

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

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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.