you stepped on your college campus as a freshman. Can you remember what you were thinking, feeling, observing? Paint me a picture of the sights and sounds that surrounded you?

9) If I had a bird's eye view of the campus what would I see happening on your campus? What is the relationship/vibe between students, faculty, staff and the community?

10) From the same bird's eye view perspective what would I see you doing? What words would you use to describe yourself as a member of your campus community? For example, when I was in college I would have described myself as a studious yet social, politically active African American female member of the UNC Dance Team.

11) Can you talk about your support network and the community in which you are most connected?

12) What activities are you involved in on campus?

13) As candidly as possible, please tell me about your lived experiences on your campus. I won't be asking questions; I really want you to share with me anything you would like. As an African American woman, what has your experience been like on your campus? (This question will guide the majority of the conversation/narrative).

14) What advice would you give to African American girls who are considering attending or currently attending a Predominately White institution?

15) What advice would you give to the president of your university? What questions do you have for him/her?

16) What are your future plans and how do you believe your experiences in college will impact decisions you make in your future?

17) I want you to envision yourself at your graduation just like when you first stepped on campus your freshman year. What are you thinking, feeling, experiencing? What moments stand out the most? How would you sum up your four years on that day? Who are you on that day?

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

      I __(printed name)__ give my consent to participate in the research study entitled: *Negotiating Environments, Managing Subjectivities, and Redefining Selves. The Lived Experiences of African American Undergraduate Females at Predominiately White Institutions.*

      By signing this consent form you acknowledge that you have read all of the information provided and that you are aware of your rights as a research participant. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any further questions or concerns you have asked the researcher and have received answers to your satisfaction.

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent_____**Date:**_____

Printed Name: <u>Ayana M. Allen</u>

Location of Consent_____

APPENDIX D

INFORMANT INFORMATION FORM

Introduction
The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about my research study, as well your consent and agreement to participate in the study.
You have been asked to participate in a research study exploring the first person experiences of African American undergraduate females who attend Predominately White colleges and universities. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of the participants and all of the factors that impact their experiences such as relationships and interactions with peers, professors, and the community. You were selected to be a possible participant because your perspectives and experiences may greatly impact this study.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an audio recorded one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will last between an hour and a hour and a half. The interview format will be that of a conversation between yourself and the researcher where questions will be used to guide the conversation vs. a formal/ rote question and answer format. Questions surrounding your experiences as an African American woman on a White campus and other life experiences you have had may also be inquired.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
The possible benefits of participation are insights gained through in-depth reflection and conversations about your experiences on your campus which in turn may greatly impact the experiences of future prospective students at PWI campuses. Additionally, your participation may give voice to other African American women at PWI campuses and may help impact institutional practices at your university.

What are the risks involved in this study?
The risks associated with this study are minimal. You have the right to decline any question or topic that would make you uncomfortable or cause emotional distress.

Do I have to participate?
No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time.
Who will know about my participation in this research study?
This study is confidential and all records (signed forms, audio recordings, transcripts from interviews, & consent forms) of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely and only myself and my Committee Chairs Dr. Chance Lewis and Dr. Norvella Carter will have access to the records. Your real name will not be used in the study to protect your identity, and the results of the interview will be coded and

presented in a manner that will remove information that might be linked to your identity. Some unique quotes will be used directly in the dissertation, but without compromising your confidentiality.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded during the interview, and these records will be transcribed into text without identifiers (pseudonyms will be used in transcripts). Any audio recordings will be erased after interviews have been transcribed, and written transcriptions will be stored in faculty advisor's office in a locked file cabinet for a maximum of two years in the case that the researcher conducts a follow up study with participants after their graduation from a Predominately White institution.

<u>Whom do I contact with questions about the research study?</u>

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact me:
Ayana M. Allen
Texas A&M University
ayanamael@yahoo.com
(832)721-5777
or
Dr. Chance Lewis
Texas A& M University
chance.lewis@tamu.edu
(979) 458-0835

<u>Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?</u>

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

APPENDIX E

PHONE SCRIPT

Hello _____, I received your name from _____
        (name of participant)   (source)

and I wanted to follow up with you about the email you received about my dissertation research. I would be honored if you would accept my invitation to participate in the study. I wanted to touch base with you by phone to tell you a little bit more about the study, as well as answer any questions you may have. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African American females; specifically I am interested in researching various factors that impact their experiences on Predominately White college campuses such as relationships and interactions with peers, professors, and the community.

You were selected to be a possible participant because your perspectives and experiences may greatly impact this research study. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in an audio recorded one-on-one interview with me. Your contribution to this research may greatly impact the experiences of future prospective students at PWI campuses.

I want to remind you that your participation is completely voluntary, will be completely confidential and kept private. I will maintain all recordings and transcripts securely in my faculty advisor's office in a locked file cabinet. Your real name will not be used in any manner and all information that might be linked to your identity will be excluded. Please call or email me at any time if you have further questions or concerns. You can also reach the Institutional Review Board at Texas A& M University at (979)458-4067 if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant.

Thank you for your time,
Ayana Allen

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT LETTER (IDENTIFIED THROUGH CAMPUS

ORGANIZATION)

Dear _____,

I am a PhD student in Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A& M University. I was discussing my research study with _____, a member of ____ (campus organization)__ and he/she informed me that you would be a great person to interview and talk to about my research. My dissertation research centers on the experiences of African American females at Predominately White colleges and universities. _____ told me that you are currently attending a PWI and that you have been an active member of __(campus organization)____ on your campus. I am writing you this email to see if you would be at all interested in participating in my research study. I will provide you with detailed information about the study and the requirements of participation for your review. I will be interviewing approximately 6-8 women about their life experiences; and specifically about their experiences and interactions on their campuses. This research study has been approved by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. If you are interested in learning more about the research study and/or are considering participation, please feel free to email me at ayanamael@yahoo.com or call me at (832)721-5777. If you are unable to participate at this time I completely understand and I thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Sincerely,
Ayana Allen
PhD Candidate
Texas A&M University
ayanamael@yahoo.com
(832)721-5777

APPENDIX G

RECRUITMENT LETTER (IDENTIFIED WORD OF MOUTH/SNOWBALL)

Dear _____,

I am a PhD student in Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A& M University. I was discussing my research study with _____, and he/she informed me that you would be a great person to interview and talk to about my research. My dissertation research centers on the experiences of African American females at Predominately White colleges and universities. _____ told me that you are currently attending a PWI and that you have been quite candid about your experiences as a Black female on your campus. I am writing you this email to see if you would be at all interested in participating in my research study. I will provide you with detailed information about the study and the requirements of participation for your review. I will be interviewing approximately 6-8 women about their life experiences; and specifically about their experiences and interactions on their campuses. This research study has been approved by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. If you are interested in learning more about the research study and/or are considering participation, please feel free to email me at ayanamael@yahoo.com or call me at (832)721-5777. If you are unable to participate at this time I completely understand and I thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Sincerely,
Ayana Allen
PhD Candidate
Texas A&M University
ayanamael@yahoo.com
(832)721-5777

APPENDIX H

ADDITIONAL QUOTES NOT INCLUDED IN THE TEXT

Advice for African American Females

I would definitely stress the importance of being sure of yourself and being confident in yourself. At Predominately White Universities, you are going to face issues and people and experiences that uestion who you are and your worth and what you can contribute and its important to know who you are and whose you are so that you can be successful. If you are confident and sure of who you are when you do face these things you aren't shaken. It is tough around here its not bubble gum, I mean at PWI the don't really cater to your emotional sort of stability and um your well being on campus. Like HBCUs people feel that sort of family feeling when they go to that sort of institution. When I speak to friends about that they feel as if they are comfortable. The faculty are very interested in cultivating a very well rounded student, but around here, you are alittle bit on your own. Get in where you fit in, get your's I'm gonna get mine. Sort of experience so its important to stay true to yourself, stay prioritized. Focus on the things that will help pursue your goals and only focus on those so then you can't get distracted you know so I would say confidence, being sure of yourself and really prioritizing what you want to experience in college life. **-Christina**

Be comfortable with who you are. That's the kind of biggest thing. Like, if you feel as though, when if, when… ok, scenario: you have a friend who may be skinnier than you, or maybe they have bigger breasts than you and feel as though you may have that need to kind of flaunt something or be like that friend… get away from them. BE YOURSELF! Because you'll be put in an environment that's going to tear who you are down, theyre going to try. Just based on looking at you. You have to kind of like, stand firm to who you are, and if you're not sure as a person who you are, figure it out! Use that summer to figure it out, and do it quickly. You know like, and find people who truly support you, even like your friends that you talk to at home if you find that those people aren't, you know, Oh! You're going to school at such and such school, oh you'll never get good grades there or keep putting you down, like you'll never get in there. I had people tell me, ill never get into (UNIVERSITY), and it was my back up school, I'm like get in? Get in, like what do you mean? Oh, its really hard to get into that school, and I know, people do that. People don't even, say comments and don't even realize it. Remove them out your life. Be positive, put positive people in your life. Put people who you aspire to be like in your life. If you meet someone that you feel as though, you know, wow, theyre doing great things or wow, shes a sophomore and shes doing this, shes a cheerleader shes that… talk to her, be her friend because that's whats going to help you get through those times when you feel like you have no one else, someone whos already kind of been there, done that or is going through something similar. Those are going to be your support network. Find those people, find those people in your life, if

you don't have them, GET THEM! Like, that's, I feel like, youre missing that. When youre in a slower economic class, everyone's kind of doing the same thing, everyone kind of aspiring for much but, you have to get away from that. You have to get near people who are aspiring more than you are so that you can be like them, otherwise, you'll stay at level one, you'll never move, youll never move. So that's kind of my advice. **-Ella**

Advice/Questions for University President and Campus Constituents

I would definitely stress with him the importance of having more black faculty and staff just because um they have experienced and already went through what we are going through right now. I feel as if I had a black professor that was in the sciences and got his medical degree or things like that or her you know he can tell me his experiences so that you know at this day and age cause you know these things shouldn't really exist at this time. Um those that are 50 years old that are middle aged and things like that and went to school in the 60s and 70 s like my parents you know they should have prepared us so that we could succedd without any issues and problems and yet these problems are still occurring to this day. So I would tell him something must not be coming to plan if these issues are still arising and the faculty are still fighting and the students are still fighting. And I would want him to make that a prioritiy
Especially with black faculty just to have some sort of inspiration and role model to look up to in college especially to those that might be first generation African American students that aren't haven't seen a college graduate in their family. Having that sort of role model is helpful. Black students I feel can bring so much to the university and enrich so many people's lives. Cause a lot of student shere this is their first interaction with people of different races at some time. Some students have even said that
-Christina

If you weren't who you were and you didn't look like who you look like, where would your place be at (UNIVERSITY) and how would you find it?" And that's kind of what I want him to think about for every student… where is there place going to be and how do they find it. was it through their orientation process? Was it in their freshman dorm? Was it in their first class experience? Like where do they find their place at (UNIVERSITY). Because you can get lost. But he, he is white and he is, you know a male, but um, if he wasn't what would he do? How can he better that opportunity for somebody else? **–Ella**

VITA

Name: Ayana Ma-El Allen

Address: YES Prep Public Schools
                   Southwest Campus
                   4411 Anderson Road
                   Houston, TX 77053

Email Address: ayana.allen@yesprep.org

Education: B.A., Management & Society with Honors/Spanish, The
                   University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001
                   M.Ed., Generic Education, The University of St. Thomas,
                   2003
                   Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, Texas A&M
                   University, 2010