AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE STUDENTS' VOICES: THEIR SOCIAL EXPERIENCES AND ADJUSTMENT STRATEGIES AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE UNIVERISTY

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KORTET G. MENSAH

Dr. Mark A. Fine, Dissertation Supervisor

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APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled:

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presented by Kortet G. Mensah, a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Dr. Mark A. Fine

Dr. Michael C. Lambert

Dr. Jonathan A. Hess

Dr. Teresa M. Cooney

Dr. Jean M. Ispa

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Kortet G. Mensah

Dr. Mark A. Fine, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored 14 African American female students' social experiences and adjustment strategies at a predominantly White university. Each woman was interviewed twice, and the data were organized into a descriptive structure that captured the key phenomena of the women's experiences. The pervasive phenomenon that emerged was the women's resiliency in dealing with racialized and gender-based experiences with their faculty/staff and peers. The women encountered negative race-based instances with some of their White faculty/staff and negative race, gender, and status segregation from some of their White and African American peers. However, they believed that their receiving supportive assistance from and relations with (mostly) African American faculty/staff and peers diminished the negativity of the divisionary encounters.

Moreover, the women's social experiences engendered mixed psychological (e.g., self-esteem, emotional comfort on campus) and social (e.g., racial views) developmental outcomes. The women overwhelmingly felt a high sense of self-worth, comfort with their (mostly African American) counterparts on campus, and ability to cope with race relations. However, they experienced some instances of discomfort and feelings of being unwanted on campus, which influenced the adjustment strategies they employed. Hence, the women sought and relied on the support they received from important others who were mostly African Americans (i.e., family, peers, faculty/staff), themselves, and their relationship with God to adjust to their social

experiences on campus. Implications for student development research and interventions with African American college students are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

African American college graduate women outnumber their male counterparts by a ratio of 2:1. Moreover, significantly more African American women than men attend predominately White institutions (Cross & Slater, 2001; Staples, 1999). According to some researchers, African American women's academic triumphs at majority White universities are often achieved in the mist of negative race-related social experiences (both in and out of the classroom), which highlights these students' resiliency. Therefore, researchers must explore African American women's social experiences in order to understand and facilitate their retention and success at predominately White institutions (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000). Yet, African American women's stories are often untold in the academic literature.

Whereas there are plentiful accounts of African American students' aggregate experiences with racism and classism at predominately White colleges and universities (Bui, 2002; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999), there is little examination of gender influences on African American students' experiences. Instead, there sometimes seems to be an assumption (in these aggregate results) that African American males and females have similar experiences on these campuses, although there is evidence that gender influences the nature of social interactions (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000), which highlights the need for further gender related investigations.

Additionally, the limited research on African American women's college experiences lacks theoretical underpinnings, which is unfortunate because theoretical frameworks such as Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism, and Africana Womanism suggest that African Americans' experiences are influenced by their race, class, and gender (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate,

1995; hooks, 2000; Hudson-Weems, 2004a, b). These theories assert that Black women's experiences are qualitatively different from their Black male, White, and higher income counterparts. Hence, using Collins (2000), hooks' (2000), and Hudson-Weems (2004a, b) racial and gender theorizations, it stands to reason that researchers should examine the intersection of gender and race on African American college women's experiences on their predominately White campuses. In so doing, these studies would extend the literature's primary focus on racial issues to include gender influences on African American college students' experiences at predominately White institutions.

Moreover, few studies examine the strategies African American college women employ to successfully adjust to their predominately White campus' social environment and the role that family support plays in their adjustment process. Although researchers note that adaptive coping strategies and family support are important for student success in secondary education and is salient among African American families (Fan & Chen, 2001; Kao & Thompson, 2003), these concepts have yet to be fully integrated into the college student development literature. Instead, the primary focus has been on institutional and community/climate factors (e.g., racial composition, racism) that impede African American students' success (Schwitzer et al., 1999), not on how gender, adjustment strategies and family support affect African American students' outcomes at predominately White universities. Examining gender influences on African American women's experiences on predominantly White campuses, their adjustment strategies and family support creates a textured picture that bolsters the literature's portrayal of African American students' academic and social experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Support

This study is guided by components of 3 theoretical frameworks (Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black feminism, and Africana womanism) that stress the need for examining African American college women's academic and social development. This hybrid addresses the literature's dire need for data that exclusively focus on African American students' academic and social adjustment outcomes. As McLoyd and Steinberg (1998) suggest, such race-specific databases generate much needed culturally relevant explanations of African American students' performances and factors affecting their performances. Race homogeneous studies also aid in creating much needed culturally appropriate theories and measures to guide future studies of African American students' academic outcomes (Allen & Mitchell, 1998; Gibbs, 1998).

The literature's limited use of cultural-specific theories in studies about African Americans (and people of color in general) pose a great methodological and interpretative challenge because most studies conducted on people of color (particularly in the academic and family arena) focus on race comparisons with people of color faring poorly compared to their White counterparts (Gibbs, 1998; Allen & Mitchell, 1998). Moreover, these studies usually use measures that are normed on White middle class individuals and employ theories that rarely account for the intertwining effects of race, gender and SES. Allen and Mitchell (1998) postulate that the lack of culturally relevant theories for people of color is partly due to the limited focus on minority issues in higher education, minimal attention to minority families in the literature, and the overwhelming use of quantitative studies (on this population) that are not focused on theory building. Hence, in an attempt to address these concerns (and because there is no one theory that fully captures the intersecting effects of race, gender, and family support on Black students' academic outcomes), this study utilizes a set of frameworks that, when combined, highlight the important role that race, gender,

and family support play in African American women college students' social experiences on predominately White campuses and the adjustment strategies they employ.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory (CRT) asserts that racial injustice is deeply ingrained (legally, culturally, and psychologically) in all major facets of the United States and though it has taken on new forms (e.g., covert racism, colorblindness), racism still needs to be opposed in order to advance the lives of all American citizens (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Hence, borrowing from its origin in legal studies and its goal of empowering people of color (namely African Americans), CRT stresses the importance of identifying, analyzing, and transforming the structural and cultural climate of the educational and legal system (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993).

This theory contends that the U.S. society is based on property rights (the ability to own property) that are often assigned based on race and not human rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Historically, accumulation of property and assignment of property rights, which have been central features of power in the U.S., have often been denied to racial minorities. One major avenue of accumulating property is educational attainment, which often leads to increased social economic status (SES); with increased SES, individuals have more means of accumulating property and power. According to researchers, African Americans have traditionally been denied equal access to quality education, dating back to the years of slavery (Kozol, 1991; Landson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Consequently, CRT posits that in order to understand inequality, researchers should explore the intersectionality of race and property rights. Several scholars documented the educational system's role in structuring inequality and de-motivating minority students, particularly African Americans, because of its stereotypical premise that these students are not entitled to

these rights (Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Currently, this process of marginalizing African Americans in the educational system is evident in resegregation practices via tracking in K-12 and neighborhood segregation. Tracking practices result in African American students (and historically underrepresented minority students in general) being assigned to lower educational tracks and being placed in gifted and honors programs and advanced placement classes at a lower rate than their White counterparts. African American students' academic achievements are further stunted by neighborhood segregation in which many students of color live in low income neighborhoods with inferior schools that inadequately prepared them to complete high school and college (Kozol, 1991).

Furthermore, when African American students successfully complete high school and begin college, they are often viewed by some of their White counterparts (including peers, faculty, and administrators) as intruders who have been granted special permission (via affirmative action) to attend predominately White universities and colleges (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2001; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Seen as intruders on these campuses, African American students are faced with limited access to quality academic services and experience negative social interactions, which highlights their "lower status" in society.

Hence, critical race theorists contend that the educational system must be rejuvenated to be more inclusive. Toward that end, education scholars should examine minority students' experiences in the education system (e.g., how students of color's educational opportunities are limited) and identify ways to restructure the education system to be more culturally inclusive (e.g., identify ways to eradicate obstacles to minority students' achievement). In so doing, CRT suggests that explorations of race and racism must be moved "from the margins of scholarly activity to the forefront of educational discourse" (Tate, 1997, p. 196) to demonstrate that people of color's

experiences are legitimate and effective bases for analyzing racial subordination in the U.S. social structure, namely in the legal and educational system.

According to the theory, its goal of transforming the U.S. system (particularly the educational system) via "fundamental criticism and reinterpretation" (Calmore, 1992, p. 2162) can be achieved by obtaining minorities' accounts of their realities and giving them voice through situated narratives (e.g., via qualitative methods). Bell (1984), a leading legal scholar who employs tenets of the CRT framework, argues that the notion of giving voice to people of color via narratives (storytelling) is a powerful communicative and transformative tool for the disempowered because it allows these individuals to openly discuss their experiences. Bell contends that storytelling allows researchers to take people of color's "experiences and configure them in conventional and comprehensible forms" (p. 28). Bell also argues that people of color must openly confront wrongs that afflict their lives and the lives of others in order to achieve racial justice. Consequently, their confrontation efforts and voices can provide insight into the structure and practices of the educational system.

In essence, the major goal of CRT is eradicating all forms of oppression, with particular emphasis on eliminating racial oppression. Hence, this theory allows for an expansive examination of race that moves beyond race comparative and deficit models to include the voices of the oppressed as a means of fully exploring the impact of race on people of color's experiences in the educational system.

Black Feminist Perspective

Black feminism argues that African American women are relegated to lower social positions in the U.S. due to the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Collins (2000) theorizes that African American women's reality has been "a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one [W]hite, privileged, and oppressive, the

other Black, exploited, and oppressed" (p. 26). She believes that many African American women are subjected to substandard conditions in several facets of the U.S. yet, they must interact with White counterparts who they know are afforded several privileges and with African American men who are given a higher social status than African American women because of their gender in a male dominated society. According to Collins (2000), this racial, gender, and class difference is due to "the interrelationship of [W]hite supremacy and male superiority" (p. 26) in many economic, political, and educational practices. These practices tend to be based on stereotypical images of African Americans, specifically African American women, (e.g., intellectually inferior, lazy, welfare dependent, and promiscuous) that serve to justify their oppression.

This intersection of sexism and racism has a long standing history in education. Some scholars theorize that not only are African American students denied access to the rights and privileges that White students are routinely afforded (e.g., access to quality educational experiences, positive view of their intellectual ability; Kozol, 1991), African American scholars have been denied leadership positions in mainstream institutions (Collins, 2000). Such limited access to influential academic positions has led to minimal validation of knowledge about African Americans (African American women specifically) and the continual promotion of elite White male ideas and interest. Moreover, these practices lead to nominal role models for African American students (particularly African American women college students) and the permeation of negative images of Black women (and African Americans in general) in academia, public policy, and popular culture (Collins, 2000).

Due to this continued exclusion in social and educational efforts, Black feminists called for African American women to move from the margins of feminism to its center (hooks, 2000). These scholars argue that African American women must fight for their voices to be heard, and they must seek self-definitions and independence by championing for their rights and privileges in the feminist

movement and society (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). African American women are also urged to focus on identifying and implementing strategies to effectively deal with their social position while challenging their position in society (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Black feminism asserts that this need for strategic effort to challenge the status quo of institutional racism in America is based on African American women's collective standpoint in society, which stems from society's continual denigration of women of African descent.

Accordingly, some African American women intellectuals have created a scholarly tradition that stresses their distinctive positions on self, community, and society. However, according to Collins' (2000) theorizations, these women's knowledge has been suppressed in academic and mainstream media as a means of maintaining social inequality and has been largely accomplished through the positivistic approaches (e.g., distance between researchers and participants, adversarial debates as preferred mode of ascertaining truth) that dominate the academic literature. She believes that these positivist approaches require "Black women to objectify themselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about Black women, and confront in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic, and professional power" (p. 256). Hence, as Collins asserts, because African American women have relied heavily on other modes of transmitting information (e.g., sharing of lived experiences, connection between storytellers and listeners), these women's knowledge has often been excluded from the scientific community.

Therefore, as Black feminism posits, to capture the wide range of experiences African American women encounter and as an effort to affect their social standing in society, African American women's ideas and experiences must be explored, reinterpreted, and analyzed via dialogues among African American scholars and their participants (Collins, 2000). These dialogues will allow researchers to identify African American women's unique experiences, ways of dealing

with their subjugation, and modes of challenging racial and gender injustices. The significance of using dialogues to generate knowledge about African American women's experiences is rooted in African based oral traditions in which knowledge is developed through dialogue with other members of the community (Staples, 1999). This exchange of information among community members highlights the role of connectedness and the importance of finding a voice, speaking, and listening, which are major parts of the interactive call-and-response discourse mode that is typical of African Americans' communication and learning styles in their families, churches, and other community organizations (Collins, 2000).

In essence, Black feminism calls for the inclusion of African American women's voices in the literature, which can be accomplished via qualitative methods that are culturally appropriate. These women's accounts of their experiences with racism and sexism can provide valuable information about ways to restructure the American society, namely the educational system.

Africana Womanism

Similar to Black feminism, Africana womanism focuses on African American women's voices in identifying and rectifying the tripartite disparity that race, class, and gender creates for African Americans. However, this paradigm places primary emphasis on racial issues, using African centered perspectives, and the importance of family support (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, b). Consequently, Africana womanism asserts that the problems facing African American women (e.g., "female subjugation both within and outside the race;" Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 30) ought to be solved within the context of the African culture with focus on family support and racism.

Africana womanism theorizes that racism "has been the most important obstacle in the acquisition of the basic needs of survival" for African American women because they are "victimized first and foremost because they are Black; they are further victimized because they are women living in a male-dominated society" (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 30). Therefore, people of

African descent should first focus on eliminating racism (coupled with intolerance of female subjugation); suggesting that "sexism is basically a secondary problem which arises out of race, class and economic prejudices" (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 30).

Africana womanists argue that adapting a paradigm that asserts gender inequality as the primary focus (such as traditional feminism and Black feminism) is not sufficient to address the major issues facing African American women. This perspective cites the racist beginning of feminism as a major reason for women of African descent to name their own movement and not adopt a tradition that is based on White women's agenda. According to Hudson-Weems (2004a), considering White women's agenda as the definitive position on all women's issues is the ultimate form "of racist arrogance and domination, suggesting that authentic activity of women resides with White women" (p. 21). This need for the self-naming of the African American women's movement serve as a point of departure and major source of debate between Black feminists and Africana womanists. Moreover, Africana womanism "commit[ment] to the survival and wholeness of [an] entire people, male and female" (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 23) is opposite to feminism's primary focus on women's issues.

Proponents of African womanism further highlight the differences between the two camps by pointing to the limited focus on racism in the feminist literature and suggesting that racism can be "threatening, for it identifies [W]hite feminists as possible participants in the oppression of Blacks" (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 25). Moreover, Hudson-Weems also (2004a) theorizes that even though the two groups (Black feminists and Africana womanists) may "share strategies for ending sexual discrimination…they are divided on how to change the entire political system to end racial discrimination and sexual exploitation" (p. 37). Hence, Africana womanists argue that African American women must identify and take control of their own collective struggle (with a focus on

their entire community and not just gender issues) via using culturally appropriate perspectives and methods to more appropriately address their collective needs and demands.

This paradigm's focus on cultural relevancy is grounded in the African culture and focuses on African Americans' unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires. Africana womanism stresses the importance of examining African American people's experiences within an African cosmology; suggesting that practitioners and researchers must view African Americans' experiences with an Afrocentric lens. This Afrocentric lens "plac[es] African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 47). It also states that people of African descent are influenced by their common beliefs that stress the importance of education and family, among many other factors (e.g., strong work ethic, flexible coping strategies, flexible gender roles, spirituality, respect for elders). These common beliefs are thought to contribute to resiliency among African American families (Lambert, Rowan, Kim, An, Kirsch, & Williams, 2005; Staples, 1999).

Consequently, studies about African Americans' experiences should include the role that their families play in their experiences and adjustment to such experiences. For instance, Hudson-Weems (2004a, b) contends that Africana women, in fighting racial, class, and gender discrimination, have focused on their family responsibilities and recruited Black men as their allies. She further posits that African Americans' focus on their families' survival (via family support as evidenced by their combined efforts to aid family members) is based on their African heritage of communalism and holistic harmony (rather than individualistic isolationism common among Europeans/Caucasians). In essence, the family is one of the most important survival mechanisms for people of African descent, dating back to pre-slavery up to contemporary days.

In sum, this framework prioritizes the major issues facing people of African descent, with racial and family issues being of primary concern followed by class and then gender issues, which

contrasts Black feminism's focus on gender issues first, followed by racism and classism. Despite this disagreement between Black feminists and Africana womanism, both groups argue that racism coupled with sexism and classism are key factors that negatively affect African American people, particularly African American women.

A Combined Theoretical Perspective

CRT, Black feminism, and Africana womanism serve as a basis for understanding African American female college students' social experiences at predominately White institutions (PWIs). Although Africana womanism and Black feminism disagree about the name and focus taken to explore the factors affecting African American women's lives (e.g., African centered vs. modifying traditional feminists ideals), taking tenets from both traditions allows researchers to closely examine important factors affecting African American women's lives (e.g., race, gender, and family support). Furthermore, combined, these perspectives assert that the lives of minorities are greatly influenced by their race and gender and offer specific culturally appropriate methods to capture these women's experiences (Collins, 2000; Hatch, 2002; Hudson-Weems, 2004a, b; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Tate, 1997). Consequently, employing tenets of these theories, one can assume that the experiences of African American female students on predominately White campuses are influenced by their race and gender, and are qualitatively different from their Black male and Caucasian counterparts (Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998). Additionally, the manner in which African American women deal with experiences on their campuses are influenced by their social standing (primarily based on their race) and the level of family support they receive.

Author's Perspective

Similar to the ontological assertion of all three paradigms, I posit that race, gender, and/or class constrain individuals' experiences of reality. Consequently, I believe that it is prudent for researchers to examine African American students' experiences in totality in order to fully capture

their lived experiences. Even though some researchers assert that racial discrimination is the major factor affecting African American college students' social experiences at PWIs, I argue that gender issues also impact these students' interactions. For example, though African American students may face similar racially-based difficulties as a group, I contend that African American female students might encounter different challenges than African American male students, which justifies this study's focus on African American women college students.

In fact, researchers note that African American women (specifically college educated women) experience a small dating pool of eligible African American men. They also consistently encounter negative views of their assertiveness and sexuality (e.g., often being viewed as aggressive, domineering, and promiscuous), which all serve to undermine these women's experiences in several spheres (e.g., home, work, school, and social settings) (Collins, 2000; Hudson-Weems, 2004a; Staples, 1999). Therefore, I posit that African American women on predominately White campuses will face difficulty in their dating experiences due to negative stereotypes and low numbers of African American men on their campuses.

Additionally, I argue that to truly help African American women college students succeed on predominately White campuses, educators and researchers must explore the nature of these students' experiences, identify commonalities among their experiences, and design programs that eradicate the barriers to their success. Thus, this study explores the lived social experiences of African American female college students on a predominately White Mid-western college campus for the purpose of uncovering themes among their experiences. Using the data from this study (combined with other studies), I intend to design programs that attend to African American women's interactions with their faculty, staff, and peers on campus to enhance their academic and social adjustment. I also plan to create training seminars for faculty, staff, and the student body to help them understand factors that aid and impede African American female students' success on

predominately White campuses. These sessions would enable participants to openly discuss their experiences with and expectations/stereotypes of others, and identify ways to embrace diversity on campus.

Examining the Social Experiences of African American College Students

In an effort to further understand the impact of race on minorities' experiences, the literature on student development and counseling is emphasizing the role of race and ethnicity in psychological development and adjustment (Comas-Dias & Greene, 1994; Helms, 1994; Santiago-Rivera, 1992; Weinrach & Thomas, 1996). This focus is amplified by the growing number of African American students who are enrolling at predominately White institutions (MacKay & Kuh, 1994; Nettles, 1988). Despite this increase in African American students' enrollment in college, the graduation rates for these students are low, with 66% of African American students leaving predominately White campuses prior to graduation compared to 45% of White students (Carter & Wilson, 1991; Cross & Slater, 2001; Steele, 1992).

According to Cross and Slater (2001), "the nationwide college graduation rate for [B]lack students stood at an appallingly low rate of 37 percent" (p. 102) in 2000, which is a 1 percent decline from 1999 graduation rates. Conversely, White students' graduation rate has remained constant at approximately 59% in the same two years span. Furthermore, African American students' graduation rate is influenced by their sex. African American men's graduation rate has consistently been several percentage points below their female counterparts. For instance, "[s]ince 1995, [B]lack male college students' graduation rates dropped from 35 percent to 31 percent" (Cross & Slater, 2001, p. 102) whereas African American women's graduation rates increased from "34 percent in 1990 to 42 percent in 2000" (p. 102).

This alarming attrition and low graduation trend led several researchers to explore the quality of African American college students' experiences on predominately White campuses (Cross & Slater, 2001; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2002; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Researchers contend that African American students' experiences reflect the overall quality of life at the academic institutions, which includes their perceptions of the university's social, academic, and cultural environment; perceptions of their cultural fit within the environment (e.g., levels of overt and everyday racism, feelings of isolation, personal dissatisfaction, stress); and family support (Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004; Redden, 2002; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). These authors assert that although overt racism is not as rampant in the U.S. and on college campuses as is it was pre-Civil Rights movement, racism still exists. However, it manifests in covert ways at predominately White institutions (e.g., African American students experiencing poor academic services and negative student-teacher interactions) and affects African American students' success. Hence, understanding the environmental context, academic comfort, and family support of African Americans in higher education is particularly important when academic achievement and personal growth are sought.

Therefore, these authors focus on African American students' descriptions of experiences with racism, which they believe benefits the literature and respondents (Redden, 2002; Schwitzer et al., 1999; Swim et al., 2003). Specifically, this approach enables researchers and educators to better unearth the range of concrete manifestations of experienced prejudice and the extent to which members of stigmatized groups must deal with discrimination. It also empowers targets by asking them to describe their experiences rather than asking perpetrators to speak for targets' experiences because targets are characterized as true "experts" on prejudice (Swim et al., 2003). A focus on African Americans' self-reports therefore guides this study in an exploration of African

American female college students' lived social experiences on a predominately White Midwestern campus.

Social Experiences: The role and impact of racism

Although all college students are faced with four major adjustment demands in their college lives (e.g., academic, institutional, personal-emotional, and social adjustment), several researchers postulate that African American students' social adjustment is an especially significant determinant of their academic achievement and retention rates in mostly White settings (Lewis et al., 2000 Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Watson & Kuh, 1996). These scholars contend that African American students' social adjustment includes the nature of their social experiences and adjustment strategies, and is influenced by their race. They define social experiences as the types of interactions and relationships that African American students have with their faculty, staff, administrators, and peers both in and outside the classroom. Adjustment strategies are defined as the reactions/thoughts, steps, and behaviors that African American students use to deal with their social interactions and relationships on campus (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Watson & Kuh, 1996).

Links between racism and social adjustment for African American students at majority White universities are well documented in the literature (Lewis, Chesler, Forman, 2000; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). According to researchers, African American college students encounter various interpersonal forms of prejudices that have significant emotional impact on them. Many experience both overt and subtle (e.g., jokes) racial incidents in interactions with their White peers, faculty and staff.

Racial Experiences. In a qualitative study of 51 African American college students, Swim et al. (2003) reported that African American students experienced an average of one racial incident per week, which included being stared at, being the recipient of bad service in public

establishments, and encountering verbal expression of prejudice. The students also encountered miscellaneous interpersonal offenses such as rude or awkward encounters with European Americans [e.g., “awkward or nervous behavior on the part of European American individuals”, and “avoidance by European Americans on the street and in seating areas” (p. 53)]. Similarly, Schwitzer et al. (1999), in a qualitative study (*N* = 22) of African American students’ social experiences on a predominately White campus, reported that these students deal with racism, namely with White peers in residential halls and the differential treatment of African American student organizations compared to their White counterparts’ organizations.

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) also documented in a qualitative study of 34 African American students at a predominately White institution that African American student organizations faced double standards, in which these organizations were not given as much access and permission to use campus facilities as the White student organizations were afforded. Moreover, the campus police usually patrolled and at times prematurely ended African American student organizations’ functions, fearing that “African Americans pose a threat to and in these public spaces on their college campuses” (p. 68).

Additionally, according to researchers, African American students experience negative interactions with faculty members on predominately White campuses. Fegan, Vera, and Imani (1996), using qualitative methodology, found that African American students at a predominately White institution perceived White faculty as unapproachable because of their stereotypical comments, insensitivity to African American culture, failure to acknowledge or incorporate culturally diverse perspectives into their curricula, and generalizations of African American students’ opinions as representing those of their entire community. Similarly, in Solorzano et al.’s (2000) study, African American students reported that their faculty had lower expectations of their academic abilities, which “instill[ed] a sense of self-doubt” (p. 66) in some of the respondents. The students

also felt that their faculty held stereotypic views of African Americans, which were evident in the course curriculum that "omitted, distorted, and stereotyped" (p. 65) African Americans.

This was similar to Lewis et al.'s (2000) finding, in a qualitative study of 75 minority (Black, Latino/a, Asian, and Native Americans) undergraduates, that students of color often report that their White faculty had "stereotypically low expectations of them, direct more complex questions to White students, [and] single them out as 'experts' or 'spokespersons' on racial/ethnic issues" (p. 86). They also felt that their racial/ethnic groups are marginalized in the curriculum, which they reported as "minimiz[ing] their intellectual opportunities and frustrat[ing] their desires to gain understanding from and appreciation by others" (p. 84).

Consequently, some African American students have difficulty interacting with some White faculty members (Fegan, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Guiffrida, 2005; Nettles, 1991). Lewis et al. (2000) found that students of color often report that their White faculty "do not appear to care about or reach out to them, and generally seem uncomfortable relating to them" (p. 85). Likewise, in Schwitzer et al.'s (1999) study, African American students had difficulty approaching and interacting with their White faculty due to some of these teachers not making the effort to get to know their students. As a result, these students hesitated to approach their White professors, which lead to them not getting adequate "classroom support, academic advising, or career guidance" (p. 193). However, students reported that when faculty were similar to them in "race, gender, academic department, or field of study" (Schwitzer et al., p. 194), they felt more comfortable approaching and interacting with them. These students placed particular emphasis on racial similarity as a key factor in increasing their level of comfort with their faculty because they felt that African American teachers did not have negative perceptions of their racial group.

Guiffrida (2005) correspondingly asserted that African American students have more positive relationships with African American (than White) faculty and believe they provide them

"comprehensive advising regarding career guidance, academic issues, and personal problems" (p. 708). According to Guiffrida, in a qualitative study of 19 African American college students at a predominately White institution, although some White faculty were sensitive to African American students' issues, the participants reported that their White faculty were less likely to extend themselves beyond expressing sympathy and understanding to help these students with their situations, whereas the African American faculty went beyond mere expression of understanding to include supporting and advocating for these students. The students also reported that the African American faculty had more "positive beliefs in their academic abilities and provided students with more motivation to succeed than White faculty provided" (p. 712). African American professors' beliefs in their students' abilities were evident in their higher expectations of their students, which was termed "raising the bar" (p. 712). This raising of the bar was viewed as African American professors "enforcing higher standards on students, holding them accountable by continually monitoring their academic progress in their courses, and pushing them to reach new limits in their academic work" (p. 713), which was instrumental to the success of some of the students in the study.

Emotional Impact of Racial Experiences. These racially charged experiences with their White peers, faculty, and staff left African American students feeling angry, unsupported, and uncomfortable on their campuses, which often lead to distance between them and their White counterparts. Furthermore, racial encounters (e.g., subtle racial insults) lead to students feeling marginalized (Cuyjet, 1998; Grant & Breese, 1997), isolated (Redden, 2002), invisible and unwanted (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000), which can negatively affect their psychosocial development (Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004; Ryujin & Abitia, 1992; Swim et al, 2003). According to Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000), these negative racial experiences leave African American students feeling drained, frustrated, "helpless…despondent and…that they could not

perform academically" (p. 68), which often led to some of them contemplating leaving school. Consequently, African American students' feelings of social alienation play a significant role in their adjustment to college; those who feel alienated are less effective socially, have fewer friends, feel lonelier, participate less in extracurricular activities, have difficulty adjusting, and suffer poor academic performance (Redden, 2002).

In short, college is a stressful time with many demands that tax students emotionally, physically, and mentally. However, for African American students at predominately White universities and colleges, this process is intensified by race-related experiences that negatively affect their sense of belonging, social adjustment, and relationship with their White faculty and peers.

Adjustment Strategies African American Students Employ at PWIs

To examine how African American students cope with such negative experiences on predominantly White campuses, using a strength-based approach, a few researchers have examined the adaptive adjustment strategies African American students employ in their social interactions and relationships on campus (Schwitzer et al., 1999; Watson & Kuh, 1996). Research suggests that some Black students actively work to overcome the racial challenges they face on predominately White campuses.

African American students' active involvement in dealing with racial instances on their campuses can be supported by the life course perspective, which claims that individuals exert some influence on their development (which is termed *human agency*); they are not passive bystanders whose lives are solely determined by their environment. Instead, people make choices that help them construct their life course within the opportunities and constraints of sociohistorical circumstances (Amato & Booth, 1997). Heckhausen and Schulz (1995) contend that individuals exert two levels of control over their environment, primary control and secondary control. Primary

control is an individual's control-related behaviors directed at the external environment in hopes of changing the world to fit the needs and desires of that individual. Secondary control is considered an individual's efforts to minimize the loss of primary control by attempting to fit into the environment. One such attempt to fit into the environment involves selecting alternate ways to view/deal with the environment.

In this vein, instead of suggesting that African American students have no influence on how they are treated at these institutions (as indicated in the current literature), some researchers have examined the primary and secondary control strategies these students are using to adjust to and integrate into their campuses. According to Schmader, Major, and Gramzow (2002), some African American students psychologically detach themselves from academic outcomes by de-emphasizing the value of academic success, which is an example of secondary control. These authors also indicate that African American students often perceive their grades and test scores as inaccurate or unreliable measurements of their abilities. Moreover, borrowing from the secondary education literature, Fordham and Ogbu (1988) suggest that some African American students consider school success as the White culture's value, which is opposite to their cultural beliefs. As such, these students are faced with the *burden of acting White*, which is defined as exhibiting behaviors that are associated with the White culture.

Solorzano et al. (2000) and Williamson (1999) also found that, as examples of primary control, African American students attending predominately White colleges form support groups and create counterspaces (e.g., African American student unions, separate campus facilities, and African American studies departments) where they can support each other and better deal with their racist encounters. Moreover, several researchers have identified the interplay among race, gender, and identity as key factors impacting the coping strategies of African American college students. For example, some researchers indicate that African American women (in studies with

equal representations of men and women) are more likely to report racial incidences and increased confrontation with the perpetrators of these offenses than were their African American male counterparts (Chavous, 2002; Solórzano et al., 2000). Walker and Dixon (2002) also reported that African American college students rely on their spirituality and religiosity to deal with the many challenges they face on predominately White campuses, which is an example of secondary control and supports the claim that spirituality is a strength of Black families (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, b; Lambert, Rowan, Kim, An, Kirsch, & Williams, 2005)

Examining the Role of Family Support

Family support, another adjustment strategy, is important for student success and is salient among African American families (Fan & Chen, 2001; Kao & Thompson, 2003). Herndon and Hirt (2004) suggest that African American college students' experiences are influenced by the level of support they receive from their families. These scholars purport that due to the limited number of racially similar role models at majority White universities, African American students on White campuses more heavily rely on their families' support (e.g., emotional, spiritual, financial) compared to their White counterparts and African American peers who attend historically Black schools. Moreover, in White educational settings, African American students are also more likely to discuss sensitive issues with their family members rather than to faculty on campus.

According to several researchers, adolescents and young adults need an arena of comfort where they are supported and armed with the resources to handle life's challenges (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford & Blyth, 1987; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). One of the most important places to obtain this support is one's family (among several other sources, including peers, school, etc.) and this is especially true for African American college students. Within African American families, family support (including extended family members and fictive kin) during all life stages is a central feature in dealing with the stressors of living in a hostile and unwelcoming society

(DeGenova, 1997; Herdon & Hirt, 2004; Staples, 1999). Researchers contend that the importance of such familial support stems from African American families operating from a collectivistic nature in which they focus on caring for each other as opposed to the individualistic, self-focused nature that is usually ascribed to White families (DeGenova, 1997; Staples, 1999)

According to Burton (1996), family support in African American families is provided to all generations and the type and source of support varies, thus highlighting heterogeneity of support in Black families (Dannefer, 1987; Elder, 1998; George, 1996; Settersten, 1999). For example, in a study about caregiving in multigenerational African American families, Burton indicated that support was given to all generations with the age of the parents and grandparents determining who provided the support. In that study, support was defined as instrumental and emotional support, assistance with daily needs, and socialization of children.

In addition to being the central nourishing, supportive, and economic unit in the lives of African Americans, most African American families (regardless of their economic status) encourage their children's educational attainment. These families hope that their children will attend college and become active participants in society because they view education as a vehicle for social mobility. However, they realize that their children might face several challenges in their educational careers due to their race. These African American families strive to maintain a closely knit unit that sequesters its members from external social stresses, particularly racial discrimination. Hence, some African American parents focus on instilling racial pride, family solidarity, and several other cultural values that help their children deal with pervasive racial discrimination in education and other social institutions (Logan, 1996).

Moreover, many African American parents become involved in their children's education, which fosters academic success and emotional support for their children. These parents keep tabs on their children's progress (via daily or bi-weekly discussion with their children), ensure that their

children are enrolled in challenging and well-taught classes, and ensure that they are adjusting to their roommates and school environment (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997).

Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, and Hayes' (2002) study about the role of parental monitoring on the academic outcomes and self-esteem of African American adolescents elucidated the importance of family involvement and support for African American students. These scholars suggest that parents who closely monitor their children have children who report higher self-esteem and academic performance than children with parents who do not closely monitor them. Likewise, O'Leary, Boatwright, and Sauer (1996) posit that African American students attending majority institutions benefit from frequent contact with their families. With frequent familiar contacts, African American students are reminded of their goals and the importance of successfully completing their educational careers, which serve as encouragement to continue their education in the midst of the negative racial experiences on their campuses.

Conversely, Holahan, Valentiner, and Moos (1994) reported that the lack of parental support contributes to less sociability in college students (regardless of race), which longitudinally predicts adjustment problems. Unfortunately, not all families are involved in their children's academic careers. Depending on the resources (e.g., parental educational attainment, parental occupation, families' socioeconomic status) that are at the families' disposal, they may have difficulty maintaining such close contact with their children. Borrowing from the literature concerning the role of the family-school relationship on children's academic performance, Lareau (1987) posits that class-related cultural factors shape parents' involvement with their children's schooling, which in turn influences their children's school adjustment and academic achievement. Extending this finding to the experiences of African American female college students attending predominately White institutions, it stands to reason that students who do not receive support from

their families are left to face the demands of college on their own, which may intensify their feelings of isolation and depression (Grant & Breese, 1997). The literature is replete with studies that highlight the struggles of first generation minority students whose families might provide emotional support but not know enough about campus life to be able to provide instrumental support in dealing with challenges on campus (Bui, 2002; Epps, 1995; Kozol, 1991; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001).

This concept of family support is championed by proponents of the life course perspective. According to the life course perspective, individuals' lives are linked to important others (*linked lives*) over time. Hence, individuals live their lives interdependently and their development is influenced by their network of shared relationships (Elder, 1998). Human development does not occur in a vacuum; instead, people's decisions and circumstances affect the lives of others, especially other family members, and vice versa. More specifically, it is assumed that events in the family of origin, such as parents' view of education and educational attainment, have consequences for children's later development, such as educational attainment and life satisfaction (Amato & Booth, 1997). The concept of linked lives can be used to broaden the literature about the experiences of African American college female students attending predominately White institutions. Because family support is important in the African American community, which is collectivistic in nature, it is essential to explore how these students' relationships with their families aid in their social adjustment and eventual academic success. For example, examining the nature of support (financial, emotional, and academic) these students receive from their families (especially their parents) during college could provide valuable information about the importance of family support in determining African American female college students' adjustment to college life.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In addressing the literature's limited focus on African American women's social experiences, adjustment strategies, and family support on predominately White campuses, this study utilizes a phenomenological design (with interviews) guided by an integrative set of theories to examine in greater detail the "shared essences" (Creswell, 1998) of African American female (sophomore, junior, and senior) college students' social experiences at a Midwestern predominately White institution. The women's adjustment strategies and family support are also explored. The tripartite theoretical underpinning of the study assert that African American women's experiences in the education system are influenced by their gender and race, their experiences are qualitatively different from their Black male and Caucasian counterparts. Hence, in order to fully understand African American women's development, researchers should identify these women's common experiences using culturally appropriate methodologies, primarily qualitative methods (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Hudson-Weems, 2004a, b).

Resultantly, phenomenology is used in this study because this qualitative tradition attempts to uncover the structures of consciousness in lived experiences and assumes that there is an essence to shared experiences that can be understood (Creswell, 1998). Basically, "phenomenology is an approach to thinking about what the life experiences of people are like" (Polite & Hungler, 1999, p.246). Moreover, this qualitative approach enables researchers to "investigate subjective phenomena in the belief that essential truths about reality are grounded in people's lived experiences" (Polite & Hungler, p.246). To capture these truths, phenomenology questions taken for granted assumptions about human experiences, verifies usual accounts of people's experiences, and offers new insights into individuals' lives. In essence, the goal of phenomenological inquiries is to fully describe the essence of individuals' lived experiences.

In order to provide such detailed descriptions, researchers (using the phenomenology approach) engage in in-depth conversations, such as face-to-face interviews, with participants. During these conversations, researchers, without controlling the discussion, strive to gain entrance into the respondents' world by aiding them in describing their lived experiences (Polite & Hungler). In hopes of isolating the true essence of the phenomenon, researchers also bracket (or suspend) their preconceived beliefs and opinions about the phenomenon under investigation and focus on informants' stories during the conversations (Creswell, 1998). Hence, by suspending judgment about African American female college students' social experiences on predominately White campuses, phenomenological interviews allowed me to explore the subjective experiences of these students to gain a deeper understanding of African American female students' lives through their own eyes and voices (Weiss, 1994).

According to Siedman (1998), one of the primary purposes for conducting interviews is to gain a richer understanding of people's experiences and how they make meaning of those experiences. Utilizing this idea in studying the experiences of African American female college students on predominately White campuses, I contend that in order to truly understand these students' lives, I must be willing to listen to them retell their stories and how they make meaning of those stories. Kvale (1996) supports this claim when he discusses the role of the interviewer; he likens the interviewer to a miner (excavator) and a traveler (going along with the storyteller). In either role, the researcher is exploring the respondents' stories/lives to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be that person.

In essence, interviews produce a more realistic and accurate portrayal of the respondents' experiences. Indeed, the purpose of an interview methodology in this study is to illustrate and elucidate various aspects of African American female students' social experiences on predominately White campuses, their adjustment strategies, and the role (and nature) of family

support. Toward this end, interviews allowed me to examine these students' lived social experiences and show how they can provide a depth of understanding, afford outsiders with greater insight, and be a guide to further research on African American female students' experiences on predominately White campuses. Better understanding of the quality of African American students' social experiences is seen as the next step in extending the literature and, in turn, enhancing educators' responses to African American female college students' concerns.

Research Questions. Accordingly, this study attempts to extend the literature by: (1) moving beyond atheoretical studies and studies grounded in culturally inappropriate theories to a set of culturally appropriate frameworks that highlight the major factors affecting African American women's lives, (2) conducting interviews that allow African American women to tell their own stories about their social experiences on a predominately White campus, their adjustment strategies, and the role (and nature) of family support in their adjustment process. Toward this end, I posed three general research questions. First, what are the lived social experiences of African American female college students on a predominately White Midwestern campus? Second, how are these students dealing with (and adjusting to) their experiences? Third, what is the role (and nature) of family support in these students' adjustment to college life? The first research question allowed participants to comment on aspects of their college experiences they find most salient, because each participant will have different challenges, triumphs, and experiences. The second and third research questions narrowed the focus to the strategies African American women students utilize to adjust to their campus.

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

Sampling

This study involved 14 undergraduate African American female students from a predominately White Midwestern university who were recruited through purposive sampling and screened based on several criteria. Criteria included being an African American woman who attends the university and has done so for at least one complete academic year (sophomores through seniors), and who were willing to participate in individual interviews (see Appendix D, p. 149, for eligibility criteria). I limited the sample to undergraduates because graduate students have various other stressors (e.g., advanced nature of studies, professional development) that affect their relationships with their faculty and peers that might not affect undergraduate students (Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005).

Moreover, I excluded first year undergraduates because they would have only completed one full academic semester, which means that they might not have had ample experiences to contribute to the discussion and because most of the students who leave predominately White institutions do so during their freshmen year (Cross & Slater, 2001). By focusing on undergraduate sophomores, juniors, and seniors, this study provided information about these students' unique social experiences, which might be different from graduate students' social experiences. The results also highlighted adjustment strategies that those undergraduates who remain at the institution use and the role (and nature) of their families' support (which freshmen students might not yet have ample experiences with).

Participants were recruited from a total student body at this university of 28,253. African American students (including graduate and professional students) make up 5.5% (1,548 students)

of the student body, with a total of 1,303 undergraduates (University of [name of institution], Registrar, 2007). While Caucasian students make up 80% (22,596 students) of the student population, American Indian/Alaskan (0.6%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2.7%), Hispanic (1.8%), non-resident aliens (5%), and students who did not report their ethnicity/race (4.5%) comprise the remaining 14.5% of the student population.

Unfortunately this institution does not publish information about the racial-sex ratios of their student population. However, information about the graduation rate by sex for African American students offers some insight into the sex ratio of Black students on this campus. In 2005 – 2006, 190 African American women (including graduate and professional students) were awarded their degrees compared to 95 African American men (including graduate and professional students). This 2:1 ratio has been a fairly consistent trend in these students' graduation rates over the past two decades, with a few years of approximately a 1:1 ratio (http://registrar.[name of institution].edu/Statistics, 2007). For instance, from 1983 - 1984 to 1991 - 1992 academic years, the number of Black women graduates were, on average, 14 more than the number of Black men graduates, which is a 1.4:1 ratio (e.g., in 1984 – 1985, 78 women and 55 men received their degrees). From 1993 - 1999, this ratio increased to 2:1, which means that, on average, 55.8 more Black females graduated than Black males (e.g., 1997 – 1998, 110 women, 55 men).

However, the sex ratio of Black women graduates to Black men graduates decreased slightly to 1.9:1 during the 2000-2001 to 2005-2006 academic years, which translated into 90.3 more Black female graduating than Black males. Interestingly, in 2000 – 2001, 214 Black women received their degrees compared to 86 Black men, which was 2.5:1 sex ratio. Regardless of sex, African American students' graduation rate from 2000 – 2006 has been, on average, 54.9%, which was an increase from 41.3% during the 1993 – 1999 academic years.

Moreover, participants were recruited using a purposive sampling technique, defined as "a procedure by which researchers select a subject or subjects based on predetermined criteria about the extent to which the selected subjects could contribute to the research study" (Vaughn, Schumm, & Singagub, 1996, p. 58). This sampling technique promotes contextual understanding and brings to light the experiences that have been suppressed. Recruitment occurred through several mediums: e-mail list-serves; verbal announcements in classrooms; at student activities, in campus eateries, study and congregation areas on campus; and at a local church. Interested participants were asked to: (1) fill out the Letter of Interest to Participate form (see Appendix A) and give (or mail) it to me, or (2) e-mail or call me to let me know of their interest. During correspondence via phone calls, participants were screened for the inclusion criteria (for screening script, see Appendix B). I then scheduled interviews with women who met all criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Of the 20 women who contacted me, 6 were ineligible because of year in school (e.g., 2 freshmen and 1 graduate student), length of time at the university (e.g., 2 sophomore who transferred to the school a semester prior to the study), and refusal to participate in audio-taped interviews.

Participants

Fourteen women were included in the study, although smaller samples are considered adequate for phenomenological research. For instance, Polit and Hungler (1999) contend that "typically phenomenological studies involve a small number of participants, often fewer than 10" (p. 246). Similarly, Creswell (1998) describes phenomenological data collection as involving "long interviews with up to 10 people" (p. 65).

Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 23. Two women were 19, four were 20, two were 21, five were 22, and one was 23. Their majors were wide-ranging: two were in Arts & Science, two were in Biology, two were in Business, three were in Human Environmental Sciences (HES), two

were in Journalism, one was in Political Science, one was in Sociology, and one was in Biology and HES. The women's grade point average (GPA) ranged from 2.7 – 3.87 on a 4.0 scale: six women had 2.7 – 2.9 GPA, five women had 3.0 – 3.5 GPA, and 3 women had 3.6 – 3.87 GPA. Two of the participants attended a lecture I gave on campus, but the other 12 did not have previous contact with me. Also, six of the women had both parents who completed 2+ years of college and received a degree (e.g., AA, BA, MA). Of the remaining eight women, one had a parent who obtained a MA but did not know her father's educational attainment, four had one parent who attended college for 1 year, two had at least one parent who did not attend college after completing high school, and one woman's parents didn't finish high school. Thirteen of the women lived in cities that were approximately 1.5 to 2 hours away from their university; one woman lived approximately 6 hours away from the university.

Aalyah

Aalyah, a 19-year-old sophomore, is the only child of her mother. Although she knows her father, she is not close to him and was mostly taken care of by her mother and her mother's relatives. According to Aalyah, living with a single mother was challenging but it strengthened her resolve to obtain a college education. Her educational aspiration was supported by her mother, who herself attended college for one year but had to dropout when she discovered she was pregnant with Aalyah. Aalyah discussed the prevalence of single motherhood, teenage pregnancy, low educational attainment, and high poverty rates in her hometown and family. She believes these issues are due to her hometown being racially segregated, which limited the type of jobs, income, and education African Americans could attain. This racial segregation was also seen in the school system in her hometown; Aalyah noted that the schools were racially segregated, as a result, she attended a predominately African American high school. To avoid teenage pregnancies and other

"traps" in her hometown, Aalyah delayed dating until her senior year in high school; her boyfriend moved with her to her college town and they were living together at the time of the study.

Joyce

Joyce is a 19-year-old sophomore. She describes herself as socially conscious and actively working to change racial issues in society, which stems from her experiences in the predominately White high school she attended. According to Joyce, because she faced racial instances in high school, she turned to her family and "the [African American] community" for help in dealing with these instances and learned from them the importance of positively representing African Americans and fighting for social justice. Her parents informed her that part of being a positive representation of African Americans involves getting a college education. According to Joyce, her parents emphasize her getting a college education because neither of them attended college and they know how much that limited their income potential and did not want her to experience the same limited lifestyle.

Lisa

Lisa is a 22-year-old junior whose parents did not finish high school nor get married when they had her. In fact, she is the first member in her immediate family to have matriculated to the junior year in college. Although other extended family members attended college, only one older male cousin obtained a college degree; other members attended college but did not complete their degree programs. Lisa believes that the low educational attainment rate in her family contributed to the extreme poverty her family has endured for generations. As such, she hopes to break the cycle and obtain a Masters Degree; she believes that by successfully completing her education she can increase her earning potential and limit her chances of living in poverty. Lisa also believes that the poverty her family experiences is due to their hometown being racially segregated, which limited the type of jobs and incomes African Americans could obtain. This racial segregation was also

seen in the school system in her hometown; as a result, she attended a predominately Black high school. She described herself as popular in high school and exclusively dating African American males; however at the time of the interview, she was dating a White male (who was not a student at her college).

Ebony

Ebony, a 20-year-old junior, described her immediate family as her parents and sister, who all previously attended college. Hence, while attending a predominately Black high school, her parents and sister told her about the importance of gaining a college education and positively representing African Americans. As a result, Ebony described being actively involved in extra curricular activities (that promoted African American students' success) in high school and college; she believes that her participation in student organizations enhanced her chances of getting admitted to her current university, ability to get along with others, and her social activism. Ebony stated that because of her exposure to racism early on in her life, she feels a responsibility to the African American community to challenge and dispel racial stereotypes of African Americans, especially African American women.

Joi

Joi is a 20-year-old junior who attended a predominately African American high school and lived in a predominately African American neighborhood prior to attending college. She describes her immediate family as her parents (who have been married for more than 20 years), an older sister, and her paternal grandparents. Joi has a close knit family who encouraged her (since childhood) to be independent yet free to rely on their help when dealing with challenging situations. She describes herself as carefree and not easily "moved" by people's behaviors; as such, she recalls mostly focusing on her goals and spending time with her friends instead of being part of the "drama" that occurs in high school or college. One of the dramatic instances she avoids dealing

with is dating; according to Joi, she did not date or hang out with guys often in high school or college because she does not like the way "guys treat the girls" once their relationship is over.

Ciara

Ciara is a 20-year-old junior who describes being very close to her parents, an older sister, and paternal grandmother. Ciara talked about her mother and sister insisting that she attend college, especially being an African American woman in the United States. And although her father did not attend college, he echoed her mother's and sister's sentiments about the importance of Ciara getting a college education. As a result of their emphasis on education, Ciara's family encouraged her active participation in college preparatory activities in junior high and high school, which were both predominately White. While in high school, she recalled having some supportive interactions with her White peers but that changed when she got to college. According to Ciara, several of her high school classmates attend the same university as she does but "…sometimes they act like they've never seen me before. So, it's just funny to see how relationships have change only in a couple of years when people you used to hang out with and now it's like they don't even know you."

Nia

Nia is a 22-year-old senior. Her immediate family includes her mother and older sister; her father died when she was a child and her mother has not remarried. She is a second generation college attendee in her family; both her parents and older sister attended college. Prior to college, Nia attended a predominately White high school that, according to Nia, had "a good amount of Black and Asian and Hispanic" students. Although she exclusively dated African American males during high school and college, Nia did not have a boyfriend at the time of the interview because, according to her, she wanted to focus on her studies. Her concentration on her studies stems from

Nia's desire to promote college education in her community because, as she said, "back home its like everybody's goal is to finish high school and it's like…they don't think of anything else next."

Stephanie

Stephanie, a 22-year-old senior, felt that although her parents are not married, they cooperatively work together to encourage her academic pursuits because she is the first member in her family to have reached the senior year in college. Her mother was the only family member to have completed a few college courses. Stephanie believes that the low educational attainment rate in her family contributed to the poverty her family has endured for generations. As such, she hopes to be a catalyst of change for her generation; she hopes that by successfully completing her education she would be a role model to her younger family members who would then see college education as obtainable and necessary. Additionally Stephanie described her hometown as racially segregated and as a result, she attended a predominately Black high school. She described herself as shy and as a result didn't have many friends in high school or college; however, she reported dating during these years. In fact, Stephanie exclusively dated African American males in high school but dated a White male on her college campus.

Cristal

Cristal is a 22-year-old senior. She transferred to this university (site of study) after attending another university; she reported not being satisfied with the student-teacher interactions at her previous school. Cristal believes that because from an early age her mother gave her the freedom to express herself and make her own decisions, she was able to transfer schools and adjust to both schools' climates. She describes her family as her mother and grandmother; she does not know her father and Cristal is her mother's only child. Cristal also talked about attending a predominately African American high school, living in a predominately African American

neighborhood, and exclusively dating African American males, one of which she was dating at the time of this study.

Janet

Janet is a 22-year-old senior whose family places high demand on positively representing African Americans and getting a college education; her parents and paternal grandparents attended college and her younger sister is currently enrolled in college. Janet describes herself as friendly, "stubborn" and not wanting help when dealing with challenging situations. She believes that these traits help her make friends and deal with challenges in her life. According to Janet, these traits were cultivated by her parents, who allowed her to "deal with things" by herself since her childhood because, as she said, "I have to learn on my own so that…I can say I did this by myself, I learned it by myself." She admits that prior to college, she didn't have many negative situations to deal with so she didn't have to ask her parents for advice often but that changed when she got to college. Janet believes that because she attended a predominately African American high school and lived in a predominately African American neighborhood, she did not have much experience with racial issues other than noticing that her hometown was racially segregated. She admits that due to this racial segregation, most of her high school friends and boyfriends were African American. In fact, she stated that her father encouraged her dating African American males in college and admonished her to "not come home with a White boyfriend." As such, she dated African American males on her campus; in fact, she was in a relationship at the time of the interview.

Janae

Janae, a 22-year-old senior, stated that her immediate family included her mother, step-father, an older sister, and an older brother. She reported that they all attended college; hence she was expected to continue the family's tradition by attending college. As a result of her family's

emphasis on education, Janae focused on her studies and maintained 3.8 or higher grade point average in high school and college. Janae believes that her parents lived in a racially mixed neighborhood and sent her to a racially mixed high school as means of preparing her for college on a predominately White campus. According to Janae, although she lived among and attended school with White individuals, her closest friends in high school and college were African Americans. Even though she had friends in high school, Janae described herself as "introverted." She stated that due to her introverted nature she did not date in high school; her first relationship was in college with an African American male on campus.

Nece

Nece is a 21-year-old senior. Her family includes her mother and step-father who both obtained college degrees. She believes that because both of her parents attended college, they insisted that she attend college. They also stressed the importance of maintaining a relationship with God throughout her life; as such, she credits her parents for establishing a strong spiritual foundation in their home and in her life. Nece believes that her spiritual foundation helped her deal with racism she experienced while attending a predominately White high school. Despite racial instances in her high school, Nece reported having many White friends but that changed when she got to college. Similarly, because she was surrounded by mostly White friends in high school, she barely dated because she wanted to date African American males, something she was able to do when she entered college. However, at the time of the study, her boyfriend had transferred from the site of the study to another college.

Robin

Robin, a 20-year-old senior, is one of four children to her parents who have been married over 15 years; she has an older brother, an older sister, and a younger brother. According to Robin, her parents attended college and expected all of their children to do the same; hence, they

stressed to their children the importance of getting a college education. She believes that her parents' emphasis on education stemmed from them being immigrants and the negative racial instances they encountered in the United States. Robin stated that her parents often talked about the importance of positively representing people of African descent in America. Robin also stated that her parents often socialized with other immigrants from their hometown, which limited Robin's interactions with African Americans during her childhood. As a result, she was especially happy to attend a predominately African American high school; there, she learned to cultivate friendships with African American students and learned about their culture. She reported that's when she started dating African American males, a practice she continued in college. However, at the time of this study, she was not currently in a relationship.

Halle

Halle is a 21-year-old senior who describes her family as large and very close knit. And although her immediate family only includes her parents who have been married over 10 years and both obtained college degrees, she includes her cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents when talking about her immediate family. According to Halle, because she was the only child, her parents surrounded her with her extended family members and kept her involved in several social activities, which she believes cultivated her outgoing and sociable nature. Hence, when describing her family, Halle believes that her extended family is a part of her immediate family. She also talked about her family insisting that she get a college degree because most of her older family members attended college and believe that getting an education is mandatory for an African American in the United States. As such, when she contemplates not going on to obtain a graduate degree, her family members remind of the "dream." Part of Halle's dream is to marry an African American male but she notes the difficulty she has had in dating; she currently ended a more than 2 year relationship with an African American male on campus.

Data Collection Procedures

All respondents participated in one face-to-face interview session that lasted approximately 90 minutes, and a follow-up telephone interview that lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Participants were compensated $15 for participating in both interviews. The in-person interviews occurred in one of several places: (1) a private location on the university campus, or (2) the students' home or location of choice. These interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience.

To establish rapport with the participants, I spent a few minutes talking to them before and after the interviews; this is in addition to rapport building during the recruitment process. At the onset of the interview session, I discussed the informed consent form, particularly issues of confidentiality, the purpose of the interview, and uses of the information obtained. During this time, I also addressed any questions that the participants had to ensure that they had a clear understanding of the study and their role in it before signing the informed consent (each participant was given a copy of the consent form for her records). Additionally, I explained to each participant that she was not required to answer any question(s) that made her feel uncomfortable and that she could stop participating at any time. Once each woman officially agreed to participant, which was evident by her signing the informed consent, I asked her to complete a brief demographic sheet and requested her permission to record observations and words (via notes and audio recording). I assured her that I will be the one to transcribe the tape and that I will delete participants' names (in the transcripts and my notes) to protect their anonymity (see Appendix C for interview guide).

Interviews: I conducted a total of 28 interviews (that is, 2 interviews with each participant) over a course of 9 months. I conducted second interviews within 2-3 weeks of the first interviews. For each interview, I used an interview guide that consisted of three broad areas of semi-structured, open-ended questions (with several sub-questions in each area) to minimize the

facilitator's influence on participants' responses (See Appendix C & D) (Hatch, 2002). These were general questions that address the research questions. The questions started with the students' social experiences on their campus, then explored their adjustment strategies, and ended with the role (and nature) of family support in their adjustment process. I also probed participants' responses for more information and clarification when necessary. If their responses were unclear or incomplete (in other words, needed clarification), I asked participants to "tell me more about" or "describe" something they said. In so doing, I encouraged participants to continue thinking deeper by focusing on the experiences they described.

The second interviews were developed to elicit further descriptions of the women's unique experiences and gain their input on the themes generated from their first interviews. This procedure is common when conducting phenomenological research (Kvalve, 1996). Several women said that they had continued to think about issues between interviews and some were prepared to offer new thoughts that had arisen between interviews.

Moreover, during both interview sessions, I bracketed my personal knowledge and prior research during the interviews, which is what Lincoln and Guba (1985) strongly urge qualitative researchers to do as a means of eliminating researcher's bias. I did not contribute my own experiences during the interviews; instead, I eliciting the participants' experiences.

Interview facilitation techniques. I adopted several strategies to elicit descriptions from the respondents. First, I told them that I might be silent for a while but they should continue to talk because I will be listening and recording. Silence is a common tactic used by researchers when conducting phenomenological interviews (Kalve, 1996). Second, I asked respondents if they would feel comfortable if I take notes during the interviews. On my notepad, I told them that I would write words (and issues) to further probe about during the interviews. Third, I reminded the respondents that I am interested in their experiences and that there are no right or wrong answers to the

questions. By doing this, I also reminded myself of the goal of phenomenological research, which is to non-judgmentally obtain informants' input.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began immediately after the first interview and continued after each subsequent interview. As I transcribed the audio tapes, I wrote my ideas and thoughts in a separate document. After transcribing, I coded the data and had my advisor audit my coding scheme as a means of addressing issues of confirmability, which is defined as the objectivity of the results. The data were also analyzed using constant comparative methodology individually and across data type (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The constant comparative method is an inductive process for forming a categorical model to identify themes and patterns in qualitative data. This analysis moves in a continuously developing process from examining individual units of information to constructing a descriptive model. Specifically, I analyzed the data by integrating modified versions of Hatch's (2002) and Seidman's constant comparative models. Hatch's typological analysis model involves "dividing the overall data set into categories or groups based on predetermined typologies…[that are] generated from theory, common sense, and/or research objectives" (p. 152). Seidman's (1998) approaches include creating profiles of each respondents' data and making thematic connections among the respondents' responses. Combing these analytical methods, I organized and reorganized the data, over a series of steps, into fewer and more meaningful domains and themes, which began with open coding in which the phenomena were initially named and categorized. As the categories were developed, they were compared to new categories; this comparison allowed me to modify the themes and patterns. This also facilitated the continual and ongoing process of data analysis that is inherent in a qualitative design (Hatch, 2002). In essence, I followed four steps in analyzing the data.

Step 1.

Seidman (1998) suggested crafting profiles of each participant's experience as to "present the participant in context…[by] display[ing] coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experience, to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates" (p102-103). Employing this approach, after transcribing and reading each participant's transcript, I created a summary profile of her experiences. To create these profiles, I organized the transcript into meaningful typologies as recommended by Hatch (2002). These groupings highlighted the major areas for analysis stemming from the research questions and interview guide (see Appendix C: Interview Guide). Hence, when reading through the transcripts, I grouped the data into five major typologies (e.g., faculty-student interactions, peer encounters, impact of relations with peers and faculty, adjustment strategies, and family support). For each participant, I read the data, identified and grouped statements related to each typology, and created summaries about the core ideas of the grouped excerpts for each typology. These summaries served as the profile for each participant.

Step 2.

Hatch indicated that after the data have been grouped into typologies, researchers should then "look for meaning within" (p. 155) the typologies. To do so, I combined all participants' grouped statements and summaries for each typology and looked for connections (e.g., frequency, similarities, differences, categories, and integrating concepts) among the statements and summaries. Toward this end, I scrutinized the data more closely by asking: "What broad statements can be made that meaningfully bring all of these data together" (Hatch, 2002, p. 156)? Similarly, as Seidman (1998) recommended, during this meaning making phase I also asked: "What is the subject of the marked passages? Are there words or a phrase that seems to describe them" (p. 107). I then created summaries of the connections within and between typologies.

Step 3.

As suggested by Hatch's model, to ensure that the summaries from Step 2 are supported by the data, I re-read each participant's full transcript to determine if the categories and themes are justified by the data. In so doing, I assess how well the selected statements fit into the categories and if the unselected portions of the transcripts "contain insights that are different or contradictory…[by asking] Is there anything in the data that contradicts my findings" (Hatch, p. 157-158)? I then combined the contradictory information generated from the review of each transcript, created alternate categories for them, and identified connections between the new and original categories within and among typologies. Subsequently, I created summaries of the new patterns and themes. This negative case analysis helped to establish the study's' credibility. According to Creswell (1998), negative case analyses allow researchers to "refine working hypotheses as the inquiry advances…in light of negative or disconfirming evidence" (Creswell, p. 202) until all cases (or at least 60 percent, p. 312) fit the new hypotheses.

Resulting from the above analytical steps, I collapsed the typologies and categories into two domains (social experiences and social adjustment) with two categories and subcategories within each domain. The social experiences domain includes the women's positive and negative experiences with faculty/staff and peers in the academic and social spheres. The social adjustment domain encompasses the positive and negative psychosocial impact of these experiences on the women and the women's behavioral responses to the experiences. These domains and categories along with the overarching theme of racial and gender influences are described in details in the Results section.

Step 4.

Based on Hatch's prompting, I selected "powerful examples" that highlighted the new summaries from Step 3 and "take the readers inside the contexts and allow them to hear the voices

of participants" (p. 159). Hatch indicated that this process of selecting quotations that accurately and clearly convey patterns and themes is the final check in the analysis. In essence, as a final analysis step, I selected quotes that highlighted the connective threads among the participants' stories.

To ensure the confirmability and dependability of the results, I submitted the findings and data to my advisor for an external audit after Steps 2 and 4. According to Creswell (1998), external audits involve "an external consultant, the auditor, to examine both the process and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy" (p. 203). Hence, my advisor examined the process by "which the accounts were kept" to assess the "fairness of the representations" of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). This act of accessing the acceptability of the study's process established the dependability of the study. My advisor also examined the study's product (e.g., the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations) to determine if "it is supported by the data and is internally coherent so that the 'bottom line' may be accepted" (Lincoln & Guba, p. 318). This act of ascertaining the appropriateness of the product authenticated the confirmability of the study.

After reviewing the data, coding scheme, and preliminary themes from Step 2, my advisor offered revision comments. For instance, he suggested ways to eliminate redundancy within and among the themes. Using his comments, I conducted Steps 3 and 4, transposed the information into manuscript form, and submitted the draft to my advisor. He then offered further revision comments on fine-tuning the themes and organizing the manuscript to best reflect the women's stories. I incorporated these comments into subsequent drafts of the Results section, which meant that I conducted Steps 3 and 4 and submitted the findings to Dr. Fine several times.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

As the Introduction section illustrated, previous research has found that the types of interactions that African American college students have with diverse others (e.g., faculty, staff, peers) in and outside the classroom affect their social adjustment (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) on predominately White campuses. Moreover, as purported by the triad theoretical underpinnings of this study, race and gender influence African American students' experiences on mostly White campuses. The results of this study support both of these claims along with the assertion that family support is influential in African American students' social adjustment at predominately White institutions.

The findings are organized under two domains representing key features of African American female college students' experiences at predominately White institutions: social experiences and social adjustment. These are presented in Table 1. Each domain has two categories and two subcategories. The social experiences domain pertains to positive and negative experiences with 1) faculty/staff and 2) peers, while the social adjustment domain involves 1) positive and negative psychosocial impacts of the experiences, and 2) behavioral responses to their experiences. Moreover, each domain and category highlights the overarching theme of racial and gender influences on the women's social experiences and adjustment at their predominately White campus.

The results are described in terms of the domains and research questions. To answer the first research question (what are the lived social experiences of African American female college students on a predominately White Midwestern campus?), the results are organized around the women's reports of negative and positive experiences with their faculty/staff and peers (See

Appendix E: Interview Guide, Questions #1-8). Similarly, the results are structured around the psychosocial impact and behavioral responses domain/categories to capture the second research question--how are these students dealing with (and adjusting to) their experiences? (See Appendix E, Questions #9 – 12). Moreover, the external coping strategies subcategory answers the third research question--what is the role (and nature) of family support in these students' adjustment to college life? (See Appendix E, Questions #11-12). Below, selected quotes from the 14 respondents are offered to illustrate the domains, categories, and subcategories for the women's experiences and the strategies they employed to deal with these experiences.

Social Experiences: Student-Faculty/Staff Interactions

Based on the women's perceptions, supportive yet racial discriminatory interactions were the hallmark of their experiences with the faculty and staff. Although the women recounted instances of academic/career support from both their White and African American faculty/staff, they reported receiving most of their support, especially personal/relational support, from their African American faculty/staff. Moreover, the women perceived most of their negative encounters to be race-based and involve their White faculty/staff.

Positive Interactions

Respondents described three major categories that comprise their positive experiences with their faculty and staff: academic/career, resource location, and personal/relational. In fact, the common themes in the women's descriptions of their positive student-faculty/staff interactions, which will be elaborated upon below, include *If I have any questions, I can go to them, They help me find the resources I need* and *They build that relationship, that rapport*. However, the women believed that race mattered in the type of interactions they had with the faculty/staff. The women had all three types of interactions with African American faculty/staff as opposed to having mostly academic/career and resource location experiences with White faculty/staff. In essence, 10 (71%)

women felt that although some of their White faculty/staff offer meaningful academic/career support, many of these White faculty/staff do not build as much rapport and establish personal relationships with African American students as the African American faculty/staff. The sections below describe the features of the women's positive interactions with the faculty and staff.

If I have any questions, I can go to them. Academically, the women recounted getting help with course work (e.g., study and test-taking strategies tips), course selection, and career advice from their faculty. For instance, Joi discussed receiving general assistance with course work: "…any questions that I needed…answered I could go straight to 'em and they'll work it out for me…" Similarly, Nece and Nia described getting course work and selection tips from the faculty. They said:

> "…I had…[a] professor [who] was extremely helpful…he offered several times to help me outside of class time and…office hours, and…he aided [me] through his class …[I have another] professor
>
> …[who] keeps me up to speed on who is the best teacher as far as taking [more advanced]…
>
> class[es]…[and] he informs me on…the best methods of studying..." (Nece)
>
> "It was…[a White] faculty member…each year, I was going to him saying…'am I taking the right classes? Am I doing the right thing? Do I actually have a chance to get into the graduate school that I wanted to?' And he…did help me and encourage me and let me know I was on the right track and…give me some suggestions on what classes I should be taking." (Nia)

They help me find the resources I need. In addition to academic/career assistance, as displayed by the previous quotes, respondents talked about their professors providing assistance with *locating resources* (e.g., scholarships, grants). Several women illustrated this type of support:

"I'm thankful for [working in] Black studies…[because] financially…that really helped me out…when…I needed more money…[the secretary] would try to work things out and I'm very thankful for that. 'Cause without that…I…couldn't pay my cell phone bill or get a car…[or] buy…Christmas gifts and…pay my bills…" (Janae)

"…[the] faculty and staff members [of a minority based program] are really there for the minority student[s] as far as finding their home or their place on campus. They're really adamant about…you getting a very good academic education…[and] helping you with other aspects that you may need later or certain resources that you may need at the current time…like anytime you have a problem or you're like how am I gonna pay for this part of school or anything like that, they basically have the answer or some kind of resources to get you to that means." (Joyce)

They build that relationship, that rapport. Along with help locating resources, the women felt that the faculty also provided them with ***relational support***. However, they believed that the African American faculty/staff provided most of this support by building rapport with them, taking interest in their personal lives, and being interested in (and expecting) their success. The women suggested that the African American faculty and staff were more willing to talk to the African American students about personal life issues along with career and academic issues, and "more free with their time" as compared to their White faculty/staff. Stephanie discussed getting more personal with her African American (than White) faculty:

"The Black professors were really lax and really willing to establish a relationship, it wasn't just a student-teacher relationship, it was a mentor-mentee relationship…[and] it was more of sharing knowledge…more of sharing experiences, more giving and taking in the relationship…it was less structured and less professional, it was more personal compare to the White professor that was…strictly down to…[the] business at hand."

Likewise, Halle described differences between White and African American teachers' relational support by saying "[t]here…is a difference I feel like sometimes with Black teachers versus White teachers…[the Black teachers] just seem to be more nurturing, just in my experiences." Janet expressed similar sentiments when describing relational support from African American faculty who attended the African American student government meetings. She said:

> "[There are]…very few times we actually have Caucasian faculty members come to [the Black student government] meetings….I don't know why, but…it seems like [when they came] they… were obligated to come…but whenever we had the African American speakers, they would be glad to come and share their opinions and their experiences and what we should do and how we should [do it]…[So]…with our [African American] older, wiser faculty members, they come and they share their experiences and they say…'just keep on going….keep striving for what you want."

As the preceding quotes highlight, the women recalled several helpful encounters with their faculty and staff; however, they contended that they received most of their relational support for their African American counterparts. This perception of race-based assistance was also evident in the women's accounts of experiencing racially different treatment (compared to their White peers) from the White faculty and staff, which left them feeling unfairly treated.

Negative Interactions

In general, the women felt that their negative encounters with the faculty and staff involved racially-charged treatment. Thirteen (93%) women believed they were getting differential treatment because of their race, which they suggested was evident in them receiving limited help from some of their White faculty and staff (e.g., advisors, administrative staff, dormitory staff, police, etc). In fact, when describing the White faculty/staff, the women felt like *they don't relate to us* and *they are not really here for us*. The respondents also perceived the staff treating them differently because,

according to the women, *we are always being pointed out for something wrong* and *they are a little bit more aggressive with us* compared to the White students. The following sections describe these aspects of the women's negative interactions with their White faculty and staff.

They don't really relate to us. Women frequently discussed feeling like some of the White *faculty* acted like they had limited time to help students, especially African American students, and they acted bothered when African American students sought help from them. Stephanie described her experiences with being brushed off by her professors: "I've had professors…make me feel like they were so busy that they didn't have time to talk with me." Ciara recalled a comparable instance of being ignored by a White faculty:

> "I had a…teacher…[who] I would go in [to see] and he would be talking…to some of the…White students, and…I would stand there for 15, 20 minutes before he would even acknowledge my presence or want to help me and then after that his whole aura changed when he was helping me as opposed to the other student that he was helping."

Similar to the above quotes' description of limited help from their faculty, nine (64%) participants felt that some White faculty showed favoritism to the White students in class. These students suggested that the White faculty provided more help to the White (than African American) students, had their favorites (who were mostly White students) in class, and gave privileges to and were more lenient with the White students while doling out punishments to the minority students in class. Lisa described her experience with faculty favoritism:

> "…sometimes you see professors giving other students privileges…[for example] you have a crowd of 5 [White students]…talking and [the professor] don't saying anything to…[them] about being quiet but…this other group on the other side that's talking that may not all be Black, maybe of some other nationality, Asian, Indian or…anyone with a little bit of a tint to

their skin [and the professors would say to them] either be quiet in my classroom, [or] you can go out in the hallway and talk…"

Joyce experienced a similar sense of racial nepotism as illustrated in the following quote:

"…I had a teacher…[who] was a very negative lady…she was very short and very snappy, and surprisingly the majority of the class was African American…I can say there might have been only 5 Caucasian people in the whole class [out of] 20 something [students]…I feel like she was a little bit more lenient or understanding…or answered the questions more thoroughly when one of them (referring to White students) would ask but if it was one of us on the other hand, [she responded with]…you wasn't paying attention, you didn't listen or something in that nature…"

As other signs of favoritism, the women perceived some of the White faculty members as not understanding, relating to, or making the effort to relate to African American students. Ebony described her experience with some White faculty's aloofness toward African American students: "…well sometimes… [with] a lot of the professors…it seems like…a distance thing where it's like they don't really relate to you…you see them interacting more with…the majority [students] versus us…they're not really…getting involved [with us]..." The women believed that this distance between some White faculty and African American students was due to the faculty being "cautious" and "hesitant" to interact with and approach African American students, which limited their rapport building. The women attributed the White faculty's hesitancy to establish relations with African American students to the negative racial stereotypes they operated from when interacting with African American students. The perception that these behaviors and assumptions were racially biased tended to prompt women to question if their White faculty had different expectations of them as compared to their White counterparts. Halle pondered the faculty's different expectations of students:

"…the Black professors, they expect you to…make the A…[and] they'll help you [with] whatever to make this grade, they want to see you…succeed. But…sometimes with the White professors, I don't know if they expect as much…[For example] I…had [a] teacher…have a[n] attitude with me like 'well…it's just kinda difficult…you just gonna have to try again'...It wasn't like 'you can do this…you're gonna make this A…and we can get [a] tutor... [like the Black professors would say].' I didn't get that from couple of teachers, it was just kinda like 'well yeah it was hard…try again' kinda like I didn't really expect you to pass anyway."

In addition to questioning professors' differing expectations for students, the women believed that their relationship with the White faculty is further thwarted by some White faculty asking or expecting them to be "spokesperson[s]" for African American issues in class discussions. Some of the women viewed this expectation/practice as racially offensive. Two participants explained:

"…whenever a case comes up, like a civil rights case…everybody turns and looks at the Black girl, even the teacher [is] like 'what is your opinion on this..." (Janet)

"…the majority of the time I'm the only African American female in the class, so if there's a statement about African American wom[e]n I feel like…my instructors would want me to be the spokesman…and sometimes you don't feel like you need to be the spokesman for…your entire race, for your entire sex….and sometimes it's annoying because…I… never considered myself to be [an] at-risk youth coming up and that's [what] a lot of my classes are talking about. So…they'll be looking at me like 'oh, well…did any of your Black friends become pregnant in high school?' And…I feel like it's kinda offensive sometimes..." (Robin)

As these quotes illustrate, the women's relationship with some of their White faculty seemed to be limited due to their perceptions of professors having negative racial expectations in the classroom.

They are not really here to help us. The lack of rapport and perceived differential treatment the women experienced with some of the White faculty extended to interactions with some of the *academic advisors*, who often were not faculty members; hence, staff members have been included in the social experience with faculty section. Seven (77%) of the nine participants who discussed their student-advisor relations reported receiving misguided or incomplete help from their White advisors. Nia described getting misguided information about credit requirements:

> "…when I first came here…my advisor…insisted that I take 12 [credit hours per semester]…but then I found out that…[I was] not a sophomore…how come you didn't take [more credits]… everybody is asking me so I went to her and she denied the fact that she even told me to take 'em when in fact [she told] my other friend who is also Black…to take 12 hours also."

The women believed that, as supported by the previous quote, African American students in general and individual participants specifically are misled about credits and course requirements needed to graduate in 4 years. They contend that this practice leads to several African American students staying in school longer than their White counterparts. To them, it seemed that African American students are usually put on a 5+ year graduation plan as opposed to the 4-year graduation plan that most of their White counterparts are given. Ciara described her views of different graduation plans for White and African American students:

> "…it's almost as if we're doomed to fail or at least that's the way the system works here … [especially with] the 5 year plan…You're really suppose to get out in 4 years but it seems as if the academic advisors neglect to tell you that you need to take at least 15 hours a semester in order to graduate on time and that's assuming you don't go to summer school.

But a lot of people don't figure that out until they're juniors like me…most Black students that I've talked with…their freshmen year…they're not aware of that…"

Ebony described similar instances of advisors encouraging African American students to take classes to bolster their GPA but not their graduation timeline:

"…when setting up my schedule…[they're] kinda like…'you should probably take this because it will get your GPA up' versus…[telling] other White students…'these are the classes you need to graduate'…And…a lot of my friends…told me about the same experience…they got thrown in classes that their advisors say 'oh this can just boost your GPA up' rather then 'hey you need to graduate in 4 years and this is what you need to do.' And so…I see…a lot of people in college for extra…one and a half, two years because [of] their advisors, and I see it mainly in Black students…"

Not only did participants perceive that advisors' behavior was delaying African American students' graduation and underestimating their ability and intelligence by putting them in lower level classes, the advisors were considered to be discouraging the women's career dreams. For instance, Ciara described how her advisor made her question her goal of attending medical school:

"…my academic advisor…[told] me one time that…I should think of other…things that I wanna do with my major because it's a possibility I won't get into medical school before she even knew what my grades would be like…there was no encouragement there, and she doesn't even know me as a person...So, I didn't feel she had any room to say that but I also feel that because I was Black that had a factor in it…"

As the previous quotes indicate, the women's experiences with their advisors involved what they considered to be incomplete assistance that leads to some African American students' prolonged schooling and questioning of career goals.

We are always being pointed out for something wrong. This practice of faculty and advisors disadvantaging Black students while favoring their White counterparts was also perceived to be present among the women's interactions with *other staff members* on campus. Sixty-four percent (nine) of the women felt that the staff in the dining halls, dormitories, administrative offices, and police department treated African American students more harshly than the White students. For example, participants recounted African Americans being picked on and looked at suspiciously in the dining halls and bookstore. Ebony described African American students being treated differently than their White peers in the dining hall.

> "…if…African American student[s] [are] sitting in a dining hall and…we're laughing and we're joking and it's a table right next to us…[with] White students…doing the same exact thing, it's kinda like the staff is looking at us versus all of the White kids…they look at us like 'oh…they're ghetto, they're rowdy'…we're the one[s] that are pointed out like '…y'all being too loud, you gonna have to leave…"

Similarly, Halle described an instance when a campus bookstore staff member voiced her suspicious view of African American students:

> "…I used to work at one of the stores in the mall and a lady came in and she...works at the [university] bookstore, she's a [older] White lady, and…[she] had a granddaughter with her and she was talking to my manager and she was like 'look at my granddaughter isn't she beautiful? Yeah she's so beautiful 'cause she's White. I know you guys have a problem with the Black people that come in here. Those Black students come into the…bookstore all the time and I know they're stealing and I just watch them like hawk, I just…don't like Black people."

They don't treat us the same. In the same vein, participants recounted instances of the administrative staff treating African American student organizations less favorably than their White

counterparts. The women felt that African American student organizations are given more stringent requirements for their functions than White organizations, they get less money allocated to them, and some of the staff distrust the accuracy of African American student organizations' reports of their activities and money management. Ebony described this sense of differing requirements for African American and White student organization functions and limited support from the university for African American students and organizations.

> "…I…am in Black…organizations and I am in White organizations and I…see…how the university treats each organization…I'll be in a White organization and I'll see how easy it is…to get stuff done…[how] easy [it is]…to get a trip together and…then have the university…be able to make payments there. But…with the Black organizations trying to plan trips, they're like '…you need to make sure that you're accurate and you're not lying on this.' And they would…give you…the third degree like 'I need to see all receipts because people cheat us out of our money.' But…with White organizations, I've never been question[ed] about what we spent and making sure that all receipts are right…"

In addition to different standards, participants believed that African American student organizations are subject to less financial support than White student organizations. Janet discussed the different funding levels of student organizations:

> "…[the White student government] get…a certain amount…to go towards activities and [the Black student government] has felt like they're not getting as much as other student organization[s] on the campus. And…we ask for…more money because..[the White student government] have the leeway to give it to us but…it always gets voted down…"

The women contended that this perception of racial mistreatment by some administrative staff extended to employment circumstances. In fact, some participants indicated that due to some

individuals harboring racial stereotypes of African Americans, they are not hired or treated equally on campus compared to their White peers. Ciara explained:

> "[Black students] don't necessarily get some of the better jobs…on campus. If I was going…to apply for just a…work study job when I was going up against a White student, I'm sure that they would pick the White students oppose to me…being a Black female…"

Lisa described similar differential treatment in employment settings by saying:

> "…as far as working in different departments here on campus, putting in applications to work like for the Deans or…[other] office type positions, you had to talk a certain way and be a certain way in order for them to even consider you."

The women also suggested that this preferential treatment in extra-curricular and employment circumstances was evident in the ***dormitory staff*** favorably treating the White residents and mistreating the minority students. For instance, Aalyah talked about the unfair treatment she received from the dormitory staff during conflict resolution attempts with a White female roommate. She said,

> "…my freshmen year…I had a roommate issue that we couldn't…resolve and it went through community advisors, peer advisors and everyone and when it got to the…hall coordinator [who was White], she seemed like she was generally trying to help…but it also seemed like she was taking sides…[For example] when…we got through with our resolution meeting…with…[her] she asked me to stay afterwards because she said that she thought I could step up to be the bigger person and move out. And it's like we're both equal roommates, she can move out just as easily as I could and I thought that was unfair treatment…it was definitely upsetting that she wouldn't offer the same option as she did to me when we were both in the same situation."

Two other women recounted similar instances when African American students were singled out and given harsher punishment than their White counterparts for what was perceived to be the same behavior.

> "As far as the RAs (referring to resident advisors), if something goes wrong in the bathroom or something nasty…who they come to first? The Black people..." (Lisa)
>
> "I've been in instances…where…we're just outside having fun, doing a water fight but the White kids are out there doing it too but we're pointed out as vandalizing campus versus them, they're just having fun…[So, afterwards the CAs (referring to community advisors)]…bursted in…[our] room[s] like…it was…a sting or…a police operation. They [were] like 'render your IDs'…it made us look…real bad like…we had just been…spray painting the campus or something or knocking stuff over…[So I asked] 'did the other group get in trouble…for…shooting water guns…?' and they're like 'well, no…" (Ebony)

"[T]hey are a little more aggressive with us." The perception of unfair treatment was also evident in the women's stories of racist encounters with the university and city's police. The women believed that their White counterparts do not have to deal with such racism on and off campus. For instance, the women indicated that the city's police engage in "racial profiling" by staying in "…one area of town…when you have crime everywhere, they just don't go explore the other areas, they just stay in this one spot." Likewise, the city and university's police seemed to end Black students' parties earlier, more abruptly and violently than their White peers' parties. Stephanie described the police behaviors toward African American students:

> "I lived in a[n] area where there was a lot of athletes…[and] there was a lot of partying mostly by Whites but only the Black parties got busted up…we would look out our window and we would see a White party going on for hours…and then we'll see…a Black person getting pulled over or…Black parties…getting busted up…I just think with the athletes

being out there and most athletes are minorities…the police…drove around a lot…searching, doing their routine or whatever the word…is the…police do."

Janet also described the police responding to African American parties in a harsh manner. She explained:

"…there was a party hosted by [a Black]…sorority and it was my freshmen year, and the [city's] police came in and maced everybody…just spraying at people, people just innocently walking…But…we wonder like 'well, when you go to the White party, you gonna do the same thing?' [I bet]…they are not gonna go and spray mace on all those people like that. But…that's probably one of those things that they have within their…police department like 'well…we got to get a little bit more aggressive with our Black people."

Summary

Overall, the women reported that they had both supportive and discriminatory encounters with their faculty and staff. Four (29%) women stressed that their interactions with all faculty/staff were generally positive, although they recalled some instances of perceived racism. Three (21%) women considered their faculty/staff-student encounters to be negative due to the frequency with which (they encountered racism with their White faculty/staff. Moreover, 2 (14%) women believed that although they had both supportive and discriminatory experiences with their faculty/staff, their overall relations with these individuals were neither overly positive nor negative; these women perceived their faculty/staff interactions to be neutral.

However, five (36%) women believed that their experiences with faculty/staff were both intensely discriminatory and supportive. These women believed that although they encountered multiple instances of racism in various aspects of their social life with their faculty/staff, they also had frequent and varied forms of supportive instances with their faculty/staff. Thus they felt that the negative experiences were counterbalanced by their positive encounters, which made their

experiences with faculty/staff seem balanced. Combining these figures, 11 (79%) women considered their faculty/staff-student interactions to be either neutral, positive, or balanced, while only three (21%) women viewed their encounters to be more negatively race-based.

In essence, the majority of the women in this study believed that despite encountering negative race-based instances with some of their White faculty/staff, which created some level of negativity between them and these individuals, their receiving supportive assistance from and relations with their African American (and some White) faculty/staff diminished the negativity of the race-based encounters they had. However, those negative encounters influenced how often (and from who) they sought help (and subsequent interactions).

Social Experiences: Peer Interactions

Based on the women's perceptions, supportive yet divisive interactions were characteristic of their experiences with their peers. The women recounted socializing and gaining support from their African American and non-African American peers; however, they contended that most of these positive encounters, especially gaining moral support, involved their African American peers. Similarly, the women experienced segregation with both White and African American peers; however, the participants felt that the separation between them and their White peers was mostly based on racial/cultural differences while African American students were divided based on differences in and competition over their social status on campus.

Additionally, the women indicated that their gender (intertwined with their race) seemed to influence their peer interactions. Although they had difficult dating experiences (e.g., lack of committed relationships from African American males, being left out of the dating pool due to frequent interracial dating between White females and African American males) and encountered competition among African American women on campus, the women reported more intimate friendships with their African American (especially female) peers than White peers. In essence, the

women believed that their relationships with their African American peers were personal although often competitive, while their relationships were divisive and mostly impersonal with their White peers.

Positive Interactions

The women suggested that their positive peer relations were characterized by academic and social support. In fact, they recounted socializing and gaining support from their peers, with the majority of these incidences involving their African American peers. With their White peers, the women felt like *we can study and work together at times* and *sometimes our interactions in class led to friendships outside of class* while with their African American peers, they believed that *we are family, we look out for each other* and *we want each other to succeed*. The sections below describe these aspects of the women's positive interactions with their White and Black peers on campus.

Positive Between-Group Interactions

We can study and work together at times. Nine (64%) of the women reported that they received academic and social support from their White peers. Academically, the women suggested that although most of the encounters with their White peers were racially segregated (as discussed in the Negative Between-Group Interactions section below), the women had instances when they and their White peers worked well together. Ebony described the complex nature of academic interactions with White peers. She said:

> "…some…[positive interactions would be]...being in classes and…seeing…us interacting and being able to do study groups together…it's not just…all the Black kids come together in a study group or…all the White kids by the[m]selves but we all come together and help each other…And of course…you have the times where everybody really don't wanna work

together but…for the most part, when…we do…get together and…try and study and learn something I do like that…"

Joyce echoed this sense of African American and White peers helping each other academically. She explained:

"…[a positive experience would be] basically everybody just helping everybody out [in the classroom]…[For example, asking each other] 'you missed a day?, you need my notes?...I'll e-mail those to you or you want to get together to study for a test? Or can you tell me what the teacher said, is that what she said?....Or different group projects that we have…you know…getting together during those times and just…having fun while getting our work done…[And that's good because] I'm usually the only Black [person in my classes]."

Beyond studying and working together on group projects, the women also recalled engaging in in-class discussions with their White peers, which they believed allowed them to learn from each other's experiences. For example, Robin described sharing experiences with her peers, which helped them gain different perspectives on various classroom topics. She said:

"…I feel that the positive interactions that I had with…White people in my classes was just pretty much in open discussions, I feel like with…[my major] we're all willing to talk and we all have different experiences to bring to…a certain topic. And…you have…open discussion[s]…or semi-debates in class and…I think that it's pretty much just to be able to get different opinions about different topics that of course me…being [an] African American female, I only have my… experiences…and like a White girl from…[a small rural city] will have her experiences and then when we come together we can talk about them. She's learning about me as a[n] African American and my experiences in life and I'm learning about her being a White girl from a small town...So, with her being from where she's from,

where I'm from, we pretty much can learn from each other just because we have 2 separate experiences and we'll have 2 different opinions…"

Essentially, the women believed that their academic-related encounters with their White peers involved working well together during group assignments and learning from each other during class discussions.

Sometimes our interactions in class led to friendships outside of class. Some of the women also described positive social encounters with their White peers. These women contended that their personal relationships with their White counterparts involved engaging in social activities (e.g., going to parties, dinner) along with having friendships that extended beyond the classroom. Halle described having personal relationships with some of her White peers: "…I've actually…gotten really close to a couple of people up here that are…White…Made some really, really good friends within my college…" Similarly, Nece illustrated how positive academic encounters led to friendships with her White counterparts. Her story follows:

> "…this is very surprising…[but me and] my lab partner…truly did work together. We worked together outside of class, she…came to my house several times…to study…for the exams or…finish…up our lab…we've met at the library several times…we helped each other with homework and stuff like that…[A]nd that was probably the first time out of the 3 years that…a relationship that was established within the classroom, because we were partners, went outside the classroom...I had partners before but we never really…met up at the library and stuff like that and worked together on projects. It was all…in the classroom type of thing, so… I thought that was cool, I felt comfortable enough to do that with her outside of class." (Nece)

The women's perceived extension of personal relationships beyond the classroom, as depicted in the above quote, was evident in some of their stories of their White peers inviting them

to parties and some of their non-African American roommates/dorm mates being genuinely interested in developing friendships with them. Nia described her experiences at parties with her White peers. She said,

> "…I…have actually been to some of their parties…and they are…more excited to have us there… they will give you free drinks or…everybody is interested in what you have to say or your conversation or try to dance with you…"

This perceived sense of socializing with their White peers was echoed by several other women's encounters with their non-African American roommate/dormitory mates. For example, Lisa described studying and socializing with her White roommate and dorm-mates. She explained:

> "Freshmen year…I had a White roommate and she was really sweet…we had a certain time to study, we'd go eat together…we'll both get up and go to the showers in the day and go to the showers at night together because the guys would play so many games…so we would go down to the showers together. And…she had a friend that was right across the hall, we'd all just be in each other's room or go down to the study hall and study…my roommate…wasn't the type of person…[who] goes anywhere…but she did go with me and she ended up having a really nice time. She met some of my friends from…[home who were] here [on campus]…and she just kinda let herself go for a while..."

Cristal discussed similar supportive relations with her non-African American roommates: "...I had 2 Asian roommates my sophomore year…all 3 of us lived in a triple together. I love those girls…so much and…I still talk to them, every time I see them we hug and stuff, and they introduce[d] me to a lot…in their culture and how they feel about things and I was able to introduce [them] to a lot."

In short, as the above quotes illustrated, the women recalled collaborating with some of their White peers on school related projects and developed friendships with some of their White/non-African American peers that extended beyond the classroom.

Positive Within-Group Experiences

We are family, we look out for each other. Similar to their positive interracial peer relations, 11 (78%) of the women believed that their relationships with their African American peers involved personal/social and academic support. On a personal/social note, the women suggested that they had intimate friendships with their African American peers and viewed them as "family." This perceived sense of solidarity involved African American students "protect[ing] each other" and "banding together in times of trouble" to fight for common causes on campus. The women also contended that the African American students work together to accomplish their academic goals, despite their perceived within-group competition. Halle narrated her views of camaraderie among the African American students:

> "…this is our family, we are going to protect each other…if anything happens to anyone who's…Black on this campus, all the Black people are going to get involved and all the Black people are going to be upset about it…No matter…if…we have problems about…whatever…you're my family and we're gonna get through this and…we're gonna go to the dean if we have to, to get things resolved."

The women believed that this kin-like togetherness, as described in the above quote, was evident in the African American students "reaching out to" and "being excited to see" each other especially because there is a small African American population on their campus. Aalyah highlighted these inviting instances with her African American peers: "I just think as a…predominately White campus…with such a small African American community, while they are segregated as far as demographics…I feel…that the African American community is very welcoming and warm." Halle described a similar sense of camaraderie among the African American students when she said:

"…African American [students] on this campus…comfort each other…we'll see each other walk[ing] around [on campus and we'll give each other the]…peace sign, node our head[s], [ask] 'how you doing', [and say] 'nice to see you.' And...there's a real pull to get to know people, there's a real pull to have people come to…[the Black student government] meetings or…when we have the Black family reunion or…just any events like that…the Black community really tries to reach out to the other Blacks…on campus…So here, it [is]…really nice to be able to ban together."

The women believed that this perceived soothing nature of their within-group relations increased their comfort level with each other. Nece illustrated this point by saying:

"…for the most part…the relationships that I have with my Black peers…are more positive [and]…more comfortable [than with my White peers] because of [our] similar backgrounds [and] similar cultures…there's more of a calming feeling…when you're with…people of the same race, you're not constantly trying to watch what you say or trying to…correct yourself if you say something wrong or anything like that."

Although they considered their African American peers to be family, combined forces with them to deal with issues on campus, and were comfortable being around, as the above quotes indicated, the women believed that their relations with African American students were gender specific. The women suggested that overall, they had more intimate relations with their African American peers compared to their White peers; however, their close friendships were mostly with an "inner circle" of African American women. Cristal described close relationships with her African American female counterparts: "…my close circle of friend girls are Black…I've had a lot of positive experiences with other people from different races but…I have one White friend that…I'll say is in my inner circle, the rest of everybody's Black…my inner circle of friends…[are] my girls, the one[s] I hang out [with and] talk to all the time." Janae described similar intimate friendships with her

African American female peers: “I’ve developed a few life long relationships [with my African American peers]…and a lot of [them are]…close girlfriends that I’ve had…[since] freshmen [year]...”

We want each other to succeed. This perceived intimate amity in the women’s social interactions with their African American (especially female) peers extended to the academic sphere. The women reported that they and their African American peers study together and help each other succeed academically, especially when there are only a few African Americans in a class. Janet described instances of this academic solidarity:

> “Most of the time…[if] I saw somebody [Black in]...my class, I’m like ‘hey let’s get together and study’…[because] it will feel less uncomfortable because…I came from a predominately Black high school so when I came here…[I was] a little nervous…[because] the…Caucasian students that I did have in high school in my class, they were a little urban so when you get here it’s like you see people walking around in that…hunting gear and you’re like ‘oh, I wonder where they’re from, do they know Black people?’…so I just found people that I could relate to…”

Nece discussed similar feelings of academic comfort with her African American peers. She said:

> “…when I do…have a couple of Black people in my class…we do kinda cling together and stick together…because it’s…just comfortable. And…we help each other out as much as we can ‘cause it’s kinda like ‘hey…I would like to see you get there too’ so it’s kinda like a buddy, buddy thing when I have a couple of Black people in my classes. And so that’s pretty much happens every class when I have Black people in that class.”

This sense of helping each other succeed was expanded on by Robin. She explained:

> “…I think it’s kind of I’ll help you, you help me, I feel like a lot of people here because they’re trying to advance that they want you to advance with them…because there is…not

> a huge rate of…Black college graduate[s] so…everyone [is like]…'I'm graduating, I want you to walk across the stage with me.' So everyone is…willing to [help]…especially…educationally."

In short, the women considered their relationships with their African American peers to be intimate, and socially and academically supportive. They suggested that these peers made them feel that they had others on campus who were interested in their success.

Negative Interactions

Although they reported positive academic and social interactions with their same and different race peers, the women also recalled negative encounters with their counterparts. They believed that their negative peer relations involved segregation. In fact, many of the women suggested that they did not have personal relationships with their White peers because, in their estimation, their White peers *don't want to be bothered, they don't know us,* and *some of them say and do very racist things at times.* The women also reported divisive encounters with their African American peers that made them feel like *we compete with each other.* Additionally, they felt overlooked in dating situations with African American males because to them it appeared that *African American men don't really want to be in relationships with us, they want White women.* The women contended that they were also neglected in friendship development with their White peers because it seemed to them that their White peers *want to hang with African American men more than with us.* The following sections describe these features of the women's negative interactions with their White and African American counterparts on campus.

Negative Between-Group (Black-White) Encounters

They don't want to be bothered. The women contended that their interactions with White students involved racial segregation in academic and social settings. Twelve (86%) participants felt that their White peers segregated themselves from African American students, which made the

women feel undermined and unwanted on campus. Consequently, as one woman put it, it seemed like the African American and White students attended "two separate schools."

In *academic* settings, the women recalled racially segregated in-class groups and their White peers underestimating African American students' intellectual abilities. The women believed that most of their White peers did not befriend African American students in the classroom and did not want to be bothered with African American students as group members. They also perceived their White peers as being surprised at African American students' knowledge base while in group projects, and questioning the nature of their acceptance/admission to the university (e.g., African American students accepted to fill a quota, not because of their grades and other qualifications). Stephanie described the lack of friendly engagements with her White peers in class: "…you have to be an outgoing Black person to make White friends…you have to start a conversation with a White person for…them to…be interested. Very, very few [times] do I have White people start a conversation and if it…is a White person, it would be a White male, White females no,…except if they are drunk then they are all friendly but in classroom settings, no." Nece had similar problems with her White peers not engaging her in group work. She explained:

> "…I constantly have to prove myself to a lot of my peers…[For example, in] a…class that I had and we had…a chance to…pick our [project]…partners and I was the only Black person in the class, which is fine. And…everyone…buddied up and…I ended up with this…White guy and you could tell he didn't really want to be my partner, which is fine with me. But…it was…sort of surprising to him that…I knew as much as he did, or…I knew more than what he thought I would...And that has happened several times throughout my career here...and that's something I still have to do today, prove myself to my peers."

This sense of proving their intellectual abilities was also described by Robin. She believed that:

> "…in some cases…the White students…assume like 'oh you must have barely got in'..[For example] I had a…White person ask me…like 'hey, did you have to go to the…trial program?' It's…a program…for students who didn't make the grades in high school but got in…So, I'm like 'well no, I did really good in high school.' [In fact,] my ACT was…higher than theirs…[which is something I found out] after I got through talking [with that student] but…I was really insulted by that because…I think a lot of White kids just assume that a lot [of] Black kids…[who] go here are either athletes or…got here…probably on a hope and a prayer…and as far as [Black] women I really think that they…think we're…helping…[the university] meet their quota…"

According to Ciara, this sense of White students questioning African American students' academic ability was also evident in some White peers' behaviors during test-taking instances. She explained:

> "…maybe you're taking a test and you sit beside somebody and they're covering up their paper so…abruptly as…[far as] going out of the way to not show their paper because they think you are copying off of them just because you're Black. Whereas if a White student…sat next to them then they would have not even thought…about the fact that someone would be cheating off of them. And it's not because you're trying to cheat off of them but you just notice those things, you notice a lot of things when you're…by yourself or there's no one like you around, you tend to notice a lot of things that other people do that are out of the ordinary [that] they wouldn't normally do around people."

In essence, the women's encounters with their White peers in academic settings were often considered to be racially charged, with African American students being "overlooked" and their intellectual capabilities being "undermined."

Socially, the women suggested that racial segregation was evident in their friendships and social settings on (and off) campus. Ten (71%) participants reported having minimal to no friendships with their White peers. In fact, some of them felt uncomfortable socializing outside of class with their White peers because they perceived their White peers as not wanting to "be bothered" or be friends with them outside of the classroom. Therefore, the women's encounters with their White peers mostly pertained to classroom interactions, which were also limited. Joyce illustrated limited interactions with her White peers by saying: "…sad to say, I haven't really hung out with anybody…that wasn't a minority…It's kind of different because in high school we did but here I haven't…I kinda do feel the separation lines sometimes of Whites and Blacks and…I haven't really had…positive experiences [with them outside of]…the classroom setting…yet." Two other women described similar divisive and limited encounters with their White peers. They explained:

> "…[my] relationship with White…peers [is] pretty much non-existent…I don't hang out with any White people…it's not to say that I wouldn't want to but it's just on [this] campus it's very, very racially segregated. The Black people, we have our own groups, we have our own organizations, we have our own student government…there's really nothing pushing us to be friends or to interact with White people, which is bad but that's just the way it's become, it's almost like we go to a separate school...[But] I do have a few White friends but none that I actually hang out with all the time." (Ciara)
>
> "…I'm not really friends with a lot of White people [and]…for some reason I…feel like maybe we don't have a lot in common…it seems like on this campus it's…the White students that you can talk to in class but…I don't necessarily know if they want to be bothered with…you outside of class…And on very few occasions when we hung out, I felt like we didn't really connect." (Joi)

They don't know us. As the above quote illustrated, the lack of perceived commonality between the women and White students was another reason for their limited between-group friendships. Specifically, the women believed that their White peers' lack of knowledge about and initiative to "relate" to African Americans (and their culture) stifled their friendship development. The women suggested that their White peers were "cautious" and "intimidated" to interact with African Americans, especially African American women on campus, which minimized their ability to relate to each other. Janae described her White peers' lack of cultural understanding and resulting limited friendships with them:

> "…I didn't talk to very many White people, I just didn't think that we could relate very well…[and I and other Black people questioned if they know] what it is to…be looked at differently or…what it is to struggle or always have to prove yourself…[So, my relationship with my White peers is] certainly not as strong [as with my Black peers]…I can honestly say I didn't really have any White friends who…endured...pass me just talking to 'em in class or…once the semester is over, you see them you say hi and that's it…I didn't really hang out with…any of 'em, so I would…say that that relationship was virtually nonexistent..."

Similarly, Ebony believed that some of her White peers had limited exposure to African American culture, which affected interracial peer interactions on campus. She stated:

> "…some [White] people I met are…from small towns, they're not used to interacting with African American students. And…I've had some people openly tell me '…where I'm from…I don't really see a lot of Black people.' So, it's kinda…a shock to them when they get to college and see Black people in college 'cause they have the impression that all Black people are stupid… because they come from small towns that are really racist…they're trying to…embrace difference[s] but it's kinda like it's all new for them."

Aalyah echoed similar views of White students not knowing about African American culture. She said: "…people like…my first freshmen year roommate [who was White] and her [White] friends and some others on campus, I don't think they really wanna be bothered with minorities or African Americans, I don't think, because they don't understand and they don't wanna understand."

This sense of the White students not knowing and interacting with African American students was also perceived to be present in racial segregation and racism in social settings on (and off) campus. Specifically, the women recalled their peers (both White and Black) mostly congregating in same-race groups in the dining halls, common seating areas, and at extra-curricular events. Stephanie described racially segregated peer interactions: "…there's not a lot of mixing of cultures between Black and Whites…and not even just Black and Whites but Asians and Middle Easte[r]ns as well, its not a lot of mixing, its so segregated…so [when] you have…Black activities and White activities here, you don't see Black faces or White faces at either [events]..." Similar to segregation in extra-curricular activities, Ebony discussed racial separation in campus facilities. She said:

> "…if you go to a dining hall, you'll see all Black[s] sitting in one area or if…you go over to the other side down the hall, you'll see all White[s sitting together]. And in the student center…they have a spot called the Black hole where you walk into the Black hole, it's all athletes, you know…all the Black people are just there talking…And it's kinda like White people kinda know this, they clear that area…'cause that's the Black hole, that's where every Black…person on campus goes if they're gonna be in [the center]…[Also] if you…go over into Greek town it's kinda like you get these funny stares like 'why are you over here? This is…the White part of campus…why are you over here?...this is our area, stay out of our area."

The women believed that this lack of venturing out of their racial groups on campus was also evident in their peers frequenting same-race dance clubs in the community. In fact, the women contended that when they or their African American peers attended mostly White local bars, dance clubs or activities, they were stared at, which they perceived as their White peers questioning their belongingness in these establishments. As a result, the women felt "uncomfortable" and "unwanted." Ciara narrated these unsettling instances:

> "…I definitely think that…[the university] is very…racially segregated…we have our own Black student government…[and]…places that we may go out to. There's places that Black people will go to the club or…there's…different clubs that White people may go to. Now you may see a sporadic few [Black] people going to the White clubs, like I may go to…a lot of [the] White clubs, but generally Black people only attend Black…events…[because, for example] it maybe in the club or something like that and they see a whole bunch of Black people coming in and they're just staring, wondering why are they here…so when you go out it's kind of weird because it's…segregated within the club. And…you get a lot of looks from…White girls…or White males and…it makes you feel uncomfortable, it's like you're not suppose to be there…"

Some of them say and do very racist things at times. Along with this perception of racial division in group interactions on and off campus, the women believed that they encountered overt racism, which they contended decreased their comfort level on (and off) campus. For example, Janet recalled a White peer writing in one of the student body newspapers that African American students should remain on their side of campus. She explained:

> "…[the White Greek organizations] had these… philanthropy signs that they hang up during home coming, they're trying to compete and raise money, so…they tried to say that one of the members of a Black sorority came and snatched their philanthropy sign down.

> And she (referring the president of a White sorority) published…[a] pretty long letter in the [Greek newspaper] about how 'they need to stay in their own world and out of ours and…things like that and it was really racist."

Other women recalled similar overt racist encounters involving their White peers using the "N" word (and other racial comments) during altercations between their White and African American peers. They narrated:

> "I've heard the nigger word a lot from people...There was one instance where I was working in…[a campus pizza shop] and…this guy actually got kicked out of school for this incident, Black guy…there were maybe a group of 5 or 6 White fraternity students and he, the Black guy, was in the front and he was coming to pick up his pizza but it wasn't ready and there was this group of 6 White guys behind him and I guess they were anxious to go, looked like they were drunk and smelt like liquor and everything, and because he wouldn't move he had to be a nigger…He turned around and knocked him (referring to the White guy who called him a nigger) down the stairs…so because he (referring to the Black male) got offended by him (referring to the White male) calling him a nigger…and he knocked him down the stairs, he got kicked out of school and is not able to return here." (Lisa)

This example of their White peers using racial slurs was also echoed by Janet's experiences. She stated that:

> "one of my [Black female] friends got in a fight with a White girl in the dorm…the Caucasian girl…called her a Black ho over the phone, and my friend, she…[lives] off campus, she came to the dorm looking for the girl, and she was hiding in one of the guy's rooms and they were harboring…her in there and…she was just saying…stuff behind the door, like racist stuff so finally they kicked her out, the guys, they were like 'un-un, like you got to go.' So when she got in the hallway my friend was…waiting around the corner and

she just…decked her when she came around the corner. And…after the fight, the girl walked to the hospital and…said some Black girl hit me…[and] tried to say 'oh it's because her boyfriend like me,'…[and] just made up a whole little story."

Similarly, Janae discussed racial encounters she had with some of her White peers. She explained:

"…in my junior year…I think it was…7 or 9 of us [who]…went to…do service work at different service organization [for alternative spring break]. And…a lot of the organizations we worked with were African American organizations like we did homeless shelter[s]…[and] worked with inner city youth and most of them were African American[s]…And…when…we worked with the inner city youth…[a particular White girl who consistently made racial comments] would say things [like]…'just think I have to work with kids like that'…and I was just like 'why are you saying these comments and you're a social work major?' And it was almost like you knew that it was kind of targeted towards the race…like Black kids are rowdy, Black kids [are] disrespectful and all this other stuff, I'm just like 'would you please stop it'…and I mean [there]…would…[be] times…I just would not even want to talk to them (referring to her White peers on this trip)…and they knew I was very distant, they could sense that…I was very, very uncomfortable and very upset with some of the comments that were going on."

These encounters, which the women considered to be overtly racist, engendered discomfort among the women, as illustrated in the previous quote. According to the women, their uneasiness intensified especially when they saw some of their peers participating and initiating a KKK demonstration (that occurred approximately one year prior to this study) in the city's downtown area. For example, Nia described being offended by KKK events on campus: "I have seen…some [things] that have been…offensive. Like say for instance…when they would

have…the little gatherings…with people who have their little confederate flags up or…talk about the KKK or whatever…it's not actually hurting me but it is offensive to see and it's offensive to see that it is allowed on campus." Similarly, Ciara narrated her feelings about graphic displays of racism/White supremacy. She said:

> "…there was…some fraternity having a theme party and…they had on all these bandanas and they had…the black stuff that football players put on their face[s], I don't know what it's called…and all these kind of urban clothing and we asked them…what kind of party it was, and they couldn't answer but it was obvious they were…having a theme party…we [later] found out…[that] the theme party was ghetto. And automatically that's associated with…Black people being ghetto but they are not really aware of the real meaning of ghetto…obviously because anyone can live in the ghetto, it's just a term for a place, not necessarily a people. So, I just found that interesting that people…were still doing that and…the whole thing with the Nazi march here, it was just really an…eye opener for a lot of people on our campus because it's like racism hasn't…[gone] anywhere. And I know I as a Black female was scared…because I can't fight a Nazi if he tries to attack me or anything like that so it was just really…scary to see that…people are still that uneducated about Black people, that they have to be so ignorant and just mean about things after all these years."

Essentially, the above social encounters, which the women considered to be racially charged, minimized their friendship development with some of their White peers and left them feeling "unsafe," "frustrated," and "unwelcome" on (and off) campus.

Negative Within Group (Black-Black) Encounters

We compete with each other. Similar to their perceived separation from their White peers, the women believed that they encountered division and competition among their African American

peers (mostly in social settings). Several women suggested that this sense of competition involves "African Americans doing things that hold them back," which, according to them, is a long standing with-in group problem. In this study's context, the African American students compete with each other for limited resources (e.g., social status—fraternity/sorority membership, athletics, grades, African American eligible males). Twelve (86%) women perceived their African American peers as not supporting each other and separating themselves into social status cliques, which they believed resulted in conflict between cliques. Cristal narrated African American students' general lack of support for each other: "…a lot of…[the African American students] are not supportive of each other…everybody's in a race to beat each other or to be better than one another…Everybody talks about each other…And I just feel like…[as] African Americans we have the tendency to…down each other…and I just feel…it's something within the community." Joi had similar accounts of African American students' unsupportive interactions. She said:

> "…the African American people on campus are…so…against each other…And [this past semester]…somebody on our campus…started a blog…talking about…all the Black people like putting everybody business out…[there] like you name it, something that you thought was secret, you thought didn't nobody know, I promise it was on that blog…And I was like 'see this is ridiculous …we try to get along and this is what we do, we stab each other in the back, make blogs, put everybody['s] business out."

According to the women, this perceived general lack of support for each other was compounded by African American students separating themselves into groups based on social status and hometown locations. Stephanie described the cliquish nature of African American students' interactions by saying "…it's…very, very cliquish [with the Black students here] and…if you don't have a clique, you can't break into a clique…[because] to break into a clique is almost impossible…because they usually go from freshmen year to senior year." The women suggested

that this separateness among the various social groups was “Blacks try[ing] to establish a class…[or] a ranking system in college.” Joyce described the social ranking system:

> “…there’s a division in our own race…you have the ones that…people say act White…[and] those people aren’t accepted into the community…And then there’s a separation between the athletes and everybody else…And then there’s…division between Greeks and then everybody else because they have a bond, they have their family and then it’s almost like everybody else is over here even though you’re cool with some of those people, it’s still almost like a line of division.”

Nia had similar views of African American students being separated based on Greek organization affiliation. She said: “…sometimes I feel like the sororities and fraternities try to…kinda pull themselves away from us and try to make it seem like they are like a upper division of Black people instead of…being a part of us.” According to Robin, this ranking system also includes hometown differences. She explained:

> “...I kinda feel like…[the Black students interactions are] broken up into cities [based on] where… [they’re] from like I’m from [my hometown]…there’ll be a [another hometown] group, there’ll be a [yet another hometown] group and it’ll be like a [fourth hometown] group or something. So you kinda just associate with [people from] where you’re from, and then…you kinda intermingle.”

Hometown and social status were not the only reasons for the perceived within-group separation. The women believed that interactions with their African American peers also included gender competition. They contended that “Black women are…pitted against each other” while competing for academic achievements, social ranking on campus, and eligible Black male partners. In the women’s estimation, these competitive gendered interactions often include conflict between the women and their friendship groups. Nece talked about competition among her African

American female counterparts:"…the African American females…on the campus are very competitive… whether it's for…men on campus, or…being very fashionable on campus and…they are competitive [over grades]." This competition over grades was highlighted by Halle who said:

> "…I think that…Black women want to be better than Black men…[I'm] not gonna lie sometimes I feel that…[For example] in [the summer minority program]…[t]here was a guy…[who] pretty much… ace[d] every test, he had…the highest GPA of everybody…And we all were upset…it was part of us that was happy for him that…he's doing great things but at the same time we were all upset because he's a man…we're women and if women don't have anything else, they should have their education…'cause we are already the bottom of the bottom some say…so we were just very [upset]. I mean it was always something…to try to…beat him. Like if we did not beat him then we just felt like we were…failures…So, it was just kinda like you gotta beat the men, you've got to."

African American men don't really want to be in relationships with us, they want White women. This perceived sense of gender competition was also highlighted in the women's depictions of difficult dating issues with African American men on campus. First, several women talked about general negative dating experiences with their African American male counterparts, which mostly included lack of commitment from these men. Janae described African American men's focus on sexual relations rather than forming monogamous relationship with Black women. She said:

> "…I don't think most people worry about actually finding a relationship, maybe the females are 'cause…you come to college and you think that you're just gonna find…your ideal guy…[but] a lot of times it's not like that. But I think…a lot of people [on campus] are just caught up on…sex so they're not really looking for…anything really serious or special…they're just in it for the moment…"

Ciara had similar accounts of African American men not wanting committed relationships. She explained:

> "…as far as males go…a lot of guys on this campus just want…to have sex, they don't necessarily want girlfriends…and they blame it on being in college…[So]…as far as relationships…with males it's very hard to even…continue talking to someone for a long time because it seems like something always happens…Black males are afraid to commit and I find that as being a[n] issue…with a lot of females and Black males, is that Black males never want to commit, they don't want to be in a relationship, they just want to have the freedom to do whatever they want…"

This perceived lack of commitment was characteristic of many of the women's views of dating among the African American students on campus.

Second, 11 (79%) women believed that African American men tended to date White women more often than African American women, which they contended created competition among these women. The women suggested that that not only were they having difficulty forming monogamous relationships with these men, African American women were also competing with each other and with White women for the limited number of eligible African American males on campus. Nece discussed the competitive nature of dating on campus by saying: "I would say [for] the Black female…in general…[interracial dating is] a negative thing just because…there's so little Black men on campus already and now they're not only competing with…Black women, they're competing with White women on campus, which could be a negative thing." This competition not only included African American males frequently dating White female students while "overlooking" African American women, it also involved the perception that White women were "turning their nose up at" African American women and "flaunting" their interracial relationships in African American women's face. Hence, the women believed that African American women's dating

experiences with African American men are limited, practically non-existent with White men, and tension- filled with White women.

Ebony described interracial dating on campus: "…you tend to see…a lot of the…White girls going towards the African American males. And…it's mainly because…a lot of the African American males are…athletes and a lot of White women are drawn to that…" Halle witnessed similar interracial attraction between the White females and African American males on campus. She explained:

> "…majority of the Black men that attend this college are athletes, which opens up a…whole different ball game because there's a lot of…Black [male] athletes now with the White women…And…a lot of my friends have dated athletes, I've talked to a couple of athletes and it…doesn't work out…none of the friends that I've talked to or any of the guys I've dated, it's never worked out with the athletes and then it turns out that they'll be with a White girl..."

In dealing with and understanding their observations of frequent interracial dating on campus, the women contended that African American males date White female students because they perceive White women to be more accommodating (sexually, financially) and less argumentative in relationships than African American women. The women believed that this perception makes African American men think that they can have their way more with White than African American women. Janae illustrated this point:

> "…sometimes you do…have the Black…athlete…dating or…in a relationship or…just merely having sex with a White female…just because this whole idea that White females are more spontaneous…than Black female…like they're willing to do anything…[Black men] can use them for their advantage and…do whatever they want with them, [the White women] give them money, things that are sexual, things like that…"

Lisa echoed this view of White women being more easily exploited by African American males. She said:

> "There are a lot of Black men that like to be in a relationship with a White woman because they are afraid to be in a relationship with a Black woman…some Black men think that White women are more easy going than a Black woman, that they can say anything…[or] do anything and there's no consequences behind it or if they need anything that that White woman will provide it. But with the Black woman they know that they can't get away with anything, they can't do or say whatever they wanna say…[Also] as far as freakiness…White women will go that extra mile and do anything sexually for a Black man and vice versa. But a Black woman, yeah you got some out there…[who] are…extra freaky [as the] White woman but it's very hard to come by…not saying Black people don't but you [are] more likely to engage in threesomes there on campus with White women than you are with Black women. And I know of football players that have done that and that's why they are there because their nose [are]…wide open, they like things like that…"

Basically, the women believed that their dating experiences with African American males on campus involved minimal monogamous relationships, engendered competition between African American and White women, and resulted in frequent interracial coupling due to their perception of African American men feeling less challenged in these relationships.

Common Negative Within and Between Group Experiences

They want to hang with African American men more than with us. This intertwining negative effect of race and gender in their dating experiences, as described above, was also perceived to be part of the women's general social experiences with their White counterparts. Nine (64%) of the participants described their White female peers as distancing themselves from the African American women on campus but socializing with (and dating) the African American men on

campus. Moreover, these respondents perceived their White counterparts (regardless of gender) relating to African American men better than to African American women, which they believe led to African American males (than African American women) having more White friends on campus. Lisa described this issue by saying:

> "…I would say some of the White girls here on campus would kinda distance themselves from you …maybe they didn't think you fit into their group or knew as much as they knew or something like that but…you would always see them with the Black males here on campus. And then you're like what's the difference between me and them, but we all know that difference…"

Janae highlighted similar issues with the White students befriending African American males more than African American females. She said:

> "…I think that White people have a easier time of talking to Black males than they do…[to] Black females…and…sometimes…they're not as open…with you as they could be with Black males. And I think that's more or less because of that…heavy stigma…of the angry Black woman and that Black women have attitudes, you know, Black women are this, and Black women are that…I think you can more or less see that within the friendships…[because] more Black males have more White female…and…male friends than you see Black females having more friendships outside of their race…it's like 'oh, he's a cool Black guy' it's like a token Black friend or some 'em."

This interest in befriending African American males and not African American females was also considered to be evident in respondents' negative experiences with their White roommates. The women contended that their White female roommates did not want to be around African American students, especially the women. Ebony described her experience with White females being hesitant to be around African American women:

> "I [had] a White roommate [in freshmen year]. And all though…her boyfriend was Black, she still was intimidated by Black women, and…if my friends came in, she'll be like 'ok, I'm leaving' or she would call my cell phone like 'are you guys gone yet?'…she was really intimidated by Black women. And…it got…to the point where…she changed rooms because…she didn't like a lot of Black girls being around or Black guys, although she dated a Black male. It was kinda like…'I like the guy but I don't like his people'…and you [could] really see that…she was…very intimidated by African American women and it kinda offended me to know that she could date…a[n] African American male but then not…be able to interact with African American women."

Joyce recalled similar instances with her White roommate distancing herself from African American students. She said:

> "…I was living in a suite last semester and…if any of my friends were to come in…the 2 people…[who] lived in there would be…stand-offish because of the color and I guess they weren't really used to that aspect…[For example, when my friends came over, my suite mates would be] like…'hi' and then…go in their room or leave and…maybe come back when they think..[my friends are] gone…"

In essence, as the above quotes indicated, the women believed that their negative encounters with their peers involved racial and gender segregation, which left them feeling overlooked in dating situations and friendship development with their African American male and White counterparts.

Summary

Overall, the women reported that they had divisive yet supportive academic and social instances with their African American and non-African American peers. One (7%) woman stressed that her within and between- group peer interactions were generally positive, although she had some instances of perceived racism, sexism and within-group segregation. Two (14%) women

considered their peer relations to be negative due to the frequency with which they encountered racism, sexism, and within-group division with their White and African American peers. Moreover, one (7%) woman believed that although she had both supportive and discriminatory experiences with her peers, her overall relations with these individuals were neither overly positive nor negative; she considered her peer interactions to be neutral.

However, 10 (71%) women believed that their experiences with their peers were both intensely discriminatory and supportive. These women believed that although they encountered multiple instances of division (i.e., racism, sexism, status) from their White and African American peers, they also had frequent and varied forms of supportive instances with these peers (especially African American peers). Hence, these women felt that their negative experiences were counterbalanced by these positive encounters, which made their peer relations seem balanced. Combining these figures, 12 (86%) women considered their peer interactions to be either neutral, positive, or balanced, while only three (21%) women viewed their encounters more negatively.

In essence, the majority of the women in this study believed that despite encountering negative race, gender, and status segregation with some of their White peers and African American peers, which created some level of negativity between them and these individuals, their receiving supportive assistance from and relations with their African American peers diminished the impact of the divisionary encounters they had. However, those negative racial, gender, and status based encounters influenced how often (and from whom) they sought help (and subsequent interactions).

Psychosocial Impact of Social Experiences

As highlighted in the Introduction section, previous research has found that African American college students' social adjustment on predominately White campuses encompasses their social experiences and adjustment strategies (e.g., cognitions, emotions, and behaviors) they

employ to deal with these experiences. Hence, now that the specifics of their social experiences have been presented, the attention is turned to how these women adjusted to their circumstances.

Overall, the women believed that their experiences engendered mixed psychological (e.g., self esteem/worth, emotional comfort on campus) and social (e.g., racial views) outcomes. On the negative end, the perceived negative racial and gender encounters left some women questioning their academic worth and belongingness on campus by asking *Am I good enough, do I belong here?* While on a positive note, others felt empowered as African American women believing that as a result of these negative experiences, *I'm a better woman for it, I'm stronger and wiser.* Additionally, the women felt unwelcome due to perceived negative racial interactions with their White faculty/staff and peers, and negative dating encounters with African American males; however, they felt most comfortable interacting and developing intimate friendships with their African American counterparts. According to the women, because *it hurts sometimes how they treat you here, we keep our guard up* and *it's more comfortable being with other African American on campus, they get me*. Moreover, the women purported that negative racial experiences changed their racial views by saying *I look at White people more critically now* but *I'm a little more understanding of White people and race issues.* The sections below describe these nuances of the psychosocial effects of the women's social experiences.

Positive Impact

I'm a better woman for it, I'm stronger and wiser. The women believed that their negative and positive experiences enhanced their personal growth (e.g., positive self-valuing, increased social comfort with African American faculty/staff and peers, better social understanding). As a result, they felt that they learned a lot from their experiences, especially the negative ones. In fact, eleven (79% of the) women maintained that their ***self-esteem*** was positively impacted by their experiences because these experiences made them feel "stronger," "confident," "wiser," and proud

to be African American women. The women also suggested that they learned about and developed themselves as social beings while dealing with their positive and negative experiences. Nia and Cristal discussed their personal growth:

> "[The lack of help from my White professors]… made me a stronger person…it's made me realize that you can't always rely on people…to help you and get you along…I feel like this whole experience has made me want to…succeed that much more, made me want to fight that much more just to make it." (Nia)
>
> "[my experiences]…definitely have made me wiser…I feel like you need positive and negative experiences in order…to understand life…a lot of the negative experiences that I experienced…[helped me get a] totally different mindset…and underst[an]d why I went through…[those experiences] a little bit better…and [I'm] a lot less critical…because those positive experiences that I began to have…in the latter part of my college career really helped balance out those negative ones…And so…they've definitely just made me…feel like a more well-rounded person…[and] they have really…matured me and just made me a better person for…society." (Cristal)

This perceived sense of personal improvement extended into the women's racial identity. Janae explained this point:

> "Well I think my experiences have definitely…made me more aware of myself in terms as a woman and as being Black. And I would say more or less it's being a woman because I think a lot of times we tend to see ourselves as being Black or White and not necessarily being man or woman…And I've learned…just to love yourself, just love who you are and love the way God made you physically and…love being a Black woman…when you're Black and a female and young…you have to look at yourself in terms of all 3 of those

things and not just one or the other… I think over all…[my experiences] just helped me to be a stronger person…"

As the above quotes depicted, the women felt empowered by their experiences.

"It's more comfortable being with other African Americans on campus, they get me."

Moreover, ***emotionally***, in spite of recalling divisive instances with some of their African American peers, the women felt overwhelmingly more comfortable with their African American (than White) peers. The women believed that this within-group emotional comfort was due to them not having to face racial discrimination or constantly explain their cultural practices to their African American peers as they do when interacting with their White peers. As a result of this perceived racial solidarity, most of the women surrounded themselves with their African American peers on campus. Halle described reasons for surrounding herself with mostly African American students:

"I…kinda surround myself with a lot of Black people. I don't really surround myself with a lot of White people, I mean I have friends and everything but…I surround myself with Black people. [Because in college, I've had White peers]…not knowing about Black people…[for example, they ask]…do I call you Black or do I can you African American or can I touch your hair [or]…how do you do your hair like that?"

Ciara conveyed similar comfort levels with her African American peers. She said:

"'…I don't really interact with…other students besides African American students on a regular basis besides class or when I go to work…I'm surrounded by African Americans all the time just because that's where my comfort zone is, that's where I feel comfortable…it didn't used to be like that when I was in high school but it's become that way just because I'm not interacting with White students like I normally do and not because it's a choice, it's just feels like they don't want to be around African Americans and we don't travel…in the same circles."

The women recalled comparable increased within-group comfort with their African American faculty/staff. According to the women, because they observe their African American faculty and staff taking interest in their success and personal life instead of simply focusing on "business as usual" as some of their White faculty/staff, they feel "more comfortable [with]," "supported [by]," and "not judged [by]" the African American faculty and staff. Lisa described this increased comfort with her African American faculty/staff:

> "…there were a lot of…[resources on campus] that I could go to but they all were Black. And I felt more comfortable…going to the Black people then I did the White people because…some of 'em would look at you like 'shouldn't you already know that?' But if I go to…one of our Black professors [or the staff of the minority program], they would be like 'ok you should start here and if you don't finish here then come back and see me and we'll see what step you missed'...I felt more comfortable there than I did going and ask[ing] a White person because they didn't really understand me and understand what I was really saying…they were trying to tell…me what I was saying [rather] then actually hearing what I was saying. So, I hardly ever went to anybody White for help or to solve a problem or to strategize..."

Janet also sought assistance from African American faculty/staff due to her increased comfort with them. She explained:

> "…if I felt like I couldn't get any help from my Caucasian faculty members or my advisors, I just go to someone within my race that I can relate to…that I don't feel like they're gonna judge me because I'm African American…[and who] knows that I'm not dumb…So…I really don't go to any of my Caucasian…instructors 'cause…I kinda feel uncomfortable so if I had a question, I feel like they (referring to Black professors and staff members) would help me out a little bit more…I feel more comfortable with my African American

instructors…because when we go outside and…try to get other stuff done it doesn't seem like we're getting any help so we have to go to [minority programs] and talk to our African American advisors to feel like we're comfortable on this campus."

As the preceding quotes described, the women felt understood and supported by their African American counterparts, which made them feel more comfortable being on campus.

"I'm a little more understanding of White people and race issues." The women believed that their ***racial views*** were also positively altered as a consequence of their experiences on campus. They reported being "more mature" and "better able to deal with and understand society." According to the women, their experiences led to changes in their views of race relations and increased their understanding of people (e.g., decreased anger, frustration, negativity, and critical nature toward others). Joyce discussed her improved understanding of human interactions:

"[These experiences are]…just making me a stronger person, better prepared for the real world and just letting you know that everybody doesn't think the same about you and everybody doesn't have the same preconceived notions. And that there may be people out there…[who] are ignorant and those are just things in life that you have to deal with 'cause everybody is not gonna like you and everybody is not gonna get along with you. People may not like you because of the color of your skin or…you may not get that job because your name is not Joe or Susie but it's just something I…learn…to deal with but at the same time wanna make changes about it as in what I can do here at school...So, both positive and negative…it makes you a well-rounded person in the end."

Similarly, Halle and Janet reported enhanced social understanding due to their experiences. They explained:

"I think everything has made me stronger [and]…made me see what the world is like…I'm here with people of all different races…backgrounds…[and] cultures…I [have been]

exposed to a lot…and I just think it…really developed me as a person and really let me see life…I can pretty much deal with any experience that's thrown my way…I can effectively communicate with people from all over…[For example]…when I'm in class and I…hear people's thoughts, I'm definitely a better listener now…because [I] used to just be like 'no how can you think that and what is wrong…' but if you really sit down and listen to people and people give their explanations and just like 'ok…I can understand that.' I'm not as egocentric, I'm not as…one track as I used to be." (Halle)

"…I'm just…more aware now, my eyes are really open to what is going on in the world. I…watch the news more, I pay attention to things that are said on campus more…I even sometimes…look in the police blogger in the [student newspaper], and…you notice the…African American names in there like 'oh, why are we having so many African American students that are getting arrested by [the university] pd?' Like stuff like that, I'm just very aware now, more so then I ever was…and all I can do sometimes is shake my head..." (Janet)

In addition to being more aware of racial issues, as depicted in the above quotes, the women also believed that they developed a more balanced view of their counterparts on campus. Despite having perceived racist and sexist encounters with others on campus, the women had positive views of their counterparts and experiences. Aalyah described her balanced views of individuals on campus:

"I think that there are a lot of great professors here, I think there's a lot of great students…I've had my bad experiences with professors and with students alike but that doesn't mean everybody on the campus is like that. That doesn't mean that every professor I cross will be great or horrible…"

The women surmised that their morphed views of their counterparts on campus, as indicated in the above quote, increased their ability to understand, interact, and accept these individuals. Stephanie described being more accepting of divisive experiences on campus:

> "I'm a lot more accepting of the people on campus then I was my freshmen year…now I see more of how…race relations work and...[I'm] more accepting to racism…[I do] not react to [it], I just brush it off where as my freshmen year I would have been a lot more offended, I would have felt like it would be more of a personal attack. Now I feel like it's not me personally, its just Black people generally or…women generally…[So] if I was put into a position where I was discriminated against or [heard] sexist comments…I know how to handle those situations better. I know how to keep my cool and yet get my point across…I'm a lot less angry…then I was coming here and at the same time I'm more angry…I'm less angry…'cause I know it's just not me…I'm not [the only one], I don't get offended as easily but…it makes me more angry because now I know it's a societal problem and the media…But then again if you're easily offended…or get angry easily, you're gonna be angry all of the time and you'll never be happy. So, it's a balancing act that you have to do…you just…have to pick and choose your battles."

Essentially, as depicted above, the women had positive views of some of their White counterparts on campus; however they felt most comfortable being around African Americans on campus and had high regards for themselves as African American women.

Negative Impact

Am I good enough, do I belong here? Despite reporting positive impacts of perceived race- and gender-related experiences with their White counterparts on campus, ten (71%) women indicated that negative experiences with their faculty/staff and peers adversely affected their *self-worth and emotional comfort* on campus. It seemed that because these individuals were perceived

as questioning their intelligence, being uninterested in their success, and treating them differently compared to their White peers, the women questioned their worth and fit on campus. Nece and Nia described negative experiences with the teaching staff that made them question their own intelligence and ability to succeed in demanding majors. They explained:

> "…[a teacher] told me that…[because] I didn't know the constant of how fast light travels…off hand…I really shouldn't be [in my]…major…oh man…I was embarrassed because she said it loud…around a lot of [White] people [and it made me] doubtful of my major…myself and…how smart I was or [how] intelligent I thought I was. But, it's…stuff like that…I think about when I study…like I make sure I know as much as I possibly can because I don't want anyone saying anything like that to me and making me feel like I'm not worthy of having that type of major…" (Nece)

> "…a lot of times I have actually had to question myself like 'well dang am I as smart as them?…[C]an I compete with them? Am I good?" Because how come…this teacher isn't running over here to…greet me. How come this teacher isn't making sure that I got a job? How come this teacher isn't…taking that extra step or going out of his way to get me to work in his lab?"…so it…has made me feel like I have to work that much harder and sometimes when you don't succeed as well as you want to it kinda is hard on your…self-esteem." (Nia)

In addition to undermining their academic worth (as depicted in the above quotes), the women suggested that the perceived negative experiences prompted them to question the effectiveness of their social and academic efforts and belongingness on campus. Ebony explored the utility of her social contributions and academic efforts on campus:

> "…with the negative experiences…sometimes you kinda…question yourself like 'is what I'm doing…significant' because you get people questioning you so it's kinda like alright,

well maybe I'm not doing enough or maybe I should do more to prove to them that…I'm [not] just another number on the campus, that I'm actually involved, I'm actually doing something and that…I'm succeeding at what I'm doing…[So] sometimes it seems like…my effort or…African American [students] in general like the effort isn't being…appreciated or recognized on campus. Like if we're trying to work hard to get something done in…the Black community or just trying to bring groups together, sometimes I feel like people question what we're doing. And so it kinda…make[s] you feel like…is…what I'm doing…really being recognized. Or should I still be doing it because it seems like it's not making a difference trying to…bring people together, or just trying to get something done or working really hard at school. And so sometimes…[it] kinda discourage[s] you but then you have to…realize that what you're doing is for a purpose so…if it's not working right now, eventually it will…[An example of being questioned would be]...just working hard in school..[for] instance…you put forth a lot of effort…trying to get a project done or something and it seem[s] like…they start to question like maybe you should change and do something different…that's what kinda discourages you…for people to think that you're incapable of doing something or…finishing something you started."

This questioning of fit on campus led Lisa to temporarily drop out of school. She explained:

"…when I started to meet people and I started to move on as I became a sophomore and junior, that's when the issues occurred about race…and…the professors not wanting to help you as they help other students…[and that is] enough to make you just wanna stop going and say it's not for you...[because] when you have all those stressors on top of your class work…then you're just kinda left with nowhere to go, you're kinda up against the wall…I used to feel as if I wasn't worth being here on campus…It hurts really bad to hear some people say the things that they say to other people and they don't even think about it

twice. So I mean it kinda… brought me to that point where I just dropped out and I said maybe…[the university] is not for me but then I…talked to myself and I'm like 'you went 3 years, why drop out…you got one more year to go, why would you drop out?'…it's just kinda hurtful 'cause for a while I would walk around campus and wouldn't speak to nobody because I didn't fit in, well to them I didn't fit in and I felt that way myself. So I got to the point where I just viewed myself as an outsider…"

It hurts sometimes how they treat you here. Emotionally, as the previous quote indicated, some of the women felt "hurt," "overwhelm[ed]" "sad," "depressed," unsupported, and not belonging on the campus. They also felt scared and amazed at the occurrence of perceived racism on campus and that they "can't believe racism [is] still happening". For instance, Nia described African American students feeling unsupported by the faculty when she said: "…for us Black students…we feel like…we are not getting the attention or help me we need from the [White] faculty…[and] …we kinda feel like ok well its up to us…[we're] on our own, we are just going to have to figure [things] out on our…own and hopefully make it." Similarly, Ciara discussed feeling hurt by the perceived exclusionary tactics of some White individuals on campus: "…sometimes…it hurts when you have…negative things happen like with a teacher…and you feel like…they're being racist towards you or…if a White student…calls you a nigger or…the racist party that they had…" Aalyah further described saddened moods as a result of her experiences. She said: "sometimes I am really depressed about attending here and I'm depressed about my decision to come here…" Ebony expanded on the negative emotional consequences of the perceived racial experiences on campus by saying:

"…with different experience[s] sometimes it makes me feel like some people are just…racist and probably won't change…and that's with the professors and students, it kinda just makes you…feel like ok…after a while you can only talk for so long, [you

can]…only say so much until somebody understands. Some people are just not going to understand and…it makes…you feel like…you can't win for losing pretty much."

The women's bruised feelings were further amplified by their perceptions of difficult dating experiences. For instance, some of the women felt "hurt," "left out" of, and "frustrated" by the dating scene due to their observations of frequent interracial dating between African American men and White women on campus. The women indicated that they questioned their worth as women and looked elsewhere (e.g., consider interracial dating themselves, on neighboring higher education campuses) for partners due to interracial dating on their campus. However, the women claimed that African American men considered interracial dating between African American women and White men to be taboo, which created a double standard in these women's dating experiences on campus. As a result, some of the women and their African American female peers look down on the African American men and White women in interracial relationships.

Aalyah described African American women's hurt emotions as a result of interracial dating. She said:

"…[interracial dating is] painful sometimes…especially when Black female students are looking to meet Black male students, it's hard….[especially] when you're trying to show interest in an African American male on campus and they're not showing that same interest back, it's just like what do I have to do? And then when you see they're not interested in you because they wanna White female student, it's just like bitter sweet because it's like you tried so hard and they went to [the White women] like a magnet…"

Halle narrated similar views of African American women feeling hurt and questioning their self-worth due to interracial dating on campus. She also described African American women's negative views of White women in interracial relationships. She said:

> "…Black women don't feel like they're adequate enough for the Black men on this campus…as far as athletes go…it's kinda like '…why am I not good enough….why do you need the White girl over the Black girl?…you have me in your face, I'm educated and I'm Black…and you're going to college, we're on the same page path but…you chose to go to the White girl'…[So] there's so many names…out now [for White girls who date Black guys. For example,]… there's a girl that…I use to work with [on campus]…she's engaged to a Black guy who used to be a football player up here and she was just talking about…people call her snow bunny, which is…a term used for…White girls who date Black male athletes. And she was like…'Black women just look down at me and look down at him,' and I was like 'yeah I know exactly what you are talking about."

Similarly, Robin discussed African American women's unfavorable views of interracial dating on campus and the double standard it creates. Her account follows:

> "[Interracial dating is]…frown upon especially with the Black females because…there is not as many Black males and…it kinda offends the Black females on campus that…the athletes, because they are more popular [or] something like that they don't want to date in their race…I also think it bothers people because…the Black men here can date White girls but you would…rarely see a Black girl who's dating a White guy. And…if you do, then it's a huge deal, it's not…"oh my god…he's dating…the White girl so and so'…But if I were to bring a White guy into…a party, they're like 'oh my god why is she here with him, oh I can't believe she's in here.' It'll be a…bigger deal for a Black girl to date a White guy then it's for a Black guy to date a White girl…So when they see…a Black girl who's…holding herself up high and who's here for an education and…she's with the White man then it's…'oh she must [think she's] too good for…[a] Black guy' even though it's not the same…for a Black guy [dating a White girl]."

Essentially, as the above quotes indicate, the women experienced what they considered to be unfair treatment in their dating experiences and interactions with some White faculty/staff, which left them feeling undervalued.

"We keep our guard up." In the same vein of experiencing decreased social comfort on campus, a few women reported being "guard[ed]" during their peer interactions. According to the women, their defensive stance was due to the perceived racism they experienced from their White peers and within-group division with their African American peers. Halle and Stephanie described guarded interactions with their White peers. They explained:

> "Black students and White students, you always have your guard up. Like even me, I always have my guard up 'cause you just never know…there are some White people who are just very well meaning…[they] want to see you do well. But there are some…[who] are out to…see the exact opposite…happen…just like how we had the Nazi march…there were a lot of students there and half of them were not supporters but some of them were. And it just kinda opened up your eyes, ok these are the same people sitting in class with you, who may be smiling in your face, but they are out here saying pretty much if you're not White, you are nobody. So, I always have my guard up, always. And I think just as the Black people on this campus…we always have our guard up, we [are] like 'yeah…you're (referring to White counterparts) cool but if…you step at me wrong, if you cross this boundary then we're going to have a problem…" (Halle)
>
> "…[the negative peer interactions] makes me more isolate myself…It makes me…not as comfortable to just open up to people…[And] it makes me cautious cause I'm always afraid that someone is being racist or prejudice, which…maybe halts a lot of conversation or people are afraid of offending me so they don't really speak their mind…I think me being a

Black woman…it makes me harder…[and it] makes me tougher and meaner..." (Stephanie)

Joi discussed having similar guarded interactions with her African American peers:

"…for me…being a Black female…you might say I'm wrong, but I don't like to hang around with too many other Black females 'cause…[of] the drama. 'Cause most people, I kid you not, if I…go sit in …[the student commons] right now it would be about 5 or 6 Black girls just gossiping about what somebody got on or how they look, and it's just like enou[gh], sometimes you might laugh 'ha ha that's funny' but after a while it's like all you do is sit around and talk about people. So, for me I don't hang around as many…Black females…I tend to…hang with [Black] guys more but then like from the outside looking in…some girls might be like 'oh, she's a ho, she just hangs out with all the guys' and it's not really like that, I just [think], guys don't gossip a lot. [And]…some guys you can talk to, I had a friend, a guy friend here, he doesn't go here anymore, but…I could talk to him about stuff. But then…as far as being a Black female like I said I don't mess with too many other girls, it's like my sister and my other couple of friends and that's just about it. Like, I'll speak…don't get me wrong, I'll speak but I'm not trying to…be your friend, be all up in your face and…go places with you. [Basically]…all this negative stuff just make[s] me not want to be bothered with a lot of people."

Robin echoed this practice of carefully selecting peers to "associate with." She explained:

"I feel like you should associate…yourself with…a certain amount of people…[like] your best friend and things like that and then you'll have…people you associate with…when you're on campus or like you're at a party on the weekend. I think that's the best way to have…a good college experience just because…if you're out there absolutely…you're

gonna get gossiped [about] and you're not gonna have a…really good positive experience in college."

As the above quotes illustrated, due to their decreased comfort level stemming from the perceived racism from their White peers and lack of support among their African American peers, the women used self-protective measures while interacting with their peers.

"I look at White people more critically now." In addition to affecting their self-value and comfort on campus, some of the participants reported that due to perceived negative race-related experiences with their White counterparts on campus their *racial views* changed. The women suggested that these experiences prompted them to scrutinize their White counterparts' behaviors more closely. Nia discussed critically viewing White people's behaviors more since being on campus. She explained:

"…when I came here I looked at everybody not as equals, I…knew that we were all different but I didn't…look down on anybody…But when I came here and I…[saw] the way people act and the way people look at you or and the way that they make you feel when you come into the class and you are trying to…do as good as them…and it feels like they don't even think that you can do it. And then considering like how we…went to our advisors and it was as if they didn't think we were smart enough to be able to take as many classes as the rest of the students…I don't think of White people the [way] I used…I don't think all White people are bad or anything like that, like I am gonna…judge you after I get to know you. That's what I try to do but going into it I don't… always look at is as a positive experience or I don't always look at them expecting for everybody to be equal the way I used to. When…I meet a White person I'm already kinda thinking that 'oh…they probably think this about us' and I'm waiting on them to prove me wrong as opposed to the

way I used to think that 'oh they think we are equal' and then later find out that maybe some of them don't..."

Several other women relayed similar leery views of their White counterparts on campus, especially surrounding a Nazi march that occurred one year prior to the study. The women felt unsafe and suspicious of their White peers because some of them supported the march. Ciara highlights this point:

> "…the Nazi march…really made me…kind of eerie about people and what they really think. Because I know one of the students who got them to even come here was part of the journalism school and he was a part of…the National Socialist Movement…So it was kinda scary because it's like hey this guy could be in my class, although I'm not a journalism major, he could have…been in one of my classes. And who else do I not know that [is] like him too, that there's someone sit[ting] right beside me that actually hates you and I'm sure there's more people like that out there..."

Janet echoed this sense of mistrust of their White peers by saying: "...since I've been in college…[I've become] really suspicious of White people's intentions…[and] sometimes…I feel like [some of the White students] are being really fake…"

Essentially, as a result of these perceived negative racial and gendered interactions, the women closely examined their White counterparts' behaviors, were apprehensive in their interactions with them, and questioned their own worth and belongingness on campus.

Summary

Overall, the women believed that their experiences engendered mixed psychological and social developmental outcomes. Four (29%) women stressed that their social interactions on campus positively impacted their sense of self-worth, belongingness on campus, and racial views of their White counterparts, although they recalled some instances of feeling unwanted and

unwelcome by racist and sexist encounters with both their White and African American counterparts. Three (21%) women viewed their psychological (e.g., self/esteem, emotional comfort on campus) and social (e.g., racial views) outcomes negatively due to the frequency with which they encountered various forms of discrimination from both their White faculty/staff and peers, and African American peers. Moreover, 2 (14%) women believed that although they experienced both positive and negative psychosocial effects of their social encounters on campus, their overall sense of worth, comfort on campus, and racial views were neither overly positive nor overly negatively impacted; these women perceived the impact of their interactions to be neutral.

However, five (36%) women believed that their social experiences engendered both intensely empowering/inclusive and displacing psychosocial effects. Although these women felt a high sense of self-worth, belongingness on campus and contribution to campus life, and improved social understanding of race relations, there were times when they experienced the opposite of these feelings. Thus they felt that the negative psychosocial impact of their experiences was counterbalanced by the positive impact, which made the overall impact of their social experiences seem balanced. Combining these figures, 11 (79%) women considered the psychosocial impact of their social experiences to be either neutral, positive, or balanced, while only three (21%) women viewed their encounters to be more negative and less empowering.

In essence, the majority of the women in this study believed that despite experiencing some negative psychosocial effects of their social encounters on campus (which created some level of discomfort and feelings of being unwanted on campus), they felt strong, comfortable with their (mostly African American) counterparts on campus, and better able to understand and cope with race relations (especially their White peers' behaviors). However, the negative psychosocial impact influenced how often (and with whom) they felt comfortable (with) on campus and the adjustment strategies they employ.

Behavioral Responses to Social Experiences

Because the women believed that their experiences had psychological and social consequences, they employed several steps to deal with their experiences. The women relied on their spiritual/religious faith, personal strength, and support from others to succeed academically and socially. The types of assistance these women received from others included academic, financial, emotional/moral, and spiritual support. Combining the sources and types of support, the women used internal (spirituality and self) and external (friends and family) coping strategies to adjust. The women suggested that self and family support provided the most well-rounded (all forms of) help while friends provided academic, emotional/moral and spiritual support. Furthermore, the faculty/staff provided mostly academic, financial, and moral support. Importantly, the type of financial support the women received varied based on the source of the support. For instance, financially, the faculty assisted the women with locating grants and scholarships to pay for academic costs, while their peers and family members provided them with money to pay for academic expenses.

However, race influenced who the women sought help from and the type of support they received. Although a few women reported obtaining help from their White faculty and staff on campus, the women indicated overwhelmingly seeking assistance from their African American faculty/staff and peers because they feel more comfortable with and supported by these individuals. Moreover, according to the women's perceptions, White faculty/staff provided academic and financial support whereas the African Americans provided all 3 forms of faculty/staff support, which parallels the Social Experiences: Student-Faculty/Staff Interactions section. And, obviously, their family support came from African American family members.

Internal Coping Strategies

The women reported engaging in spiritual and self-improvement strategies that changed them internally, which they contended helped them better deal with their experiences on campus. They believed that spiritually *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* while personally, they thought that *I have to rely on myself if I want to make it.* Moreover, in trying to "make it" on campus, they said that *I adjusted my behaviors and overlooked the negatives when they happened* and *I had to show them that I was serious about my education.* The sections below describe these features of the internal coping strategies the women used to adjust to their experiences on campus.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. In terms of *spirituality*, all 14 women reported using prayers and their faith to understand and handle their experiences. They contended that their faith aids in their positive psychological functioning (e.g., emotional regulation, mental stability and perseverance). Specifically, these women cited "living for God," seeking "God's guidance [and assistance]" through prayers, and reading the Bible as common strategies they employ to gain perspective on their situations, and handle their negative emotions and experiences. They also believed that through their relationship with God, they gained "peace of mind" and positive outlook on life, and they are not easily "bothered" by their experiences. As examples, the women talked about how God helped them through many situations that involved "…the pressures of college,…adult life,…relationships…" and self-understanding. Furthermore, the women claimed that with this spiritual assistance, they were better able to persevere, remain "calm" and "relax" during difficult experiences on campus. As the women indicated, they do not know where they would be without their spirituality and faith in God. Joi and Ciara described their reliance on God's support:

> "…praying…[is] part of…what I've done my whole life…I feel like a prayer helps in every situation…so…I don't get stress about a lot of stuff, I'm like let me just pray on it…[For

example] [w]ith my advisor, yeah I've prayed on it 'cause I…know that I'ma get it fixed…[because] to me besides going out to…try to get it fixed it's nothing else I can do but pray on it or go to [a specific Black staff member] and ask her about it…[So] I feel like when I pray on it...God is always gonna…have the answer for you and…all you got to do is ask. [So, I just]…ask…God to like work it out for me." (Joi)

"…I pray to God everyday and I read the Bible…I get all my support from God, if…I'm ever in a jam…it's just God please help me and…all the time I get through it…I can do anything through Christ and so that's what I keep believing and that's how I keep going on even when I do experience these instances of racism or I'm having problems with a teacher or anything like that, I just pray about it and I don't worry about it anymore because I know that God's gonna get me through this…" (Ciara)

I have to rely on myself if I want to make it. Beyond utilizing their spirituality and relationship with God, as depicted above, all 14 of the women discussed using *self-strategies* that enhanced their personal growth (e.g., improved self-reliance, self regulation, and academic behaviors) and ability to adjust to their social experiences on campus. In fact, the women claimed that in order to deal with their experiences, they had to be more *self-reliant*, more self-secure, and increase their self-knowledge. They also described being assertive by standing up for themselves and other African Americans. Stephanie described being self-reliant as a strategy to deal with her experiences on campus:

"[One of the ways I dealt with my experiences was]…learning how to speak up for myself…how to be assertive…[and] how to…not takes things so personal…Now…if I feel like I have a point I will make it even if I don't get my way, I'll make sure you know how I feel…[Also I]...have a…stronger identity…now, I know…more about myself…so…being secure in…who I am and where I'm from helps me deal with other people and who they

are and where they're from. That security…that's one of the biggest things…not letting people make you feel like you are less then them regardless of race, class, sex…[because] when you're the only person and no one's around you that you can identify with, you have no choice but to identify with yourself and look inside yourself for strength because it's no one around you…[who is] like you that can offer their shoulder, that can offer you strength. So, you're forced to retreat in yourself to gain…the strength to…be able to feel comfortable in your skin and move about around those who are so different from you."

I adjusted my behaviors and overlooked the negatives when they happened. In addition to relying on themselves to succeed, the women also reported using *self-regulation techniques* (e.g., monitoring and adjusting their behaviors/reactions) to deal with their experiences on campus. For instance, they engaged in behaviors that they believed negate the perceived negative stereotypes of African Americans while remaining focused on their goals. In regards to "prov[ing]" the stereotypes "wrong," the women reported "work[ing] hard," "…speak[ing] up for…[Black women] and prov[ing] 'em wrong," and being actively involved in (and championing) changing their campus. As means of remaining focused on their educational goals, the women recalled utilizing their experiences as "learning" opportunities and overlooking perceived negative behaviors on the part of their White counterparts. Consequently, they contended that these changes enable them to better deal with their peers and faculty. Joyce described adjusting her behaviors and disproving racial stereotypes when interacting with her White counterparts on campus:

"I'm just more aware and more cautious of maybe what you say or how you may do something around others because you don't want to make anybody else uncomfortable just like you don't want…people to make you uncomfortable…[Also] I just try to a lot of times prove them wrong that…race has nothing to do with the issue and that it's all about

the person's mind and knowledge of what they bring to the table. So, I would always use that and…my extra-curriculum activities and everything that I was involved in and people could tell like I was one of the smart ones because a lot of times I was the only Black in a class…[like] advance math or advance English…So, I just let my knowledge and different things like that speak for me…[For example]…when I was taking English, we were reading inserts out of books and…the whole thing came about…the special treatment and how Blacks…feel that we always need repayment for things. And I was the only Black in the class and everybody else was Caucasian, and instead of being ignorant [which is] what they probably expected me to do, I just basically give them…the hard facts about the percentage of kids that actually came to …[the university] and the percentage that was actually minority and how that our scholarships aren't that much, how we still have to come up with the rest of it. And how it's not really special treatment in how they have things that are almost like they're the norms and they have things that's almost specifically just made for them and we have to find our way. So, instead of doing something that they expected me to do, I flipped the script on them and basically just dropped them some knowledge and it was to the point where they couldn't say anything back because they knew what I was saying was true and I had the facts to back it up. And I just kinda left them flabbergasted like 'wow she's telling the truth.' And letting them know that all…of us are not the same and everybody that comes…[here] doesn't get a scholarship, there's a very small percentage of Black people that get a scholarship and…not everybody believes in the reparations and all this, it's just what you guys see [in the media]."

Besides dispelling perceived stereotypes about the African American community, the women reported using their experiences, whether positive or negative, as learning opportunities,

which they believed enhanced their ability to deal with their social experiences on campus. Janet illustrated her reframed perspective of situations on campus:

> "…I feel like every experience is a learning experience. I now know that everybody is not innocent…what I thought was in high school 'oh, I never had problems with racism, racism doesn't affect me.' That's what I thought, then I got to college and I'm like 'oh…it really [exists]', I mean, I knew it existed for other people but to me I'm like 'well, I never had a problem with that". Because I never had too many problems with people outside of my race, but when I got to college, it…changed and I don't know why…maybe [it's] because people are a little bit free in college, you can just say whatever you want to say and do whatever you want to do. So, I'm just taking it in like, you can't be naïve with people…I've just taken everything and turned it into a positive…[Also, with the negative] stuff that happens to me…it just…feels like it just rolls off my back, like in my mind I'm…like 'remember it…take it in…and turn it into a positive and remember it so…next time I won't be so surprised, so caught off guard…"

Moreover, as highlighted in the last quote, the women ignored (e.g., overlooked, not being moved by) their negative experiences as means of adjusting to their social experiences. According to these women, they did not take their White peers' negative behaviors (e.g., "ignorance" and questions) too personally because they reasoned that their White peers "didn't know" about African American's culture. They also reported being able to overlook these experiences because they were prepared for them via their pre-college schooling and did not want to be distracted or relive negative emotions. Cristal and Ciara described not being bothered by the negative experiences on campus:

> "I noticed…the racial…prejudice and all that kinda stuff…but…I just kinda brushed it off or…just kinda [said]…'whatever' to it…[and] didn't allow it to affect…[or] bother me...I just

move on…like oh it's not the end of the world or anything, you just kinda go on…because I…come for a purpose and I come to get help and that's what I'm looking for…And as long as I get that, I can care less how you really feel or…what you may think…" (Cristal)

"…because I came from a predominately White high school so it's not like this is new to me, it's just become a routine thing I kinda wash it off just because…I've already been through it so many times that it's nothing that really faces me anymore. But that doesn't make it right." (Ciara)

"I had to show them that I was serious about my education." In addition to changing their social behaviors and reactions to perceived racist encounters on campus, as depicted above, the women also reported improving their *academic behaviors* as another adjusting strategy. The women recalled changing their academic behaviors by adjusting their speech around professors, speaking "properly" in class, initiating contact with professors, and disproving perceived racial/gender stereotypes. They also took their education seriously (e.g., seeking help, studying more). Nia described her improved study habits as a means of disproving racial stereotypes of African American students:

"…[my experiences] made me study a lot more then I originally thought I would. It's…made me stay in nights that I would have gone out. [And]…there was times where I…went and got tutors on the first day of class just because I was scared that maybe it would be hard and I didn't even want to get behind…So therefore…it's made me just be a better student because I feel like if I don't then that's what they are going to expect…I feel like maybe it makes them feel good to see that we met…[their] expectations of failure and to prove to them that Black people don't measure up to White people."

Similarly, Nece discussed changing her speech and interactions with her faculty as means of disproving stereotypes. She said:

"…my experiences have definitely…allowed me to figure out ways into approaching teachers…

[and] adjust[ing] the way I speak to the faculty members…[For example], when I was a freshmen…I was not aware of how…important it is…the way you speak to them when you…go to their office to ask for anything or ask for help…I would say that when I was a freshmen my language was a little bit less professional, which sometimes when I…spoke less professional and I didn't get as much help as I thought I should have or it didn't seem as if they were as willing to help me I [at]tributed that to being the reason because of the way I spoke to them. And so…my language would be one major thing that I've…changed or adjusted…I would say that another strategy…that I use is that I make it apparent that my professors know me…I…usually sit in the front of the class…I talk to them right after class, you know, introduce myself… And so that's something that's important to me to make sure that I know my professors and that they know me by name."

Ebony echoed this idea of initiating contact with faculty/staff as a means of establishing rapport with the White faculty. She explained:

"…with the faculty I…try to get to know them, let them know that I'm there…I've started [an]…organization that…bring[s]… students…together with advisors [and professors] on campus…where they come in and speak to us at different meetings and stuff like that…[and] that's been pretty good like just getting to know more professors on campus…And I think that's one of the things that kinda…creates that barrier is…when we don't…reach out to each other because in most cases professors are not gonna reach out to us because they have so many students. And… since I'm Black, they [are] probably not trying to…reach out to me as far as they would with somebody else so it's kinda like…my strategy to get to know professors...[involves me] really just put[ting] myself out

there…making an effort to really get out there to know my professors and my advisors of course."

In sum, the women reported that they called on God and themselves to deal with the perceived negative encounters they had on campus. By seeking God's guidance, relying on their internal strength, adjusting how they viewed their counterparts' behaviors, and initiating interactions with their faculty, the women believed that they were better able to prevent/minimize the effects of the negative racist encounters they had with these individuals.

External Coping Strategies

In addition to changing themselves to deal with their experiences on campus, the women reported reaching out to others as another adjustment strategy. The women sought assistance from faculty and staff members for guidance on academic, career, and financial (i.e., academic expenses) issues; their peers for academic, social, moral, and spiritual support; and their family for emotional/moral, spiritual, and financial support. When describing the support they seek from the faculty and staff, the women contended that *I go to the faculty and staff for help, but it's the African Americans who help the most.* They also implicated racial differences in their peers' support by saying *my African American friends are really there to support me and help me make it through.* Similarly, the women said that their families provide multiple supports and encourage them to *keep your eyes on the prize.* The women also described their family support as *they help me pay for whatever I need, my family prepared me for what I was going to experience on campus, they listen to me and come to visit me, they tell me they are proud of me,* and *my family reminds me to focus on God to get through what I'm going through.* The subsequent sections outline the features of the support the women obtain from their faculty/staff, peers, and family.

Faculty/Staff Support

I go to the faculty and staff for help, but it's the African Americans who help the most. The women rely on the faculty/staff's advice to make informed academic and career decisions as well as adjust to their negative experiences on campus. Specifically, all 14 women sought help for class work, course selection and career decisions from the teaching staff (including graduate teacher's assistants and tutors). Nia described getting career assistance from the staff by saying: "[I remember]…going and talking to the…directors over the programs [I was in]…to…see if…I'm still able to get into the [graduate] schools that I want, see if I am still doing good enough and with them encouraging me and telling me that I'm still on track, that I shouldn't give up or anything, that's… been a lot of help." Similarly, Lisa discussed seeking academic assistance from the faculty:

> "…most of the time like with my faculty, I just kind of go talk to 'em anyway. They don't want me there but they can't tell me that…and if I need help and if I want help, I'm gonna go and ask them for help. And if you can only give me 15 minutes then I'ma take that 15 minutes and I'ma run with it …I might have 30 minutes worth of questions but I'ma ask you the most important ones."

As the previous quote indicates, although the women sought help from the faculty/staff, as described in the Social Experience: Student-Faculty/Staff Interactions section, the women believed that race affected the source of faculty/staff support they pursued. The women suggested that while they sought help from the faculty regardless of race, they obtained more wide-ranging support from their African American (than White) faculty/staff. Ebony described getting academic, career, and personal support from the African American staff members. She said:

> "…when I switched over from my advisor…who put me in the class to raise my GPA up, the first two people I went to in the college… [were] 2 Black advisors...And…they were really concerned about me getting my schedule together…And then…programs like [the minority based] program was a really good thing because…it brought all minority students

together to…get the college experience before we had to be thrown in and be the only Blacks. So, they brought us in…[and] they kinda warned us 'this is what you're gonna face…and this is what you should do'…And…

[they] host[ed]… seminars on…diversity [and] how to deal with this situation like [with] your professor…And so I felt like they prepared us…[and] it…helped my experience out a lot…[and] help make up for the negative things that's happened since I've been on campus. [Also, the staff of that minority program has]…been really good…because… they've gotten my family involved…[and they] really took the time to get to know my family and…I just like that because it lets me know that I…have support coming from every end, the fact that they stay in contact with my family [and]…letting them know…if…I haven't been around…[like] '[she] hasn't came around and visit' [or asking]…'have you talked to her?'…or just letting them know like '[I'm]…being real good' or they just…have a friendship with them too, just like…letting them know 'hey we're here for [her] if she needs…any help'…[So] having [their]…support [makes me feel]…that everybody is just…helping my…all around experience on campus. Like it just…helps as a whole like with anything I'm going through, [it's] just [helpful] to know that I can go to them for their support and…motivation…like 'ok, you're a minority student, we're here to…keep minority students in college."

Aalyah received comparable support from an African American female staff. She explained:

"…over the last…2 years…I have gathered a lot of…support from a specific [staff member in the minority program on campus]…it means a lot…having another African American on a…predominately White campus [who] is just really supportive especially someone [who]… already has their degree and telling you to keep going and striving for it…she's a really good person. And I think…if there are minority or specifically African American

female students…[who] are looking for…a boost up or inspiration or an advisor or just someone that's well affiliated with the campus and the community, [she's] a really good source."

Peer Support

My African American friends are really there to support me and help me make it through. Similar to their relationship with the faculty and staff, the participants illustrated how race influences the source of peer support they seek. Although the women reported perceived positive academic and social experiences with their White and African American peers (as highlighted in the Social Experiences: Peers Interactions section), all 14 of the women indicated that they overwhelmingly sought academic, emotional/moral, spiritual and social support from their African American (not White) peers on campus. Lisa and Nece described the academic support they obtain from their peers:

> "…as far as…getting help in classes where…you just didn't ask [the professors]…certain questions because they didn't really care, I would…have…roommates [who]…took certain subjects in high school that I didn't take in my high school because their high school were a little more advance, they would help me." (Lisa)
>
> "I…[got help from] my best friend [who is an African American female I went to high school with and she currently goes here]…[For example I learned] methods of study[ing]…well my best friend, she actually is a semester ahead of me and so…all the classes that…she's taken I have to take…the following semester. And so, with that…she gives me a lot of insight on…'oh you definitely need to study for that 'cause…[that's] a major part of…[what] you need to know' or…'I know you have like 3 exams…[but] I know you can do it', just [giving me] support…[and encouragement]." (Nece)

In addition to academic support, as described above, the women received emotional/moral and spiritual support from their peers. In fact, the women talked about sharing and venting about their negative experiences with their peers and getting their peers' opinions and encouragement while dealing with their experiences on campus. Moreover, the women talked about going to church and praying with their peers, applying principles of their religion/spirituality to make sense of their experiences, and being in an African American Christian group. Cristal narrated the moral support she gets from her peers:

> "…my friends that I met here, like I consider them…part of that family circle and they've been…
>
> very supportive. I just…never felt by myself...no matter what I was dealing with…I just talked to my close friends about that. [For example]…most of the time, things, experiences that I dealt with on campus whether it be with faculty or peers, I generally talked to my friends, my close, close friends about stuff like that."

Similarly, Janet discussed sharing her experiences with her African American peers on campus:

> "…it helps to talk about [it], like sharing your experiences…[So] me and my African American friends…[m]ostly…talk about stuff that…happens within us 'cause I feel like we have our own little community here…it's segregated…we go to our each other houses, we go out together, we go to the clubs together and stuff like that. So if...something…racist happen[s] to us we just be saying like 'girl'…[because] the older we get the more it's like 'well, you know, that happens in [this city]…it's racist here'…So…within this small community, I feel like I've learned a lot from everybody and made a lot of friends."

Besides the moral/emotional support they received from their peers, as depicted above, the women also obtained spiritual support in their peer relations. Nece described this spiritual support: "…[me and] a few of my friends…pray together, we attend church together [and]…we just talk our

problems out and try to relate them to…each other. And try to make sense of…why are we going through this…and so, it's pretty much a collective effort in that."

This perceived sense of "collective effort" was an element of the women's social support they received from their peers. Specifically, the women were actively involved on campus and attempted to make changes on campus as means of gaining and providing social support to/from their peers. The women explained that they spend time with their peers and participate in student organizations (especially African American organizations) as a way to meet other people (particularly African American peers) and to make changes on campus. Ebony described this group effort to make changes on campus:

> "…with the African American students…we work together…I really try to…work with them because…[it's] like 'ok, we're all here on campus and [there's] not a lot of us.' And…I really try to interact with White students because it's like I want them to learn about us while I'm learning about them…[So overall, I]…just really get…out there, getting into organizations and get[ting] to know other students…[Also] I'm really involved with…[the Black student government]…we kinda really just sit down and have discussions about our experiences being Black on campus. And…we kinda realize that we all have similar experiences so what can we do [about]…it. And…one of the things we do is the list of demands every year kinda like…'ok, this is what we feel…as Black students should probably change or…this is what we need…in order to…create…unity on campus.' And so it's… not…an individual effort but more so it's a group effort 'cause…we come together with our collective…experiences. And in most cases, we have a lot of the same experiences that have happened to us on campus or we feel like there are teachers that don't relate to us or understand [us] so we just…come together and do what we can do. We take…[the list of demands] to…the majority [White] student government, where…they're like 'ok, we didn't

know this was a problem' because they don't see it from our viewpoint like they're White…[and] this is their campus. So it's like we want to feel like we're part of the campus too so we really go and talk to them a lot about…what we feel…they could do for us and they tell us… what we can do for them…how we need to open up a little bit more so that…they can come in and …we told them how they should open up more so we can feel like we're being embraced. [In all]…I find [that]…just getting more involved…[is] the way to…interact with everybody and…the mean[s] for everybody to come together out there."

In sum, as a result of their peers' support, the women were comforted in knowing that they were not the only individuals going through the perceived negative (mostly racial) experiences on campus and they collectively worked to improve campus conditions. This perception of camaraderie was also evident in the women's descriptions of the family support they receive.

Family Support

Keep your eyes on the prize. According to the women, gaining support and motivation from their families helped them stay focused on their academic goals and deal with their negative experiences on campus. The women sought financial, emotional/moral and spiritual support from their families. Based on the women's stories, emotional/moral support encompassed advice, motivation/encouragement, frequent contact (e.g., telephone calls, visits, being involved), being listened to, and role modeling; whereas financial support involved getting money to pay personal and academic-related bills. Spiritual support comprises prayers, going to church, sharing faith, and reading the Bible, which was indicated by some women in the Internal Strategies--Spirituality section. However, the level of assistance the women received is most accurately described as a continuum, with some of the women receiving more frequent or more pronounced aid. Additionally, the women who were on the lower end of the spectrum formed alternate familial links (e.g., fictive kin) to obtain emotional/moral and spiritual support.

Moreover, the women implicated social economic status (SES) and gender in the type of support they receive. In relation to SES, some of the women highlighted the role of generational college attendance in their ability to adjust on campus. These women described how their families, chiefly their parents and siblings, prepared them for racial instances and what to expect on campus prior to attending their university. Interestingly, most of these women have both parents actively involved in their lives and at least one of their parents attended college. Consequently, based on their accounts, those participants whose family prepared them for racial instances and college life reported being better able to "brush off" instances they considered to be racist than those women who were not as prepared. As far as gender, the women indicated that although they receive help from both male (e.g., father, grandfather, uncle, brother) and female (e.g., mother, grandmother, aunt, sister) family members, they overwhelming reported more emotional/moral support from their female (than male) relatives (especially mothers, grandmothers, and sisters).

Financial Support. *They help me pay for whatever I need.* The women suggested that, beyond receiving university-based scholarships and financial aid, the bulk of the financial assistance they received came from their parents. Twelve (85% of the) women reported getting money from their parents to pay for their living (e.g., car and insurance, gas, rent, utilities, food) and academic (e.g., tuition) expenses. According to these women, because their parents value their education, they are willing to make the financial sacrifices necessary to help the women focus on academics instead of employment. Nece described the financial sacrifices her parents make:

> "…my parents, they both…pay my rent, I don't pay rent [in] my apartment complex. [Also]…they pay my tuition…they pretty much pay all my bills…only thing I pay is my cell phone bill…my utilities and I buy my own groceries and stuff. "

Although not all of the women received such extensive support, they all received some variation of financial support. Nia discussed getting limited help with educational costs but more with living expenses:

> "…the first year, my mom was able to help me, she…took out a loan. After that, they try to make her, she wouldn't do it…But…if I ever needed money other than that, then I was able to turn to her…And she was able to pay car insurance, cell phone bills. So even though I…had to go and get a work study to be able to do extra stuff…like pay to get into different events, or buy clothes, I was never hungry or without a phone."

Additionally, the women discussed getting financial support from other family members, although it is not as substantial as the support they get from their parents. For instance, Aalyah talked about her uncles and cousins sending here "a little bit of cash" while according to Stephanie "…since my cousin can't give me money, oh I raid their closets and take shoes and belts and accessories and…go over my auntie house and take whatever I need if they [are] willing to give it to me, jewelry, clothes, hair supply, necessities, deodorant. The things you don't think about in college that will cost more money when you go out on your own..."

In sum, the women suggested that their parents pay for large ticket items (e.g., rent, tuition) while they save their money and pay minimal bills (e.g., utilities, extra curricular activities). Moreover, they indicated that their extended family members occasionally offer financial assistance.

Emotional/Moral Support. *My family prepared me for what I was going to experience on campus.* Thirteen (92%) women said that their families give them advice about how to deal with situations on campus, allow them to "vent" about their situations, and provide encouragement/motivation to succeed. In terms of getting advice, the women recalled getting most of their suggestions about dealing with their social experiences from family members (e.g., parents,

aunts/uncles, siblings, and cousins) who previously attended college. The women claimed that their families offered them different perspectives on understanding their experiences and helped them locate resources (e.g., financial; academic—tutoring, advising; relational—locate helpful others on campus). Ebony and Ciara discussed their families' emotional support in dealing with their social experiences. They explained:

> "…I had a sister who graduated from here so…I kinda had the heads up. I feel like I had an advantage coming here and since they (referring to family) really motivated me like when I tell 'em about what I experienced on campus. Like when I had my first White roommate it was kinda like 'ok, that's one of those things that you gonna have to adjust to because you go to a predominately White campus…you're going to the real world when you graduate from college, you are gonna be with every race imaginable, so it's kinda one of those things, that's something you're gonna have to deal with.' And I like that because…they could have just told me…'hurry up and get out that dorm room with…the White student'…[instead, they told me] not to leave the dorm room because me…and my roommate didn't get together or that…she might have been racist or something like that. So my…family just…helped me with it like listened to it and motivated me and everything." (Ebony)
>
> "My mom…is always saying…'go get as much help as you can, that's what they're there for, go get a tutor, go…talk to your teachers and….get to know the secretaries in the departments 'cause they'll really be able to help you in the future.' [So]… she's always telling me just to get to know people on campus and…'you need to get to know the people in the administration offices' and things like that. [But]…my dad is more of the financial side of it but he's always just curious to see…what I'm doing in school and if I'm making good grades or if I need any help or anything like that, just making sure that I'm staying on

top of it…[And] as far as my sister goes since she has been in college…as far as money management skills when I'm talking about how…to manage my money, she's always telling me…'well maybe you should go to [the] dining hall this many days a week and then the other days you can eat out. Or, don't necessarily use your student charge all the time when you go to the bookstore maybe use your money a little bit.' So, she's always giving me tips on how to manage my money or who I should go to talk to…about different classes, or if she's had a class that I've had, she didn't go to….[this university] but it's still the same curriculum, so she may try to help me with a question that I have. So anytime maybe it's like writing a paper, I'll call her up and I'm like 'hey what do you think I should do for my paper title or should I do this for my title or do that' and run it across her. Or whenever I'm at home if I have a paper due or anything like that I let her read my paper and she critiques it for me to make sure that everything's ok." (Ciara)

According to the women, their families' advice about college experiences (as depicted above) began prior to their college years. The women explained that, during their pre-college years, their parents and siblings taught them about racial issues (e.g., pro-social skills, what others (especially Whites) think about African Americans) and college life (e.g., success strategies, what to expect on campus). The women believe that these early lessons helped them put their college experiences in perspective and avoid being taken by surprise by the perceived negative events on campus, which aided in the overall adjustment on campus. Nia described racial lessons she learned from her mother that helped her adjust on campus:

"…when I was in high school the town we lived in it was…a lot of Blacks…students so all…our expectations were the same. And the few White kids that…[were] there, our expectations were still the same because nobody came from a rich community or anything like that, nobody was driving like a really nice car. But [my mom] knew that when I came

here it would be different, she knew that it was predominately White, in a White town, and there…[are] a lot of Republicans and people just living different lifestyles. So…I think it was mainly important for her to…let me know that I couldn't go in and…and let them think that all [the] stereotypes that they feel about Black people are true. Like we do know how to speak correctly, we…are not all loud…just all the things that they… think of us to make us seem ignorant, I think it was important for her to let me know like I need to go down there and show them…that Black people are smart, that Black people do have goals, and we are not ignorant."

Ebony relayed similar a childhood preparation for racial instances on campus. She explained:

"[My family help is]…really…motivating [to] me…just having…a strong foundation really with them…it started off from being young not even just when I got to college…I went to predominately White schools when I was younger so it's kinda the thing where…ok I know that…I'm Black…it's obvious that I'm…a Black woman so it's one of those things that…[when I] got to college I just used everything…that I've ever learned that they've taught me to…deal with the experiences that I've came across on campus. You know, if I deal with anything, a racist experience, it's kinda…like 'ok, this happened before, I heard this was gonna happen…[so] this is how I should deal with it...' So I…use…everything that happened as…a guide to go through…what I should do if it ever happens again." (Ebony)

They listen to me and come to visit me. In addition to advising them (pre and during college years) about social experiences on campus, the women suggested that their family members (namely parents, grandparents, and siblings) showed them compassion by allowing them to "vent" about their experiences. Consequently, being able to share their experiences made the women feel as if they had "someone to listen and talk to" them. The women believed that their families allowed them to voice their concerns by maintaining frequent contact with them. For

instance, some participants described their families, especially their parents, calling (daily at most and weekly at minimum) and visiting often (e.g., coming to help them deal with their college life). However, according to the women, they received most of this type of support from their mothers. Joyce discussed her family maintaining contact with her and morally supporting her through difficulties on campus:

> "[My family provides]…more of an encouragement and support…in just keeping up…my studies or…even when I was sick…'cause I can't go home all the time, so it's just them calling just to see how you're doing and you calling them and just knowing that they're behind you and backing you up. I would say it was a major…help…[Also]…I talk with most of…my cousins…or they'll come [visit me because]…some go to [near-by universities]…they're not that far away so we still…visit one another and see how we're doing… and…just being there for each other."

Robin described similar close contact with her mother. She explained:

> "…I kinda feel like when I came out here, me and my mom got more close just because I was becoming more independent, so…in order to stay linked to my family, me and my mom just got a lot closer. [So]…I feel like just having even a simple support like me calling my mom everyday… helps me get through my days and it helps me with my experiences…"

This perceived sense of moral support from female family members was also echoed by Cristal. She said:

> "…my grandmother, that is my girl. I can call her at anytime and she was just always there…[Because] I'm a talker, she's was always there to talk and give advice and pray for me and be there for me…She was very instrumental…I [talked to her]…a lot about things that were happening or things that I would go through…so if it was a[n] issue that I had on

campus with…peer[s] or anything, I would discuss it with her. So…it's really like my grandmother and my mother have been…my two biggest supporters…just being there for me, to talk with me and things like that…[Basically] my family was there for me when I needed them…"

My family motivates me to keep going. Besides maintaining closeness in their familiar relationships, the women believed that their families motivated and encouraged them to succeed. According to the women, their families offer encouragement when they are "down" and serve as motivation for them to work hard and "persevere" through difficult times on campus. Janae discussed the level of motivation she receives from her family:

"…talking to my mom…my sister, and my boyfriend, talking to my family period, was…a big help. I remember…[with] my step-dad…I used to call and talk to him, he would always say 'keep your eyes on the prize.' And…just something like that helps you…persevere and…adjust and forget about the things that are happening right now [and forget] the people…[So] I think that they've been my motivation…to keep going...I think just the biggest help has been that…they've listened to me…they've supported me, they've pushed me to do…my best…"

Halle relayed similar stories of her family motivating her to succeed. She explained:

"…it's just big for me that my parents went [to college] and graduated…because I have them pushing me and then their parents…I have them pushing me as well. And all of my…cousins who've graduated and… everybody else [so] it's kinda like 'we all did it, we understand your pain, we will help you…but you're going to graduate…you can make it.' And…it's a blessing and a curse because…on one hand if I am having a problem with something I can talk to my mom or my dad [but]…I can't get on the phone and be like 'dad I can't do this…it's so hard and I want to come home'…[because he will say] 'no, no, it's

not, you're gonna be fine, I did it, your mom did it, your aunt did it, your other aunt did it, your uncle'…So I can't do the little whining stuff that I would like to sometimes, I can't say 'I can't do it'…[because they usually say] 'you wanted to do it, you're gonna go and that's it."

They tell me they are proud of me. Besides getting their immediate families' support, as illustrated in the above quotes, the women indicated that their extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) were supportive and expressed pride in them. Although the women reported not having regular contact with some of their extended kin as they have with their immediate family (e.g., parents, siblings), these relatives tell the women how "proud" they are of them, which the women believe enhances their self-evaluation and ability to deal with college life. Janet and Stephanie described this source of support by saying:

"…a lot of my family members didn't go to college, but it's my grandparents, the ones on my mother side, they both went to college, they were both teachers. And…whenever I talk to them, they always have something encouraging to say like 'well you're so smart' and…everybody is looking forward to me going to law school…I [also] get the occasional calls like 'we just want to call and see what you were doing and…just tell you that we are proud of you and we are happy that you are in school.' 'Cause some of my cousins and my aunts and uncles didn't go to college… some of 'em took bad roads in life so for them to see somebody in the family that's doing really good, they're proud." (Janet)

"…when I did go home, I was welcomed and I was looked up to…[and that] made me want to be a better person…[So] having them put so much pressure and responsibility on me has supported me…because I'm…the first to go to a university and graduate from a university, they're more willing to help me like the older generation. And my cousins that are…in my generation they see that and I think that makes them want to do more 'cause they see how much…support that I'm getting…and they are not envious, which I

> love…[Instead they are]…just applauding any achievement that I had…They were excited as my mom…[and they were] just always saying good things to me, saying good things about me, always. [And they]…respect me a lot more…And they listen to me…and they admire me and that supports me because it makes me see that in myself…so that build[s] up my confidence. [And it made]…me able to deal with coming to college…and deal with people that I'm not used to dealing with and talking to people that I'm not used to talking to." (Stephanie)

In addition to being empowered by their extended families' support, the women were also getting support from their fictive kin. Cristal and Joyce described instances of receiving emotional support from non-biological family members:

> "…my auntie…and uncle…they're not even my real aunt and uncle, just started calling them aunt and uncle one day ten years ago, they've been supportive…just [with] whatever I've needed…" (Cristal)
>
> "…my church family back at home like they may send a package or…call and see how I'm doing or ask about me just to see. So that's another…form of moral support." (Joyce)

Spiritual Support. *My family reminds me to focus on God to get through what I'm going through."* In addition to receiving emotional and moral support from their immediate, extended, and fictive kin, a few of the women talked about the spiritual support they get from their families. For instance, Nece talked about her family encouraging her spiritual practices:

> "My parents are very spiritual and so…[they] definitely [are] reminding me of how important it is to…read my word (referring to the Bible) and…praying with me…over on the phone because they are far. [And they]… remind…me of what it takes…spiritually to…get through this and stuff like that. And…that's a everyday thing.'"

Similarly, Stephanie discussed her mother's assistance in strengthening her spirituality. She said:

"…coming from a religious family…them encouraging that relationship with God…helped my peace of mind…[and] kept my family ties strong…And then my mom helped me with…my spirituality as far as dealing with other people and growing stronger in your faith…'cause being [here]…on my own, I didn't have that immediate back up from my family so, I had to depend a lot on God. And she helped me to sort my feelings out with… the world and my faith."

In sum, the women reported that they received financial support from their families and were allowed to vent about their experiences. They also felt that their kin offered them practical and spiritual suggestions for dealing with those experiences. In so doing, their families maintained frequent contact with them and encouraged them to succeed. Essentially, the women believed that their families "do all they can do" to help them adjust to college life and nine (64%) of them believe that there is not "anymore they can do." However, women who didn't get as much support as they wanted wished that their families would offer more emotional/moral and financial support (e.g., maintain more contact, be more understanding, and provide more financial assistance).

Summary

Overall, the women relied on the support they received from important others (i.e., family, peers, faculty/staff), themselves, and their faith/spirituality (i.e., relationship with God) to adjust to their social experiences on campus. Interestingly, although the women recalled gaining support from both their White and African American peers and faculty/staff, they noted most of the support coming from their African American counterparts. Also, ten (71%) women noted that their most inclusive source of support came from themselves and their families. In essence, the women highlighted the important role of supportive others and self-belief/reliance in their adjustment to their social experiences on campus.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

The results of the study highlight the role of race, gender, and family support in African American college women's social experiences and adjustment at a predominately White Midwestern university. Using qualitative interviews, this study extended the literature beyond the existing gender neutral studies on African American college students to more effectively understand and address the social experiences and adjustment strategies of African American college women attending predominately White colleges and universities.

African American women's social experiences at a predominately White institution: Race and gender influences

The results seem consistent with existing literature about the role of race and gender in African American women's experiences in the education system. It appeared to the women that African American students on their campus were denied as much access to academic and extra-curricular support as their White counterparts, which buttresses the Black feminist perspective and critical race theory's assertions that African Americans are not given equal access to quality education. Moreover, the women's accounts of their White counterparts questioning their intellectual abilities and acceptance to their university reinforces several researchers' contentions that African Americans are often viewed (by some White individuals) as intruders who have been granted special permission (via affirmative action) to attend predominately White universities and colleges (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2001; Rankin & Reason, 2005). These scholars argue that because African American students are viewed as intruders on these campuses, they are faced with limited access to quality academic services, which highlights what critical race theory considers as Caucasians' views of African Americans' "lower status" in society.

The results also revealed that some of the African American college women expressed concern that sexism and racism negatively impact their dating experiences and interracial friendships. The women felt that, in dating situations, they were often overlooked by their African American male counterparts because they were viewed as less accommodating (i.e., financially, sexually) and more demanding (i.e., expecting more from their men) compared to White women. Moreover, the women noted that the occurrence of African American women dating White men was less frequent on campus and created more negative reactions among the African American students (especially the men) as compared to the negative reactions African American students had towards African American men dating White women. In other words, as one woman put it, "[for] the Black males it's (referring to African American women dating White men) kinda like…that's not cool…it's kinda like them saying it's ok [for them] to date a White woman but it's not ok for Black woman to date a White man."

This perceived double standard is a hallmark of what the Black feminist perspective and Africana womanism considers the "female subjugation both within and outside the race" (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 30). Similarly, the women talked about their White counterparts developing friendships with African American males more frequently than with African American women, which furthers theoretical claims of the intertwining role of race and gender in African American women's lives. These findings also support several researchers' contentions that African American students encounter various interpersonal forms of racism with their White peers, faculty and staff (Lewis et al., 2000; Schwitzer et al., 1999; Solorzano et al., 2000; Swim et al., 2003).

Borrowing from the friendship and ethnic social comfort/racial identity literature, another explanation of the women's perceived racially segregated peer relations could be that starting from childhood, individuals actively seek similar people to be in their friendship groups (Blieszner, 1994; Schaffer, 1996). As individuals age, their friends become even more similar to them in major

aspects of their lives. This similarity could be based on several factors including similar intellectual interests, racial group, and gender. As Schaffer puts it, "[individuals] of like minds seek each other out and then further sustain each other's interests" (p. 317). Using these assertions, it could be reasonable to assume that race was not the only factor affecting the divisive relations between the women in this study and their White and African American peers on their campus. As several women indicated, many of the African American males on campus are athletes who have teammates who are White males, thus increasing their similarity among these men and increasing African American males' chances to interact with White women in social settings. This intermingling of African American males with their White counterparts, which stemmed from similar athletic backgrounds, could partly account for the higher number of interracial friendships for African American males than between White peers and African American women.

These men's more frequent social relationships with their White counterparts could also be explained by Rollock and Vrana's (2005) findings of factors affecting people's comfort level with same and different race individuals. In their study of 238 African American female and male undergraduates' views of social comfort with African Americans and White individuals in several social contexts, the researchers found that these students' (who attended a predominately White Midwestern university) comfort level and distance from their same and different race counterparts were affected by the participants' gender and the context of the social interaction. In general, both male and female students indicated feeling more comfortable with and less distant from other African Americans in intimate and non-intimate social settings/relationships. But they reported varying degrees of social comfort with their White counterparts (although on average, their level of comfort was less with their different race individuals than with their same race counterparts).

Rollock and Vrana's participants experienced decreased social distance and comfort between them and their White counterparts in non-intimate social relationships/settings. In other

words, the students felt like although they had more interactions with their White peers in non-intimate settings, they felt less comfortable during these interactions than with their African American counterparts. As for interacting in intimate social settings/relationships, students reported less social distance but varying degrees of social comfort, which was influenced by the participants' gender. Specially, the men reported feeling more comfortable in intimate relationships with White women while the women in the study reported less comfort in dating White men. Although these authors did not ascertain the reasons for the participants' feelings of social comfort and distance, it is reasonable to assume that prior racial and gender-related experiences and socialization partly influenced these participants' social comfort and distance with their same and different race counterparts.

Surprisingly, the women noted competition and divisiveness among the African American students on campus, which contradicts the literature's customary portrayal of solidarity among African American students on predominately White campuses (Solorzano et al., 2000, Williamson, 1999). Although they recalled kin-like togetherness among the African American students especially when "banding together" to "fight" perceived racial injustices on campus, which partially supports the literature, the women suggested that this racial camaraderie co-existed with within-group competition over academic performance, social status (e.g., fraternity/sorority, popularity), and hometown "cliques." Perhaps these students felt the need to outdo each other as a way to disprove the negative stereotypes of African American students being disengaged, uninterested in academic success, and dropping out (Cross & Slater, 2001).

This sense of outshining one another was also seen in the women's dating life. In particular, the women described African American female students competing with each other for the affections of the small pool of eligible African American men on campus. The women believed that competing for these African American men was challenging because they perceive the men as

not wanting committed/ monogamous relationships, which stiffens the competition among African American women (who the women believed mostly wanted monogamous relationships). This finding supports Staples' (1999) claims that due to the high incarceration rate and low educational attainment of African American men, and high rates of interracial dating between these men and White women, the dating options of college educated African American women are restricted. As a result of the limited selection of eligible African American male partners, African American women tend to compete for and share their mates (knowingly or unknowingly), date outside their race, or engage in homosexual relationships. Staples (1999) contends that competition and mate sharing seem to be the predominant pattern in these women's lives, which often creates strain in these women's interactions with each other.

In essence, these findings support the current literature's portrayal of negative racial interactions between African American college students and their White counterparts on predominately White campuses. Moreover, the results highlight the gap in the literature on African American college students' within-group peer interactions. The literature is replete with findings about the nature of African American students' interactions with their White/non-African American peers, and the supportive interactions among African American students, but little is said about these students' negative with-in group encounters. This study's results uncovered a complex picture of supportiveness yet division among African American students, which indicates that more needs to be learned about these students' relations with their same race peers. Studies that explore the full nature of African American students' within-group interactions on predominately White campuses and these students' intentions for their academic and social behaviors with their same race peers will strengthen the literature base.

Adjustment Strategies: Reliance on supportive others

As means of dealing with their perceived racist and sexist encounters, the results suggest that the women enact several external (e.g., relying on supportive others) and internal (e.g., faith, self-reliance) adjustment strategies. Externally, the women seek assistance from and establish personal relationships with their African American (compared to their White) faculty/staff and peers. The women believed that these individuals have high expectations of their success, actively aid their successful matriculation and social adjustment, and establish personal/intimate relationships with them. Hence, the women felt empowered and wanted on campus by the supportive encounters they have with their same race counterparts. In fact, the women suggested that even though this racial solidarity in their peer group co-existed with within-group divisiveness, they have more intimate, "family"-like relationships with their African American (than White) peers. Interestingly, the women stated that although their relationships with African American students were generally closer than with the White students, their most intimate friendships involved their "inner circle" of African American female peers.

These findings can be explained using tenants of the symbolic interactionism and social exchange theories. According to proponents of the symbolic interactionism theory, people "act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them," and these meanings "arise in the process of interaction between people" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 143) and can be viewed as individuals' perceptions of interactions. The theorists argue that individuals' perceptions of their interactions with others determine the meaning they attach to those interactions; they then use their perceptions and meanings of the interactions to determine later levels of engagement/interactions with the same or other similar individuals.

The nature of human interactions is also explained by the social exchange theory. This theory asserts that individuals act "out of self interest with the goal of maximizing profits" while minimizing costs (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993, p. 385). Moreover, the theory proposes that

individuals “use their expectations of rewards and costs to guide their behaviors” and that “emergent experiences of relationships guide subsequent exchanges” (p. 396), these exchanges are based on the levels of satisfaction and fairness experienced in the exchanges.

Applying tenets of these theories, the results indicate that the women’s perceptions of their interactions with the same and different race individuals on campus affect how they interact with these individuals. In particular, the women believed that continued interactions with same race individuals on campus enhanced their social and academic adjustment, which were major profits; limiting their interactions with their White counterparts on campus served to minimize the cost of feeling discriminated against. For instance, the women were comfortable interacting with and actively seeking support from their African American counterparts on campus because of the continued assistance and encouragement they believed to receive from these individuals. As such, the women’s interactions with same race individuals on campus extended beyond academic/career concerns to include personal relationships.

This theoretical interpretation of the results supports researchers’ assertions that African American students feel more comfortable approaching and interacting with African American faculty because they feel that African American teachers do not have negative perceptions of their racial group (Lewis et al., 2000; Schwitzer et al., 1999) and that they provide “comprehensive advising regarding career guidance, academic issues, and personal problems” (Guiffrida, 2005, p. 708). Moreover, this perceived within group solidarity reinforces Solorzano et al.’s (2000) and Williamson’s (1999) findings that African American students attending predominately White colleges form support groups and create counterspaces where they can support each other and better deal with their racist encounters.

This racial camaraderie was highlighted by a woman who said,

"…if I felt like I couldn't get any help from my Caucasian faculty members or my advisors, I just go to someone within my race that I can relate to...I mean, sometimes you have to do stuff like that…by any means necessary…I have to go…talk to somebody else that I don't feel like they're gonna judge me because I'm African American. And, you know, they (referring to White counterparts on campus) already think we're disadvantaged and our education weren't good enough before we got to college. So, I have to go and share my experiences, my problems with somebody that doesn't judge me that way, that knows that I'm not dumb…[Also] it helps to talk about, like sharing your experiences and informing other people…[about] what's going on so that they don't have to go through it too…I feel like if I can help anybody by telling them…what's going on with this teacher, like don't take that teacher 'cause she has a problem with…watch out for this teacher and…make sure you do this and do that [and]…stay on your stuff. That's what helps me get through college, you know, if I can help somebody else and not have them go through the same thing I went through, then that's fine with me…that's another thing that makes me proud, helping other people…within my race."

In the same vein, as suggested by the above quote and theories, because the women considered their White counterparts' behaviors to be racially-charged in academic and social settings and led to their negative sense of belongingness on campus, they were less apt to engage with these individuals beyond what they were required to (e.g., in the classroom, getting academic/career assistance). This finding supports researchers' assertions that racially charged experiences with White faculty/staff and peers leave African American students feeling unsupported, uncomfortable, and unwanted on their campuses, which often lead to distance between them and their White counterparts (Cuyjet, 1998; Grant & Breese, 1997; Redden, 2002; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000).

The results also revealed that the women's academic persistence and social adjustment (in the face of perceived racial/gender discrimination) were further facilitated by the support they receive from their families. In particular, the women felt that their families' practical and spiritual advice about how to deal with the faculty/staff's behaviors and alternate ways/sources to obtain the support they need helped them stay focused on their academic goals and less affected by the perceived lack of support from the White faculty/staff. The women's reliance on family support confirms Herndon and Hirt's (2004) claim that African American college students heavily rely on their families' support (e.g., emotional, spiritual, financial) and discuss sensitive issues with their family members. Moreover, the women's accounts of their families instilling racial pride and teaching them about racial issues prior to attending (and during) college supports Kane's (2000) and Logan's (1996) claims that African American parents focus on instilling racial pride, family solidarity, and several other cultural values that help their children deal with pervasive racial discrimination in education and other social institutions.

The women also indicated that their families (especially their parents) maintain frequent contact with them as means of monitoring/facilitating their academic progress and social adjustment. This finding supports several researchers' assertion that many African American parents encourage their children's educational attainment because they view education as a vehicle for social mobility. These scholars contend that African American parents keep tabs on their children's progress (via daily or bi-weekly discussion with their children), ensure that their children are enrolled in challenging and well-taught classes, and ensure that they are adjusting to their roommates and school environment (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997). Likewise, O'Leary, Boatwright, and Sauer (1996) posit that African American students attending majority White institutions benefit from frequent familiar contacts because during these exchanges, African American students are reminded of

their goals and the importance of successfully completing their educational careers, which serve as encouragement to continue their education in the midst of the negative racial experiences on their campuses. Supporting this claim, the women in this study reported that during the frequent contacts they have with their families, their families express pride in their accomplishments, encourage/motivate them to continue their success, and allow them to vent about their experiences. Hence, as these scholars suggest and the women's stories confirm, parents' involvement in their children's education and emotional support foster academic success for their children.

Furthermore, the women's accounts of family members who previously attended college preparing them for college and giving them advice (based on their own experiences) while on campus reinforces the life course perspective contention that events in the family of origin, such as parents' educational attainment, have consequences for children's later educational attainment (Amato & Booth, 1997; Elder, 1998). In essence, the women's academic persistence and social adjustment are partly influenced by their families teaching them what to expect and how to handle experiences on their campus. Similarly, this concept of *linked lives*, which suggests that individuals' lives are linked and influenced by important others over time (Elder, 1998), is in sync with the women seeking guidance and support from African American faculty/staff and peers who they considered to be "family." This familial feeling among the African American students on campus was illustrated by a woman who said: "…this is our family, we are going to protect each other…if anything happens to anyone who's…Black on this campus, all the Black people are going to get involved and all the Black people are going to be upset about it…it's like we're family and that's it at the end of the day. No matter you got a better grade than I did, if…we have problems about this, if I don't like the shirt you got on, whatever, it doesn't matter…you're my family and we're gonna get

through this and we're gonna figure this out, we're gonna go to the dean if we have to, to get things resolved."

This sense of racial/familial ties and the women's reliance on supportive others' assistance to adjust to their social experiences on campus reinforces Saltzman and Holahan's (2002) claim that social support "bolsters feelings of self-esteem and belongingness, as well as [provides] informational guidance that aids in assessing threat and in planning coping strategies" (p. 309). In a study about the role of social support on adaptive coping, these researchers found that parental and peer support enhances individuals' adaptive coping strategies and self-efficacy. Saltzman and Holahan contend that one's belief in his or her ability to deal with life's challenges (i.e., self-efficacy) is enhanced by supportive others' encouragement, availability to let the individual share/vent about challenges, and provision of information about "how to address problems and an interpersonal context within which to rehearse and evaluate problem solution strategies" (p. 319). These authors' view of the beneficial role of social support in adjusting to life's challenges was supported in the women's stories of their families, and African American peers and faculty/staff providing emotional/moral support that enhances their self-worth, personal control, academic persistence/focus, and sense of belonging on campus.

Adjustment Strategies: Reliance on faith and adaptability

The results further indicate that, as examples of employing internal adjustment strategies, the women ask God for help in dealing with perceived racial encounters with their White faculty/staff and they adapt their behaviors to make themselves more acceptable to these individuals. The women discussed that their relationship with God was personal and encompasses praying, reading the Bible, going to church, and "doing the right thing" based on God's word. The women believed that this relationship serves as a source of support that reminds them that God is in control of their lives and will always help them through difficult situations. Thus, by relying on

God and the Bible for guidance and support, the women feel that they are better able to deal with their perceived racist and sexist encounters on campus. As one woman put it: “I’ve learned how to strive more for what I want and to not listen to others but to know that I have to trust in God for anything that I want and not to let anyone tear me down or bring my dreams down because you never know what anyone’s motivation for saying those things...”

This finding supports researchers’ claim that spirituality and religious beliefs are strengths of African American families that help them deal with the challenges of living in a racist society (Barbarin, 1993; Kane, 2000; Lambert, Rowan, Kim, An, Kirsch, & Williams, 2005; Logan, 1996; Staples, 1999). In a study about the role of spirituality in African American and White college students’ academic performance, Walker and Dixon (2002) found that African American students reported higher levels of spirituality beliefs and religious participation than their White counterparts. These authors also contended that African American students who reported high levels of spirituality/religiosity also had higher grade point averages, thus highlighting the facilitative role of a relationship with God in these students’ academic adjustment.

In addition to relying on God’s support, the women altered their behaviors when interacting with their White counterparts as means of adjusting to the perceived racist experiences they encounter on campus. In particular, the women initiate contact/relationships with White faculty/staff, demonstrate their academic ability/seriousness, and change their speech when talking to the faculty/staff as means of disproving racial stereotypes and enhancing their chances of getting helped by these individuals. These findings support Steele’s (1999) contention that having to prove one’s worthiness commonly characterizes African American students’ experiences at predominately White universities. The results also corroborate Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas and Thompson’s (2004) finding that African American college students

experience an increased need to prove their academic worth and thus engage in behaviors to invalidate prejudices about the ability of African American students to succeed academically.

Another method of altering their behaviors when interacting with their White counterparts included the women reframing their White counterparts' perceived racist behaviors so that they are not angry about and negatively affected by their experiences. In fact, the women felt that the support they received from their relationship with God, their families and African American counterparts on campus helped them better understand race relations, which helped them reinterpret their negative encounters as learning experiences. As one woman put it, "I feel like every experience is a learning experience. I now know that everybody is not innocent…[because] in high school [I thought] 'oh, I never had problems with racism, racism doesn't affect me'…then I got to college and I'm like 'oh…it really [does exist]' I mean, I knew it existed for other people but to me I'm like 'well, I never had a problem with that." Because I never had too many problems with people outside of my race, but when I got to college, it…it changed and I don't know why. You know, maybe because people are a little bit free in college, you can just say whatever you want to say and do whatever you want to do. So, I'm just taking it in like, you can't be naïve with people."

Although this woman indicated not personally being exposed to racism prior to college, the majority of the women in the study talked about being able to reframe and overlook their White counterparts' perceived racist/sexist behaviors partly because of their pre-college experiences/preparation. Most of the women believed that because they experienced racism in elementary and high school, and their families taught them about racism, sexism, and the importance of positively representing African Americans, they were better able to reframe their interpretations and reactions to the perceived racist and sexist encounters on their college campus because "it was not new" to them. This result bolsters Davis et al.'s, (2004) finding that African American college students who previously encountered racial discrimination (i.e., via attending

predominately White elementary and secondary schools) reported improved adjustment to racism on campus compared to those students who had limited exposure to racism. Hence, these authors' findings and results from this study substantiate the belief that preparation for racist treatment enhances the possibilities of coping.

Consequently, by reframing their experiences (via help from family and previous school experiences), the women believed that the negative encounters they considered to be racial and gender-based helped them gain a better understanding of how to deal with discrimination, be more accepting of their White counterparts, and made them work hard to disprove racial stereotypes and champion changes on campus. One woman illustrates this point when she said that her experiences: "…[made me] better prepared for the real world and just letting you know that…there may be people out there that are ignorant and those are just things in life that you have to deal with...People may not like you because of the color of your skin or…you may not get that job because your name is not Joe or Susie but it's just something, I just kinda learn…to deal with but at the same time wanna make changes about it as in what I can do here at school..."

Although this woman (and the majority of the women in this study) discussed the positive outcomes (e.g., lessons learned) from encountering perceived racism and sexism on campus, a few of the women in this study recalled instances when they were negatively affected by the perceived racist experiences, which supports several scholars' contention that negative racial experiences can adversely affect African American students' psychosocial development (Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004; Ryujin & Abitia, 1992; Swim et al, 2003). Supporting this claim, the women discussed instances when their self-esteem, views of their academic abilities, and feelings of belongingness on campus were compromised due to perceived racist and sexist encounters. According to Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000), these negative racial experiences often led to some African American college students contemplating leaving school, which was the case for one

of the women who temporarily dropped out of school for a couple of semesters but returned to complete her schooling. Hence, as means to deal with these potentially negative consequences of their perceived racist/sexist encounters, the women bolstered themselves with support from their spirituality and self-reliance.

Summary

The current findings suggest that African American college women utilize internal and external resources to maintain their academic focus, and positive self-esteem and racial/gender identity in the face of perceived racism and sexism. These women's efforts to realize their academic goals and socially adjust on campus exemplify their resiliency, which researchers consider a cultural attribute of African Americans. Resilience is considered the ability to encounter trauma/stress (risk factors) and yet rise above the threat and come through relatively unharmed (Nelson-Wicks & Israel, 2003; Schaffer, 1996). Moreover, resilient individuals are believed to exhibit internal (e.g., self-confidence, good intellectual functioning, faith) and external (e.g., bonds with supportive others within and outside the family) features that buffer them from potentially undesirable outcomes as a result of exposure to stress/trauma. Researchers contend that experiencing racism and sexism are common sources of stress for African American women (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Hudson- Weems, 2004a, b) that can lead to deleterious health outcomes (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002). Consequently, these researchers argue that, in order to effectively function in society, African American women lean on their fictive and blood relatives, their faith, and themselves to cope with the effects of perceived discrimination in their daily lives. This process of using self- and other-based adjustment strategies to deal with life's stressors captures what researchers consider to be a common characteristic of African American family functioning (Kane, 2000; Staples, 1999). The results from this study substantiate these authors'

claims and highlight the important role cultural values and beliefs play in individuals' selection of adjustment strategies to deal with life stressors.

As suggested by the Africana Womanism perspective, one of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, practitioners and researchers must view African Americans' experiences with an Afrocentric lens that "plac[es] African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (Hudson-Weems, 2004a, p. 47). It also states that people of African descent's behaviors and adjustment to living in a racist (and sexist) society are influenced by their common beliefs that are grounded in the African culture (i.e., education, family, strong work ethic, flexible coping strategies, spirituality), which contribute to African American families' resiliency (Lambert, Rowan, Kim, An, Kirsch, & Williams, 2005; Staples, 1999). Using the tenets of this theory, the women's expressions of self- and racial pride (i.e., "I'm a strong Black woman," "I'm proud to be an African American," "I am strong and well-rounded") highlight the Afrocentric cultural values of expressing ethnic pride that is common among African American families. Moreover, the women's focus on positively representing African Americans on their campus, dispelling several negative racial stereotypes, exhibiting personal strength and relying on their relationship with God in the face of adversity are other examples of Afrocentric cultural values playing a significant role in the women's selection of adjustment strategies. The value of exhibiting personal strength is particularly salient for African American women because, according to Davis (1981), due to the historical demeaning of these women by White Americans during slavery and the subsequent years of racial and sexual oppression, African American women had to develop a unique definition of womanhood that emphasizes "hard work, perseverance, and self-reliance, a legacy of tenacity, resistance, and an insistence on sexual equality" (p. 29).

The women also sought help from supportive others in dealing with their experiences on campus, which supports Wallace and Constantine's (2005) assertion that, "family members, close

friends, and trusted community members are viewed as primary resources of assistance when many African Americans experience problems and concerns" (p. 371). Researchers argue that African Americans are often prepared by their family members and important others to deal with discriminatory experiences, which in turn impacts the adjustment strategies they employ when faced with perceived racial encounters. Scott (2004), in a study of African American adolescents, found that adolescents who received frequent messages about racism sought more social support and used self-reliance and problem solving coping strategies as means of dealing with instances of racism. Echoing Scott's findings, the women in this dissertation study credited their reliance on themselves and supportive others, and actively championing social/racial climate changes on their campus to their families teaching them about racism and the importance of racial pride. They believed that these earlier racial socialization messages helped them select adjustment strategies that assisted them in dealing with the perceived racism they encountered on campus.

Limitations

This study provides a glimpse of the lived experiences of 14 African American college women at a predominately White institution and has identified some key issues to further explore. However, there are some important limitations that temper the findings. One limitation of the study is the self-selection bias of the sample. Because I recruited women through purposive sampling and screened with demographic criteria only, I cannot be certain that the women in the sample are similar to other women on their campus with comparable demographic characteristics. That is, did the women who respond to the recruitment materials have characteristic(s) different than the women who did not respond? For example, it might be likely that women who wanted to discuss the issues (studied in this research project) in a deeper manner were more likely to respond than were women who did not respond. Additionally, because the study attracted women who previously experienced racism and were prepared by their families to deal with this issue, it is possible that

the nature of the recruitment strategies inadvertently excluded potential participants who did not view race or gender as factors affecting their social experiences on their campus. Similarly, the recruitment strategies could have excluded potential respondents who were of African descent or bi-racial and did not consider themselves to be solely African Americans. Perhaps there were women who were African- descent immigrants or whose racial make-up included African American and another racial group who might have been interested in participating but because the recruitment materials stated I was studying "African American women's social experiences," they did not respond.

The sample's homogeneity in terms of the women's reports of fairly high GPAs (2.7 – 3.87 on a 4.0 scale), a strong need to positively represent African Americans, and relying on spiritual/religious practices/beliefs could be an indication that the women's accounts might not fully capture the entire picture of all African American women students on this campus (and predominately White campuses in general). The women seemed to be a group of survivors, who were prepared by their families, important others, and earlier schooling experiences to deal with racism and sexism. It is plausible that other women on the campus could have had more difficulty dealing with the experiences and have not yet developed effective adjustment strategies. In fact, it is reasonable to speculate that other African American women at this college (and other predominately White campuses) could have been overwhelmed by perceived racist and sexist encounters, which could have led to them leaving the institution. This assertion is supported by Lisa's (a 22-year-old junior in this study) report of temporarily dropping out of college due to feeling overwhelmed by, what she considered to be, racist and sexist encounters on campus.

Perhaps there are other African American women students who (feeling similarly overtaken by perceived racism and sexism on campus) left the campus and chose not to return. It would be interesting to gather those women's stories to compare the two groups' social

experiences, strategies they employ, and the nature of family support they received during their tenure at the campus in this study (and at predominately White campuses in general). Perhaps those women who permanently leave school do so because they do not want to continue dealing with perceived racist and sexist encounters even though they might have had ample family and important others' support. It could be that they decided to go to a school with less racial/gender based discrimination (i.e., a historically Black college/university), or an institution that is closer to their homes so that they can be better buffered by their family's support if they encounter similar racism/sexism. Understanding both groups of women's experiences could broaden the literature base's depiction of African American women college students on predominately White campuses.

Therefore, because the sampling strategy (and resulting sample) was not designed to allow for generalizability beyond the experiences of these 14 women, their lived social experiences cannot be considered representative of the lived social experiences of all African American college women (or college women of African descent) at majority White institutions. Hence, future research with a larger sample of African American (or African descent) college women at several predominately White colleges and universities could strengthen the transferability of the current findings. Moreover, the experiences these women shared were retrospective and from a single perspective; their faculty/staff and peer counterparts (White and African-American) might have different lived experiences of the same circumstances/social interactions. Hence, examining faculty/ staff perceptions of their interactions with African American students on their campus could paint a more well-rounded picture of African American college students' experiences with their faculty/staff. Also, exploring African American college men's experiences and adjustment strategies would create more texture to the current body of literature's portrayal of African American student's experiences on majority White campuses.

Additionally, although there was variability in the women's family income, I did not explore issues related to socioeconomic status because there is a growing body of research that explores the role of class (but not its intertwining effects on race and gender) on college students' (and specifically African American students') academic outcomes and experiences (Bui, 2002; Epps, 1995; Kozol, 1991; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001). Three women discussed how income issues created segregation in their peer relations, which validates previous findings about the role of income on minority students' college experiences. This area deserves further inquiry.

Another limitation of the study involves the data analysis method. Despite the rigor and structure of the constant comparative analysis used in this study, the nature of the method requires the research team (me and the study's auditor) to make judgments about the data and draw conclusions. For this reason, the biases of the team might introduce limitations to reporting accurate data. Although I acknowledged and attempted to set aside biases throughout the analysis process, they may be reflected in the findings. I generally believe that racism and sexism affect minority students' experiences in the education system, and in the importance of using a strengths-based approach to understanding African American students' academic and social outcomes. Also, the auditor believes that even though a person's perspective is a real aspect of her social experiences, it does not represent the totality of the situation leading to her experiences. Perhaps that person's perspective of a certain situation might not fully and accurately capture the intentions of all parties involved. It is possible that these biases might have influenced how the data were processed and analyzed.

Similarly, the data collection method of the study could serve as a limitation. Data were drawn from a semi-structured individual interview protocol. Qualitative researchers attempt to safeguard participant responses from research bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although open-ended questions were used in this study, the interview structure had the potential to influence the shape

and scope of participant responses. For instance, perhaps asking respondents to discuss their positive and negative experiences generated responses that might have been different than if they were asked to simply discuss their experiences on campus, without any mention of the positive or negative valence of the experiences.

Future Research

Findings from this study invite future research. Researchers could further explore African American female students' experiences with their same and different race peers. This research need stems from the women's perceptions (in this study) of mostly negative race relations with White students on their campus, segregation and competition among their African American peers, and strained dating experiences with their African American male and White female counterparts. According to the literature on student development, a key factor in students' success on college campuses is the quality of one's peer relations. This is especially true for African American students at majority White campuses. However, in the literature, there is a lack of attention to African American students' intra-group experiences on these campuses; instead the focus is mostly on between-group interactions. Consequently, most of the literature focuses on race relations and the resulting negative consequences, thus suggesting that African American students' adjustment on predominately White campuses overwhelmingly involves dealing with race issues.

However, as Black feminism asserts, African American women's experiences not only include race-related issues but also encompass gender complications. Supporting this assertion, the findings of this study highlight the intersecting roles of race and gender on African American women's encounters with their African American male and White peers, which expands the current literature's primary focus on negative race (rather than gender) relations. Moreover, the results suggest that there might be several positive outcomes attributable to racial and gender influences,

including an increased commitment to succeed and improved relations with same race peers. Hence, further studies with larger samples could tease out negative between-group interactions and the intertwining effects of race and gender on African American women's experiences on predominately White campuses. In so doing, the transferability of the current findings would be strengthened.

Furthermore, researchers could examine African American male experiences on these campuses to ascertain if they have similar peer issues, specifically in their friendship development and dating life. Solely focusing on African American men's experiences would address the literature's lack of gender specific studies by providing African American men's voices instead of the commonly gender-aggregated accounts in the literature. Hence, these studies would provide a broader perspective of the lived social experiences of African American students at majority White college campuses by exploring African American men's interactions with their peers and faculty/staff, and their dating behaviors and reasons for those behaviors. Perhaps these men perceive similar race but different gender-related challenges as the women in this study.

Moreover, exploring these men's adjustment strategies would enhance the literature base. According to researchers, men and women handle problems and personal stressors in different ways. For instance, in a study about gender differences in coping strategies to deal with stress, Bird and Harris (1990) found that females utilize social support networks (e.g., spiritual, family) in dealing with stressors, while males engage in more aggressive (e.g., taking anger out on others, being aggressive) and avoidance (e.g., acting as pillars of strengths, minimizing the problem) strategies. Similarly, in a study about male and female coping strategies, Chapman and Mullis (1999) reported that when dealing with stressors, females rely on social supports, self-reliance, and spiritual support more frequently than males. Males were reported to avoid and minimize the importance of the problems. Based on these findings, it would be reasonable to assume that

perhaps African American college males' adjustment strategies on predominately White campus would be different than the strategies employed by the women in this study.

However, because cultural values/beliefs influence individuals' adjustment strategies (DeGenova, 1997; Hudson-Weems, 2004a, b; Wallace & Constantine, 2005), as before mentioned, African American college males might use similar strategies as the women in this study due to both genders being influenced by their cultural heritage/upbringing. For instance, Staples (1999) asserts that in response to historical and ongoing racial oppression African American males tend to rely on their male peers' support and reinforcement of their manhood, while African American females tend to garner support and motivation from their blood/fictive family members (including "church family") and peers. Following this logic, it is evident that regardless of gender, African Americans' ability to deal with racial (and gender-related) stressors is promoted by the support they get from important others. Staples also argues that African American males are less active in the church and report less religious affiliation than their female counterparts, which could highlight a divergence in these individuals' coping strategies. Perhaps African American males use athletic activities and male peer friendship as primary adjustment strategies, compared to their female counterparts' use of spirituality/religiosity and support from important others.

Interestingly, although the women in this study view interracial dating as a common pairing between African American men and White women, Staples (1999) argues that might not be representative of the larger African American male population. He suggests that the close proximity of these male students to their White female peers on predominately White campuses, the decrease in the historical lack of access to each other, and the small numbers of African American males on predominately White campuses increase the chances of interracial dating. Combining Staples' above mentioned assertions, one can speculate that African American males on predominately White campuses might engage in interracial dating as a byproduct of proximity

and/or because they are seeking their African American male peers' approval. Because these men are believed to engage in several activities (i.e., gaining female attention, participation in sports, verbal acuity as evidenced in playing the dozens) to prove their manhood to each other, a possible reason for the frequent interracial pairing noted by the women in this study could be due to the fact that the men view interracial dating as another avenue for displaying their manhood and getting their male peers' approval. However, as Staples claims, when the larger population of African American males is considered, these men are choosing to date African American women more than White women. Hence, it would be interesting to explore the experiences of African American males who attend universities with large number of African American male students and who had previous exposure to White students (particularly females) to assess their dating patterns.

Additionally, to gain better insight into the differences in which faculty and students view their relationships and interaction, future research should examine faculty/student relationships from the perspectives of the faculty/staff. The women in this study perceived their African American faculty/staff to be more personable with them, which made the women feel more comfortable and supported on campus, whereas they felt undermined by their White faculty/staff. Because these women's reports mirror several researchers' findings on African American students' racialized social experiences on predominately White college campuses (Fegan, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Guiffrida, 2005; Lewis et al., 2000; Nettles, 1991; Schwitzer et al., 1999), it is important that researchers ascertain if these women's (and African American students', in general) perceptions of racial bias in their faculty/student interactions bear out in the faculty/staff's view of their interactions with African American students. Toward this end, researchers could examine White and African American faculty/staff's perceptions of their positive and negative encounters with African American students. By obtaining the faculty/staff and students' voices, researchers can determine if there is racial difference in how faculty/staff view and interact with African American students

from both the students' and faculty/staff's perspectives. For instance, researchers can explore whether White faculty/staff have different or similar views and interactions with African American students compared to African American faculty/staff's views and interactions with these students.

Future studies could also explore the faculty's professional and cultural focus, and if (and how) that focus affects their interactions with students. It could be that some faculty focus mostly on fulfilling the research/ publication requirements of their position (especially at research intensive institutions like the site of this study) and less on cultivating relationships with their students. For these faculty members, race and gender discrimination may not influence their decisions about how to interact with students; instead tenure and promotion criteria that stress research and publication rather than teaching and advising could be the driving force behind their limited interactions with students (not just African American students). And considering the role culture plays in individuals' social interactions, it would be reasonable to speculate that due to the generally individualistic (self-preservation) nature of the White culture (DeGenova, 1997) some White faculty do not consider developing relationships with students (regardless of their race) beyond the classroom a primary focus as some African American faculty do..

Although this might be the case for some White faculty, the focus on professional advancement and/or cultural differences arguments do not fully explain the overt racism the women described with some of their White faculty. Specifically, for those faculty members who the women saw providing more support and less punishment to their White (rather than African American) students it would be interesting to examine the reason(s) for their behavior. Perhaps, racism and sexism play a role in their behavior; however the role might be unconscious/unintentional (i.e., a byproduct of living in a racist/sexist society). By asking them to share their experiences and intentions, faculty members could be inclined to more fully examine the racial/gender influences (or any other factors) that impact their faculty-student interactions.

Hence, it would be interesting to examine both White and African American faculty members to ascertain their behaviors and reasons for their interactions with African American students. This information can then be compared to what African American students are saying about the different interactions they have with their White and African American faculty/staff. This information would also provide college administrators with information that can assist them in designing comprehensive training programs to enhance faculty/student relationships.

Practice Implications

The findings offer several practice implications. Because the women discussed less favorable interactions with their White counterparts on campus, administrators at predominately White institutions should consider designing and mandating multicultural sensitivity training for faculty/staff and students as means of ensuring more positive interactions for their African American (and other minority) students. In these sessions, attendees should be exposed to how their behaviors with students of various racial groups are perceived by these students. They should be informed of how (even if they did not intend racial bias) once African American female students (and minority students in general, as supported by literature) perceive their behaviors to be racially biased, they are less apt to feel comfortable interacting with and seeking help from them. Additionally, faculty/staff should be exposed to the role of culture in students' expectations of faculty/staff-student interactions. For instance, they could be informed that because African Americans (and several other racial/ethnic groups, namely Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans) stress collective effort and harmonious relationships with others (Hill, R., 1972, 1999; Hyde, 1996; Staples, 1999), these students most likely would expect (and benefit most from) more involved relations with their faculty/staff than some White faculty/staff might expect. According to Guiffrida's (2005) study about the characteristics of student-teacher/faculty interactions that African American students consider meaningful and most helpful in their academic

careers, these students best respond to (and feel most supported by) faculty who serve as mentors, academic coaches, advocates, and counselors who listen “to their academic and personal problems, support them, and giv[e] them sound advice” (p. 715) beyond merely being culturally sensitive.

Moreover, because some White faculty/staff might consider taking such a comprehensive role in relating to their students as crossing professional boundaries, it would be imperative that these multicultural training sessions explore the long standing tradition (and racial obligation) of such involved relations between African American students and their African American teachers. According to Foster (1993) and Guiffrida (2005), African American teachers (in K-12 and college) are taught (and believe) that it is their “moral and spiritual obligation to uplift the African American community” (Guiffrida, p. 716) by attending to students’ academic, emotional, and psychosocial development. Applying this cultural knowledge, it is essential that these White faculty/staff understand that if they (and their institutions) are committed to promoting student success, they must then implement strategies that are culturally appropriate for the student body. Granted this holistic approach might be more time consuming and distracting from traditional research, teaching and professional service requirements for faculty, but when implemented, African American students report feeling supported, which increases their motivation to succeed on these campuses.

Furthermore, in these training sessions (as well as in general) faculty and staff should examine their racial biases/expectations of students and any other expectations (i.e., cultural beliefs, focusing on professional versus student development) to ensure that these beliefs are not adversely influencing their interactions with students. Borrowing from the secondary education literature, Steele (1992) argues that White teachers’ and administrators’ views of African American students as academically inferior compared to their White counterparts contribute to these students disengaging from the student-teacher relationship. Their disengagement is considered to be

detrimental to their academic success. According to researchers, due to African American students' hesitancy to seek help from faculty/staff who they perceive to be racist, they do not get adequate "classroom support, academic advising, or career guidance" (Schwitzer et al., 1999, p. 193) from these individuals. Hence, if education professionals are interested in promoting student success (regardless of students' race), they should focus on establishing rapport with African American students, which will enhance these students' comfort level in their student-teacher/staff interactions. With increased social comfort, African American students (and minority students in general) might more readily seek the type of support necessary to facilitate their social and academic adjustment on predominately White campuses.

While examining how they interact with students, the factors that affect their interactions, and ways that culture influences theirs and their students' behaviors/expectations, faculty members should also strive to make all students (but in the case of this study, African American women students) feel respected as individuals and not viewed as a member of a group (even if the view of that group is positive). For instance, when discussing a topic that deals with African Americans' experiences, faculty members should be careful not to ask their African American students to serve as "cultural experts" (i.e., asking an African American student how African Americans feel about a particular issue). As the women discussed in this study and McKeachie (1999) indicated, expecting students to serve as experts on racial (and/or gender) issues make students feel stereotyped and not respected as individuals. To avoid making students feel disrespected or singled out because of demographic issues (or stereotypes), faculty should allow students to voluntarily contribute to class discussions.

However, as part of promoting rapport between them and their students (especially African American students), faculty could ask these students' their opinion on class topics (that are related to race, gender, or other sensitive social issues) during one-on-one discussions. Perhaps during

these individualized meetings, they could encourage their students to share their opinions in class (if they want to). This way, the faculty would convey interest in the students' views, respect for their right to share what/when they want to, and belief that they have valuable information that might enhance class discussions. In so doing, the students' might feel that the faculty welcomes their point of view, which could make them feel more comfortable sharing their views/experiences with the White faculty and other students in class. This increased sense of comfort would promote student-faculty interactions, these students' active participation in class, and increasing the majority students' exposure to these students' experiences.

In this same vein, administrators and educators should consider instituting a mandatory cultural awareness curriculum/class for all incoming students. These classes should address the role of prejudice in social interactions, how it plays out in the classroom, and ways to identify and correct these interactions. Students should be exposed to minority students' perceptions of racism on predominately White campuses (via reading summaries of research findings, listening to panels of minority students talk about their experiences), they should be encouraged to explore their racial biases and expectations, and participate in role playing to understand the impact of perceived racism on minority students' sense of belongingness and social adjustment on majority White campuses. The goal of such classes would be to help the student body understand how racial differences can hinder peer relations and some students' success on their campus. Also, because, as Guiffrida (2005) suggests, it is likely that students (regardless of race) face some level of frustration with the nature of the social interactions they have on college campuses, these cultural awareness classes should address the influences of multiple social demographics (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, social economic status, sexuality, religion, ability level) on individuals' behaviors and the way they are treated. In so doing, these classes would attempt to improve the

students' multicultural sensitivity, tolerance for diverse others, and social understanding and interactions.

Additionally, administrators should bolster minority based programs that focus on facilitating African American (and other minority) students' academic success and social adjustment on majority White campuses. As the women suggested in this study, having faculty/staff who were part of a program that solely focused on helping them succeed academically and socially made them feel supported on campus and give them a safe place to share their feelings and gain insight on how to deal with their experiences. Moreover, administrators should attempt to ensure racial diversity among their faculty/staff because, as the women in this study and previous studies suggest, African American students feel more comfortable seeking support from same race faculty/staff because they believe that these individuals serve as pertinent sources of support from which they get assistance with academic/career, financial, and personal issues. By being committed to ensuring that the racial composition of the faculty/staff is representative of the student body's racial composition, minority students are provided with role models and sources of support they feel comfortable interacting with. In essence, along with increasing cultural diversity and training of the faculty/staff, administrators should also consider restructuring the tenure and promotion criteria to include factors (i.e., activities related to building supportive student-faculty/staff relations) that promote student success (in the case of this study, African American female college students). In so doing, the faculty/staff (especially White faculty/staff) would be encouraged to provide more integrated services to their students without feeling like they might jeopardize their professional advancement with the time-consuming nature of addressing students' unique academic, career, and personal issues.

Similarly, considering the women's perceptions of differences in advising standards that they and their African American peers are held to compared to what their White counterparts are

held to, administrators should ensure uniformity in the length of program/number of years to graduate of all their students. Ignoring such an issue not only unfairly favors White students and prolongs the educational process for African American students, it also contributes to the racial stereotypes in the literature about low educational attainment among African Americans.

Interestingly, the women did not discuss using psychological services as part of their adjustment strategies. And because the literature on student development and counseling emphasizes the role of race and ethnicity in psychological development and adjustment, and explores minorities' decreased use of psychological services (Helms, 1994; Neville et al., 2004; Wallace & Constantine, 2005), psychologists and counselors should pay special attention to the women's adjustment strategies to better design programs that might attract these individuals. For instance, considering that the women in this study rely on their peers' support (i.e., sharing experiences and gaining support/insight from each other during student organization meetings), psychologists/counselors could contact student organizations to provide workshops that focus on the students' psychosocial and emotional development to better address the racial/gender issues they might be facing on their predominately White campuses.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 1

Two Domains of African American Women College Students' Experiences at a Midwestern PWI

Domain	Descriptors
Social Experiences	
Category 1: Student-Faculty/Staff Interactions	
Subcategory 1: Positive Interactions (Types of Support)	
• Academic/Career	*If I have any questions, I can go to them.*
• Resource Location	*They help me find the resources I need.*
• Personal/Relational	*They build that relationship, that rapport.*
Subcategory 2: Negative Interactions (Race Based Treatment)	
• With Faculty	*They don't really relate to us.*
• With Advisors	*They are not really here to help us.*
• With Other Staff (dining hall, bookstore, administrative)	*We are always being pointed out for something wrong.* *They are a little more aggressive with us.*
Category 2: Peer Interactions	
Subcategory 1: Positive Interactions	
• Between Group (African American - White) Interactions	*We can study and work together at times.* *Sometimes our interactions in class led to friendships outside of class.*
• Within Group (African American - African American) Interactions	*We are family, we look out for each other.* *We want each other to succeed.*

Subcategory 2: Negative Interactions

- Between Group (African American - White) Interactions (Racial/Cultural Segregation)

  They don't want to be bothered.

  They don't know us.

  Some of them say and do very racist things at times.

- Within Group (African American - African American) Interactions (Competition)

  We compete with each other.

  African American men don't really want to be in relationships with us, they want White women.

- Common Negative Within and Between Group Experiences

  They want to hang with African American men more than with us.

Social Adjustment

Category 1: Psychosocial Effects of Social Experiences

Subcategory 1: Positive Psychosocial Effects

- Self-Esteem — *I'm a better woman for it, I'm stronger and wiser.*
- Emotional Comfort — *It's more comfortable being with other African Americans on campus, they get me.*
- Racial Views — *I'm a little more understanding of White people and race issues.*

Subcategory 2: Negative Psychosocial Effects

- Self-Esteem — *Am I good enough, do I belong here?*
- Emotional Comfort — *It hurts sometimes how they treat you here.*

  We keep our guard up.

- Racial Views — *I look at White people more critically now.*

Category 2: Behavioral Responses to Social Experiences

Subcategory 1: Internal Coping Strategies

- Spirituality — *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*
- Self-Reliance — *I have to rely on myself if I want to make it.*
- Self-Regulation — *I adjusted my behaviors and overlooked the negatives when they happened.*
- Academic Behaviors — *I had to show them that I was serious about my education.*

Subcategory 2: External Coping Strategies

- Faculty/Staff Advice — *I go to the faculty and staff for help, but it's the African Americans who help the most.*
- Peer Support — *My African American friends are really there to support me and help me make it through.*
- Family Support — *Keep your eyes on the prize*
    - Financial Support — *They help me pay for whatever I need*
    - Emotional/Moral — *My family prepared me for what I was going to experience on campus*

      They listen to me and come to visit me

      They tell me they are proud of me.
    - Spiritual — *My family reminds me to focus on God to get through what I'm going through.*

Overarching Theme

The women perceived race and gender as positively and negatively influencing their social experiences and adjustment on campus.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITING MATERIALS

Recruiting Letter (To e-mail list-serves, faculty, and student organizations)

Hello [name of list-serve/person/group]:

I am a doctoral student in the Human Development and Family Studies Department at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I am conducting research on the experiences of African American female college students on a predominately White campus, under Dr. Mark Fine's supervision. Because you closely work with these students, I am requesting that you advertise this study to your Black female college students.

Results from this study will help educators better understand what it is like to be Black female college students on their campus and the role of their family's support. The information these students provide will also help educators to design programs that enhance African American students' families support, academic success, and social adjustment on predominately White campuses. The students will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview (with me) that will last approximately 90 minutes (1.5 hours), for which they will be paid $15.

Please inform the students that their participation in this study is completely voluntary. If they choose to participate in the study, they can stop participating at any point when they feel uncomfortable. Also, by participating in this project, these women will not experience any risks greater than those they normally have in everyday life. It is my hope that as a result of this study, Black women will begin to examine their social experiences on their campus and identify effective ways of handling these experiences.

Also, inform the women that all of their answers will be held in the strictest of confidentiality. All data will be combined and only unidentifiable summaries will be included in my reports. No data will be reported in a manner that would allow a reader to associate any responses to individual respondents.

For interested students, please do the following: (1) provide them with the enclosed Letter of Interest to Participate (Recruiting Letter), (2) have them contact me via e-mail, or (3) ask them to give you their names and contact information. Please send me the list of their names/contact information (via e-mail or campus mail) so that I can contact interested students to determine their eligibility and schedule the interviews.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me or Dr. Fine at:

Kortet Mensah
314 Gentry Hall
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 771 - 0126
kgmc47@mizzou.edu

Dr. Mark Fine
410 Gentry Hall
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 884 - 6301
finem@missouri.edu

Letter of Interest to Participate (Recruiting Letter)

Dear Students:

I am a doctoral student in the Human Development and Family Studies Department at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I am conducting research on the experiences of African American female college students on a predominately White campus, under Dr. Mark Fine's supervision. Because you meet this profile, I am requesting your participation in this study.

Results from this study will help educators better understand what it is like to be Black female college student on their campus and the role of their family's support. The information you provide will also help educators to design programs that enhance African American students' families support, academic success, and social adjustment on predominately White campuses. You will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview (with me) that will last approximately 90 minutes (1.5 hours), for which you will be paid $15.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop participating at any point when you feel uncomfortable. Also, by participating in this project, you will not experience any risks greater than those you normally have in everyday life. It is my hope that as a result of this study, you begin to examine your social experiences on your campus and identify effective ways of handling these experiences.

All answers you provide will be held in the strictest of confidentiality. All data will be combined and only unidentifiable summaries will be included in my reports. No data will be reported in a manner that would allow a reader to associate any responses to individual respondents. I ask for your name and contact information (in the below section) to allow me to contact you to determine your eligibility and schedule the interviews.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me or Dr. Fine at:

Kortet Mensah
314 Gentry Hall
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 771 - 0126
kgmc47@mizzou.edu

Dr. Mark Fine
410 Gentry Hall
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 884 - 6301
finem@missouri.edu

If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign, date, and return the below consent form to my address listed above. Or e-mail or call me to let me know that you are interested in participating in the study.

Letter of Interest to Participate

I am interested in participating in the study on African American female college students' social experiences on a predominately White campus. I understand that if I am eligible to participate in the study, my responses will be kept strictly confidential and I may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence to me.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

Name (Please Print) E-mail Address/Phone Number

Good times to call: _____

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I hereby consent to participate in research conducted by Kortet Mensah (573) 771-0126 and Dr. Mark Fine (573) 884-6301 with the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand that other persons may assist the primary investigator or be associated with her.

It has been explained to me and I understand that:

A. The purpose of this research is to examine the social experiences (both in and out of the classroom) of African American women college students at a predominately White institution. The researcher is interested in learning about the social interactions these women have on their campus, their adjustment strategies, and the role of family support in their adjustment process. The results will help the researcher, other educators, and student development personnel to design programs to aid Black female college students' social adjustment on predominately White campuses.

B. Description of the research
    1. African American women college students (including sophomores, juniors, and seniors) at a predominately White Midwestern institution will be recruited.

    2. All women who respond to the request to participate in the study will be asked to participate in an approximately 90 minute one-time face-to-face interview. These participants will be paid $15.00 on completion of the interview.

    3. All women will be given the names and phone numbers of local community resources in case they need assistance in dealing with negative feelings associated with the social experiences on their campus.

C. If I volunteer, my participation will consist of the following:
    1. I will meet with the researcher in a private location for an individual interview that will last approximately 90 minutes. I will be asked questions pertaining to my social experiences (both in and out of the classroom) on my college campus, my adjustment strategies, and the role (and nature) of family support in my adjustment process.

       The interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed. No names will be put on the tapes or transcripts to identify participants or family members. If names are mentioned in the interviews, they will be deleted from the typed transcripts. All data will be kept in a locked file in Kortet Mensah's office. After transcribing, tapes will be stored for 2 years and then will be erased.

    2. I may refuse to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering. I may end my participation in the interview at any time. Participation is voluntary, and refusal to participate at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

3. The questions I answer will be kept confidential and in no way will I ever be identified if I participate. The only exception to this is if I suggest that a child is being abused, in which case, the researcher is required to notify the appropriate authorities.

4. After I complete the interview (in its entirety), I will be given $15.00 and my participation in the study is finished.

D. There is no reasonable basis for expecting my participation in this research to expose me to the risk of serious harm or discomfort. In the unlikely event that the interview should bring up distressing issues, I have been given a list of community referrals.

E. There is no other way to obtain the information required for this research.

F. The benefits that are reasonable to expect from taking part in this research are monetary incentives of $15.00 for the interview and the satisfaction of contributing to scientific knowledge.

G. I will be provided with copies of the transcript and/or summary of results and given a chance to share my opinions about the results and conclusions.

H. The results of this research may be published but I will not be identified in any publication.

I. My questions about this research project have been answered. I understand that if I have any further questions about the research project, I am free to contact Kortet Mensah at (573) 771-0126 or Dr. Mark Fine at (573) 884-6301. For additional information regarding human participation in research, I can contact UMC campus IRB Office at (573) 882-9585.

J. I further consent to Kortet Mensah to perform the procedures referred to; report findings to government agencies, funding agencies, manufacturers, or scientific bodies; and to publish findings.

K. By signing below, I agree that I have been told the purpose of the project, understand what is expected of me, have been given a chance to ask questions, and have a copy of this Consent to Participate form for my records.

_____ _____

Volunteer's Signature Date

_____

Interviewer's Signature

APPENDIX D: ENLISTMENT GUIDELINES

Telephone Screening Script

Thank you for providing your contact information and willingness to know more about the research. I am interested in learning about the social experiences (both in and out of the classroom) of African American female students at a predominately White institution. Before setting up a time for the interview, I need to ask you some questions in order to determine if you are eligible for the study.

Eligibility Criteria

1. Are you an African American female? If no, not eligible.

2. Are you a student at [name of institution]? If no, not eligible.

3. Are you a sophomore, junior or senior in college? If no, not eligible.

4. Have you attended the university for at least two semesters (or one complete academic year)? If no, not eligible.

5. Are you willing to participate in an individual interview with me to discuss your social experiences on campus, your adjustment strategies, and the role (and nature) of family support in your adjustment process? If no, not eligible.

**If the individual does not meet the criteria of the study: Thank you very much for answering these questions. Based on your answers, you do not fit the criteria for this research. I am particularly interested in learning more about Black female college students' (who are sophomores, juniors and seniors) social experiences at [name of institution], their adjustment strategies, and the role that family support play in their adjustment. I appreciate your time and interest in the research. Best wishes on the rest of your semester.

**If the individual meets all criteria of the study [i.e., an African American female, junior or senior at (name of institution), attended the institution for at least two semesters (or one complete academic year)]: Thank you very much for answering these questions. Based on your answers, you fit the criteria for this research. I would like to schedule an interview with you. If it is alright with you, please tell me when you will have a 90 minute block free to participate in the interview.

Schedule the interview (time and location). I look forward to meeting with you on [scheduled date, time, and place. Give or get directions]. Would you like for me to call and remind you the day before? [Keep track of those who say they want a reminder call. Try to set up for weekday evenings between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m.] Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE

First Interview Guide

I will spend the first few minutes after each participant arrives to build rapport and help her feel comfortable during a greetings and informal chat section. Thereafter, I will begin the interview session with the below guide.

Beginning of interview:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview about African American female college students' social experiences on a predominately White campus. Today, I will ask you several questions about your social experiences (both in and out of the classroom), your adjustment strategies to deal with these experiences, and the role that your family plays in your adjustment process. Before beginning the interview, I will like to go over the consent letter [give the letter to the participant] and have you sign it, if you agree to participate in the research. If you have any questions about the research, the consent letter, and your participation while we are reviewing the consent letter, please feel free to stop me and ask any questions that you may have. [While discussing the consent letter, highlight the purpose of the study, the participants' role, confidentiality, and compensation.] Also, please complete the demographic form.

After reviewing and collecting the consent letter and demographic form:
Thanks for agreeing to participate in this research project. I would like to begin the interview now. I will ask you several questions, there are no right or wrong answers, I want to find out about your experiences. You are not required to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable and you can stop participating at any time. As you are talking, I will listen and probe when necessary. I may be quiet, please keep talking. Also, if I ask any question(s) that you are not clear about, please stop me and ask me to clarify the question(s). Will it be ok if I audio-tape our discussion and jot down a few notes while you talk?

> If no: Address any concerns they may have. Remind them that the information (the audio-tape and my notes) will remain confidential, no identifying information will be included in the transcripts, and the transcripts will only be shared with my committee members.
>
> If yes: Press record and begin the interview. State date and title of interview.

Demographic Form

1. Age: _____

2. Year in School: (Please put a check by the option that applies to you.)

   ____ Sophomore ____ Junior ____ Senior

3. Department: _____

4. Mother's educational level: (Please put a check by the option that applies to your mother.)

   ____ 8 years of schooling (finished 8th grade)
   ____ 9 years of schooling (finished 9th grade)
   ____ 10 years of schooling (finished 10th grade)
   ____ 11 years of schooling (finished 11th grade)
   ____ 12 years of schooling (finished 12th grade)
   ____ 13 years of schooling (finished 1 year of college)
   ____ 14 years (finished 2 years of college or graduated from college with an Associate's Degree)
   ____ 15 years (finished 3 years of college)
   ____ 16 years (finished 4 years of college or graduated from college with a Bachelor's Degree)
   ____ 18 years (finished 2 years of graduate schooling or graduated with a Masters' Degree)
   ____ 20+ years of schooling (finished 4+ years of graduate schooling or graduated with Ph.D. or M.D.)

5. Father's educational level: (Please put a check by the option that applies to your father.)

   ____ 8 years of schooling (finished 8th grade)
   ____ 9 years of schooling (finished 9th grade)
   ____ 10 years of schooling (finished 10th grade)
   ____ 11 years of schooling (finished 11th grade)
   ____ 12 years of schooling (finished 12th grade)
   ____ 13 years of schooling (finished 1 year of college)
   ____ 14 years (finished 2 years of college or graduated from college with an Associate's Degree)
   ____ 15 years (finished 3 years of college)
   ____ 16 years (finished 4 years of college or graduated from college with a Bachelor's Degree)
   ____ 18 years (finished 2 years of graduate schooling or graduated with a Masters' Degree)
   ____ 20+ years of schooling (finished 4+ years of graduate schooling or graduated with Ph.D. or M.D.)

6. Have you had me (Kortet Mensah) as an instructor or guest lecturer before? (Please put a check by
the option(s) that appl(ies) to you.)

____ Instructor ____ Guest Lecturer

7. Racial make-up of your high school: (Please put a check by the option(s) that appl(ies) to you.)

____ Predominately Black ____ Predominately White

____ Racially Mixed ____ Other (Please describe) _____

First Interview Guide Continued

Begin Interview Questions:

As we talked about earlier, I am interested in learning about the social experiences of African American female college students on predominately White campuses, the adjustment strategies they employ, and the role of family support in their adjustment process.

1. As a Black female college student at this predominately White institution, please describe what your experiences/interactions with the faculty have been like on this campus.

2. Please describe a few of the positive experiences you have encountered with the faculty on this campus.

3. Please describe a few of the negative experiences you have encountered with the faculty on this campus.

4. As a Black female college student at this predominately White institution, please describe what your experiences with your peers have been like on this campus.

5. Please describe a few of the positive experiences you have encountered with your peers on this campus.

6. Please describe a few of the negative experiences you have encountered with your peers on this campus.

7. In what ways has being a Black female affected your experiences with the faculty?

8. In what ways has being a Black female affected your experiences with your peers?

9. How have these experiences (both the positives and negatives) affected you?

10. Please describe what you have done to adjust to the experiences with the faculty and your peers you described.

11. What role does your family play in your adjustment to your social experiences on campus?

12. In what other ways could your family help you better deal with your experiences on campus?

13. Please provide any other information you would like to add about what we discussed today?

If participant does not provide/add further information: We have discussed all of the questions that I have, which means we are at the end of the interview. Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me today. You provided valuable information that will enhance scientific knowledge and help other females in similar situations. I appreciate your time and participation. Please give me a couple of days and times within the next week that you will be available to participate in the second interview. [Provide a sign-up sheet]. I will mail you a check of $15.00 as my token of appreciation after the second interview.

Second Interview Guide

Beginning of session:
Thank you for participating in the second interview about African American female college students' social experiences on a predominately White campus. Today, I will ask you several questions about your social experiences (both in and out of the classroom), your adjustment strategies to deal with these experiences, and the role that your family plays in your adjustment process. These are the same questions from the face-to-face interview. Today, I want you to share any additional information you may have to add and to discuss the summary of your responses from the interview. This interview is designed to do several things: (1) to get more information about your responses, (2) to get your reactions to current results from the interview, and (3) generate more information that will enhance the current result.

Before beginning the interview, I will like to go over the consent letter that you were given at the first interview. If you have any questions about the research, the consent letter, and your participation while we are reviewing the consent letter, please feel free to stop me and ask any questions you may have. [While discussing the consent letter, highlight the purpose of the study, the participants' role, confidentiality, and compensation]

After reviewing the consent letter:
Thanks for agreeing to participate in this research project. I now like to begin the interview. I will ask you several questions, there are no right or wrong answers, I want to find out about your experiences. You are not required to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable and you can stop participating at any time. As you are talking, I will listen and probe when necessary. I may be quiet, please keep talking. Also, if I ask any question(s) that you are not clear about, please stop me and ask me to clarify the question(s). Will it be ok if I audio-tape our discussion and jot down a few notes while you talk?

If no: Address any concerns they may have. Remind them that the information (the audio-tape and my notes) will remain confidential, no identifying information will be included in the transcripts, and the transcripts will only be shared with my committee members.

If yes: Begin the interview. State date and title of interview.

Begin Interview Questions:
As we talked about earlier, I am interested in learning about the social experiences of African American female college students on predominately White campuses, the adjustment strategies they employ, and the role of family support in their adjustment process.

1. According to your responses from the first interview, you described your experiences/ interactions with the faculty on this campus as [include the themes/concepts and give some examples].
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

2. According to your responses from the first interview, you described several positive experiences that you encountered with the faculty on this campus. For example, you stated that you experienced [include the themes/concepts and give some examples] on campus.
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

3. According to your responses from the first interview, you described several negative experiences that you encountered with the faculty on this campus. For example, you stated that you experienced [include the themes/concepts and give some examples] on campus.
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

4. According to your responses from the first interview, you described your experiences/ interactions with your peers on this campus as [include the themes/concepts and give some examples].
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

5. According to your responses from the first interview, you described several positive experiences that you encountered with your peers on this campus. For example, you stated that you experienced [include the themes/concepts and give some examples] on campus.
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

6. According to your responses from the first interview, you described several negative experiences you encountered with your peers on this campus. For example, you stated that you experienced [include the themes/concepts and give some examples] on campus.

a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

7. According to your responses from the first interview, you stated that being a Black female did/did not affect your experiences with the faculty on campus. [include the themes/concepts and give some examples]
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

8. According to your responses from the first interview, you stated that being a Black female did/did not affect your experiences with your peers on campus. [include the themes/concepts and give some examples]
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

9. According to your responses from the first interview, you stated that your experiences affected you in several ways. For example, you stated that [include the themes/concepts and give some examples].
    a. Does this accurately reflect your feelings? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

10. According to your responses from the first interview, you stated that you have done several things to deal with your experiences on campus. For example, you [include the themes/concepts and give some examples] to help you adjust to your experiences on campus.
    a. Does this accurately reflect your experiences? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

11. According to your responses from the first interview, you described several instances when your family helped/did not help you deal with your experiences on this campus. For example, you stated that [include the themes/concepts and give some examples].
    a. Does this accurately reflect the nature of family support you receive (or didn't receive)? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

12. According to your responses from the first interview, you described several ways that your family can help you better deal with your experiences on campus. For example, you stated that your family can [include the themes/concepts and give some examples] to help you in your adjustment process.
    a. Does this accurately reflect your thoughts/ideas? Please explain.
    b. Please provide any other information that you might like to add.

13. Please provide any other information you would like to add about what we discussed today?

If participant does not provide/add further information: We have discussed all of the questions that I have, which means we are at the end of the interview. Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me today. You provided valuable information that will enhance scientific knowledge and help other females in similar situations. I appreciate your time and participation. I will mail you a check of $15.00 as my token of appreciation. [Get and double check address]

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VITA

Kortet G. Mensah was born in Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa. Beginning at the age of 9, Ms. Mensah lived between West Africa and the United States. After graduating from Curtis High School in Staten Island, NY (1995), she received a BA from Stephens College in Columbia, MO (1998). Thereafter, Ms. Mensah completed her graduate studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She earned her Masters of Education in Educational and Counseling Psychology (2000) and Doctorate of Philosophy in Human Development and Family Studies (2010). Since 1998, Ms. Mensah has provided academic and personal counseling services in numerous settings.