Using Critical Theories to Examine the Lives of Black Collegians

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Second, I want to thank each and every author who was invited to contribute to this special issue of the Journal. You were selected based on the high-quality and meaningfulness of your prior research; many were individuals with whom I have worked previously, but several were new collaborators who brought much to the project too. A “special issue” is nothing without special contributors, like those published here, who take seriously the special assignment to produce a special manuscript that addresses the theme of the volume. Usually this requires conducting a new study using a new approach, revisiting existing data but plotting new coordinates along a different path, or reframing past results using a new or different lens. And despite the time and work this requires, each of the authors presented here were up for the special assignment and strove to meet my demands with grace. Thank you all!

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With gratitude,

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Introduction to Special Issue: “Using Critical Theory to Examine the Lives of Black Collegians”

Terrell L. Strayhorn, Ph.D.

I contemplated this special issue long before I ever took up pen and started working on the original proposal or an initial draft of this introductory essay. There’s good reason for this foreshadowing of sorts too. First, my interest in and understanding of social science theories has grown exponentially over time, ever since my “early days” as an insatiably curious undergraduate at the University of Virginia. In sociology courses, I acquired basic knowledge about theories of crime, deviance, interpersonal conflict, social exchange, justice, and feminism, although it would take years for me to apprehend how each could be gainfully used to “see” what might otherwise go hidden or unseen. Moving from a focus on the group (i.e., society) in sociology to the individual (i.e., person), I took several psychology courses that exposed me to classical theories such as mental conditioning, self-efficacy, Maslow’s (1962) hierarchy of needs, and cognitive dissonance, although again I wouldn’t fully understand the utility of these until I entered a master’s degree program in education.

In graduate school, my interest in and understanding of prevailing sociological and psychological theories deepened. It was then that I recognized, as Kerlinger (1986) aptly said, theory is “a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomenon” (p. 9). This operational definition was helpful when making sense of theories about cognitive development, socialization, psychosocial growth, multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), and sexuality, to name a few. Theorists, at least as I understood then, aimed to develop plausible explanations of observed social phenomena for the purpose of explaining them and predicting when, where, or how they might occur in future instances. For instance, Perry’s (1970) intellectual development theory posits cognitive growth as movement along nine positions from simple, dualistic ways of thinking (i.e., received knowledge) to relativism (or procedural knowledge) then onward to more complex uses of knowledge for establishing personal commitments (i.e., constructed knowledge). Though contested, Perry’s theory, like so many others, attempts to explain through accessible words (i.e., labels) and relatable structures (i.e., positions) a much more complicated process of human development.

Yet not all theories exist merely to explain and predict phenomena. Similarly, not all phenomena unfold naturally and organically without provocation, interruption, or pressure from external forces. For instance, how might growing up in poverty affect a youth’s predisposition to crime or deviance? To what extent, if any, does race or culture shape the process through which individuals develop internal commitments to certain beliefs, values, and ethics? Do mainstream theories apply equally well to all people or might there be certain limitations? Indeed, some theories were developed solely for this purpose—to challenge existing bins of knowledge, to confront the limitations of
current information, and to contest normative assumptions that masquerade as “fixed facts,” “objective realities,” or “pure science.” Theories designed to question the existing status quo by aligning interests with those opposed to the dominant order of society are referred to as critical theory or theories.

The term “critical” often has a negative connotation. To some, critical is synonymous with words like rejection, ridicule, disparage, or damn. Literally speaking, the word critical was derived from the Greek term “kritikos,” which simply means to discern or judge. Consequently, critical theory is the application of principles, values, and beliefs to make judgments—no matter how “subjective”—for the purpose of bringing about change. Whereas rhetorical criticism carefully examines and evaluates the nature, function, and quality of discourse, critical social science carefully examines and critiques social functions and structures (Littlejohn, 1992), as an example.

Just as critical theory aims to critique, evaluate, and judge the dominant order of society with intent to improve the material conditions of people, critical theorists also align their scholarly interests with those minoritized or marginalized by the proverbial “natural order” of things. Critical theorists ask questions about competing interests, the ways in which they clash, and the manner in which they are resolved in favor of particular (and powerful) groups. For these, theory exists to do more than explain and predict, but also to understand how some social groups are oppressed so that one can take action to change oppressive forces, reshape archaic structures, and foster conditions for the betterment of individuals and groups in society. For critical theorists, knowledge is power (Horkheimer, 1937/1976; Littlejohn, 1992).

But so much of what we know (i.e., knowledge), especially in the study of higher education, is latent—or existing but not yet developed—and this is evidenced in several ways. First, higher education knowledge is latent in that it exists but has not yet been awakened or honed in ways that make it come alive for readers, practitioners, and scholars themselves. Dozens of higher education journals exist publishing hundreds of papers each year on topics ranging from student involvement to faculty productivity, from Black Greek-Letter organizations (BGLOs) to living-learning communities, where authors cite a particular theory typically in a section labeled “theoretical framework” where it rests largely unused and all-too-often unconnected from the rest of the manuscript. And though many papers exist dressed in various theoretical frames, far too many do nothing more than exist published on the pages of a journal. Without wrestling with the nuances of theory and what it provides, future research in the field may be similarly situated: “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Knowledge produced by the weight of empirical evidence in higher education is latent for another reason: much of it is underdeveloped but capable of seismic growth under proper conditions. Theorizing in higher education research has been critiqued by previous scholars (Anfara & Mertz, 2006) and even more recently by yours truly (Strayhorn, 2013). Even when postsecondary scholars employ theory, their use, at times, may be unsophisticated or incomplete. Scholars who study college students’ relationships often draw upon a set of capital theories to frame such relations as transactional resources (i.e., human), information-rich networks (i.e., social), or mechanisms through which values and tastes are (re)produced (i.e., cultural). Still, human and sociocultural capital theories are robust in their capacity to explain human social relations, to predict outcomes, and to merge with “critical perspectives” to unveil and expose the oppressive forces that conspire to deny some groups/people access to productive networks while privileging others. Rarely do higher education scholars push the boundaries of capital theory using a critical perspective, perhaps because education is such a

No matter how “nice” education may be perceived as a discipline, American society is marred by “non-nice” or savage inequalities that are, in part, tied to educational disparities throughout the PreK-20 pipeline. Such trends are racialized too—that is, educational disparities in the U.S. are organized into fairly persuasive patterns that are best interpreted by race/ethnicity¹. For instance, of the 1.5 million high school graduates who took the ACT (in 2008-2009), a significant proportion were not ready for college-level English (33%), college-level math (58%), or college-level biology (72%). Rates were startlingly higher for African Americans and Latinos, when compared to Asians and Whites. There are other examples. In this country, Black students perform lower than Whites and Asians on standardized tests of literacy, math, and science and these trends have persisted for decades. Less than 50% of Black males graduate high school and approximately half of them begin their postsecondary careers at 2-year community colleges; startlingly, two-thirds of Black men leave college before completion of their degree. Most explanations of Black college students’ performance accentuate individual agency and behaviors (e.g., involvement, help-seeking, grit) but eliminate (or downplay) the role of social, environmental, and societal forces that structure students’ opportunities to learn and achieve in schooling contexts. In my opinion, far too many extant theories assume dominant perspectives, majority beliefs, or traditional paths for developmental unfolding to capture the essence of Black college students’ lives, both on- and off-campus.

To fully apprehend Black college students’ experiences, tools are needed that push current explanations of how such college students learn, the influence of learning and larger environments on their achievement, as well as other critical perspectives that permit researchers to describe, document, and critique racialized inequities among groups so as to restructure and change the learning world around them ultimately. That’s what critical theory(-ies) can bring to our current understanding of Black collegians and that brings us to the focus of this volume.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this special issue of the NASAP Journal is to assemble, under a single cover, a set of peer-reviewed, high quality manuscripts that demonstrate the power and potential of using critical theory to examine the lives of Black students in postsecondary contexts. Manuscripts feature various critical theories including critical race theory, queer theory, and others, in studying diverse Black student samples (e.g., lesbian women, men) in distinct contexts (e.g., HBCUs). Beyond highlighting rigorous empirical studies, the special issue was designed to serve as an exemplar of how critical theories can and should be used in future research. Thus, implications for research and theory are included in each article, along with an impressive set of references to the literature that informs each author’s work.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

This special issue is comprised of a dozen contributions from nearly 20 faculty members, administrators, or graduate students from institutions across the country. This article serves as an introduction to the special issue, laying the context for the focus on critical theory and sharing some background information about how I came to edit it. Articles in this special issue not only illustrate various ways to use critical theories to study Black college students but also expressively focus on various subpopulations. In the next article, Crystal Renee Chambers (who was a doctoral student in the Curry School of

¹ This is what many education scholars coin the “racialized achievement gap[s]” or “Black-White achievement gap.”
Education at the University of Virginia when I was a fledgling masters student) paired with Diana Bowen to argue the value of proactive mentorship for Black women undergraduates. As a theoretical extension of sorts, Christa Porter and Candace Maddox draw on critical race theory and intersectionality to examine the lived experiences of Black lesbian women in college. Specifically, they use narrative analysis to understand the ways in which their participants attributed words and meaning to identity statuses, intersectionality of identities, and the role of race and racism.

The next two articles turn attention to Black men in higher education who face significant challenges that can be qualitatively different from those encountered by their same-race female counterparts. T. Elon Dancy, with whom I’ve worked on several other volumes, focuses on Black males in college using “Black Maze, White Gaze” as a useful heuristic. Shifting the focus a bit from undergraduate students to Black men studying in graduate and professional fields, Royel Johnson (one of my newest PhD students) and I join forces to posit a preliminary framework of professional identity for these men. Drawing on data from qualitative interviews, we articulate how Black men describe their professional identity, factors they attribute to its development, and how they make meaning of the role of race and racism in their graduate and professional fields. Not all authors divided their “sample,” “population,” or “participants” by gender; for instance, Michael Steven Williams, Joey Kitchen, and I worked to co-author a paper examining psychological theory as a frame for understanding the influence of psychological factors on Black students’ satisfaction in college.

Another set of articles in this special issue focus on another aspect of Black college students’ lives, specifically the various kinds of institutions in which they enroll. For example, Constance Illoh authored a paper comparing marketing strategies at for-profit and community colleges. Marjorie Dorime-Williams presents an analysis from her dissertation that examines differences in involvement among Black undergraduates at 4-year colleges and universities. Highlighting another important segment of the higher education enterprise, Robert Palmer, J. Luke Wood, and Brian McGowan co-author a paper that explores gender differences in student engagement at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), reifying the critical role that HBCUs play in contemporary issues of education.

Lastly, the special issue ends with two special essays. Lori Patton Davis, Chayla Haynes, Jessica Harris, and Samantha Ivery offer a reflective essay on the role of critical race theory (and related critical theories) in postsecondary research, using Gloria Ladson-Billing’s seminal article as an initial launching point. And, Derrick Tillman-Kelly, one of my PhD students, contributed an imaginative review of CJ Pascoe’s book that focuses on masculinity and sexuality in school contexts, which is the focus of his research interests.

CONCLUSION

In the end, what’s offered is a useful special issue of the NASAP Journal that catalogs under a single cover manuscripts that illustrate the useful ways in which critical theories can be brought to bear on studies of Black collegians. Much is to be learned from each of these manuscripts—what are the mentoring experiences of Black women, the identity development processes of Black lesbian women, the masculine scripts with which Black men contend in college, or the ways in which race and racism shape development of professional identity for Black men. Indeed there are other important lessons: gender differences in involvement, marketing strategies at for-profit and 2-year colleges, or background to HBCUs in contemporary society. But more than the usual purpose of study, research questions, and methods, each article offers fairly elaborate explanations of critical theories, findings that may
challenge existing notions or contradictions within a single study, and many, many implications for future research, theory, and practice. With so much to offer, I think this special issue of the NASAP Journal will have a longer-than-usual shelf life. It may be that some readers will see it as a new issue of a long-standing journal, sponsored by the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASAP). Other audiences might receive it as a more technical resource—a place to turn for information about theories, frameworks, subpopulations, or even methodological guidance. Still others might be enthused about the volume’s empirical base and the hefty set of references to prior literature that characterize it. Indeed, any and all of these are acceptable uses of this special issue. But if nothing else, it was a fun, useful, and worthy scholarly exercise for me to guest edit and I am better because of this experience.

EDITOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Terrell Lamont Strayhorn is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies, Chief Diversity Officer in the College of Education and Human Ecology (EHE), and Director of the Center for Inclusion, Diversity & Academic Success (IDEAS) at The Ohio State University. He also serves as a senior research fellow at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity, faculty research associate at the Todd A. Bell National Resource Center for African American Males, and faculty appointments in the Department of African and Africana Studies, Engineering Education Doctoral Program, and Sexual Studies Program at OSU. His research interests center on issues of equity and diversity in higher education, social psychological development of students, college student learning and cognitive growth, with a particular accent on the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities, socioeconomic disadvantaged students, and other marginalized populations.

Author of 7 books/monographs and more than 100 book chapters, journal articles, and scholarly reports, Strayhorn’s work has been published in the most highly-respected journals in education including The Journal of Higher Education, Educational Researcher, Review of Higher Education, Journal of College Student Development, NASPA Journal, Urban Education, and American Behavioral Scientist, to name a few. Recipient of a prestigious CAREER grant from the National Science Foundation, Strayhorn’s recent research examines students’ pathways into scientific and technical fields, sense of belonging, and both proximate- and long-term outcomes of college education.

Named one of the most highly-visible and regarded new scholars in his field by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education and Diverse Issues in Higher Education, Strayhorn has received several national awards for his contributions to knowledge including, but not limited to, the ACPA Emerging Scholar Award (2007), Benjamin L. Perry Professional Service Award (2007), SACSA New Professional Award (2008), ACPA Annuity Coeptis Emerging Professional Award (2008), ASHE Early Career/Promising Scholar Award (2009), and the CEP ASHE Mildred Garcia Founder’s Service Award. In 2011, Diverse Issues in Higher Education named him one of 12 top diversity scholars in the country. Professor Strayhorn earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Virginia (UVA), a master’s in education (MEd) from the Curry School of Education at UVA, and a PhD in higher education from Virginia Tech. He is currently completing a masters degree in law (MSL) at OSU’s Moritz College of Law.

REFERENCES


My Sister’s Keeper: The Value of Proactive Mentorship for Black Women Undergraduates

Crystal Renée Chambers, Diana Bowen

Abstract— Mentorship literature often links mentoring relationship effectiveness to protégé enthusiasm; however, for women of color a proactive strategy by a mentor may be more important in overcoming barriers to the initiation of a relationship. In evaluating the differences in mentoring strategies at two institutions, we conclude that proactive mentorship, enthusiastic pursuit of Cooper’s notion of “my sister’s keeper,” may be most valuable to enhance the college experience of Black women undergraduates.

Key Terms— Black Women, Critical Feminism

I am my Sister’s keeper! Should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race, and this conviction should purify and exalt the narrow, selfish, and petty personal aims of life into a noble and sacred purpose (emphasis in original).

(Cooper, 1998, p. 64)

In A Voice from the South, Black feminist foremother Anna Julia Cooper asserts not only that young Black women are worthy of the organized attention afforded to their White peers, but that every person of Negro/African American heritage should enthusiastically seek to be “a friend to every weak, struggling unshielded girl” (Cooper, p. 64). Consider that over Dr. Cooper’s lifetime, the Civil War was fought, slavery ended, and freedmen and women like herself took hold of opportunities for further education while a Reconstruction Congress and concomitant state legislators gave space for a few – DuBois’ “talented tenth” – to pursue the highest of education and vocational aspirations. However, if the “talented tenth” metaphor had a grain of truth, for every Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida Barnett Wells, there were nine other young Black women without either the foundations or support to pursue a higher education.

Today the higher education trajectories of young Black women are different in that regardless of quality, there is universal access to elementary and secondary education. In addition, as with other subpopulation groups, more young Black women than ever attend some form of post-secondary education (NCES, 2011). However, data on student collegiate experiences as a whole are uneven. Particularly underrepresented are the experiences of a segment of the population recently branded “the new model minority” (Kaba, 2008, p. 309). According to Kaba (2008), Black women show great resilience: they are less likely than Black males and Whites (male and female) to commit suicide, use alcohol and illicit drugs, or die per 100,000 per capita; less likely than all males to commit crime, and are more likely than Black males and Whites to
live to age 100. This is in addition to their disproportionately high propensity to attend college. These successes are attained in spite of comparative economic hardships (Evans-Winters, 2011), differences in educational opportunities in and outside of the K-12 classroom including opportunities to participate in rigorous pre-collegiate coursework, such as advanced placement classes (Flowers, 2008) and private community based student activities (Cuadros, 2007). Yet, by focusing solely on inputs (student background characteristics) and outputs (various measures of student success) information pertaining to the quality, sometimes even the humanity, of the college experience is ignored.

Michelle, a participant in Winkle-Wagner’s (2009) UnChosen Me is emblematic of the disjuncture between student success and student experiences. As the president of her campus’ chapter of her sorority and active participant in other student organizations, Michelle is a highly engaged student and leader. However, when referring to her experiences at a predominantly White institution (PWI), she expresses resentment and describes them as “painful” (Winkle-Wagner, 2009, p. 99).

In the present study we look at the experiences of young Black undergraduate women in two spaces we posited would be most supportive of this population: a majority Black (83.7% Black undergraduates) historically Black college and university (HBCU) with a women’s center and a majority White (58% White undergraduates) women’s college with a multicultural center. We analyze commonalities and differences in the approaches of the directors of these two spaces to tease out analytically generalizable premises that are translatable to other spaces, such as Michelle’s PWI alma mater. Critical race feminism (CRF) frames our analysis as we find that mentorship literature often links the effectiveness of mentoring relationships to the enthusiasm of the protégé (e.g., Castellanos, 2000; Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Zachary, 2012); however, for women of color the proactive stance of a mentor may be more important in overcoming barriers to the initiation of a relationship. One purpose of CRF is to work towards a humane, egalitarian society (Wing, 2003), proactive mentorship, enthusiastic pursuit of Cooper’s notion of “my sister’s keeper,” may be most valuable to enhance the college experience of Black women undergraduates.

STRUCTURAL LIMITS OF COLLEGES SERVING WOMEN OF COLOR

Law professor Adrien Wing describes CRF as a means of addressing the legal concerns of people minoritized because of their racial, gender, and often class status (2003). Too often, legal responses to whether an individual has behaved in a rational manner are grounded in a normality, neutrality, objectivity, and truth that embrace the experiences of White, middle class heterosexual men as the rational person. As such, it becomes at best difficult for financially poor, women of color, within the spectrum of sexual orientation, to demonstrate before a court that one too is a rational person. As law shapes society, legal constructions of what behavior is rational shapes social expectations and judgments about whose behavior is not normal, which people are able to evaluate from a perspective of neutrality and objectivity, and whose construction of events is true (Wing, 2003).

CRF centers gender while at the same time critiquing essentialism embedded in much of (White) feminist work, the normalization of middle class White women’s experiences as universally belonging to all women (Wing, 2003). CRF theorists assert that one’s identity cannot be divvied into parts. Instead, the actuality of our layered experience is multiplicative. Multiply each of my parts together, one X one X one X one X one, and you have one indivisible being. If you divide one of these parts from one you still have one (emphases in original). (Wing, 1991, p. 194)
It is in this consideration of oneness that we employed a research design whereby we sought not to isolate race and gender effects, but rather to evaluate support services for Black women on college campuses as singular, unified beings.

To illustrate, Elaine Jones, the first Black woman graduate of the University of Virginia Law School and General Counsel to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) until her retirement after 34 years, recounts her story in this way. There were no Black male students at the time, the firsts had graduated or otherwise moved on by her time. And so she would congregate with the other women in the ladies room. If the other, White, women were talking about a matter, then it was about gender. However, if they were not, she would deduce that it was about race. Yet at some base level, it did not matter whether it was race OR gender: “It was happening to me” (Jones, 2000).

Intersectionality, is not just about identity politics, but describes this situation in which one is unable to receive an adequate remedy because of the intersecting layers of one’s identity (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw & Dill, 2009). The example Crenshaw (1989) uses is of a case in which a Black woman sued a firm for race and gender discrimination. She lost the case because the firm was not discriminatory on the basis of gender. The firm also hired Black men in the warehouse; therefore, the firm was not discriminatory on the basis of gender. The firm also hired Black men in the warehouse; therefore, the firm was not discriminatory on the basis of race. By failing to acknowledge racialized sexism or sexist racism (James, 2002), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was effectively null and void for women of color. Contemporarily “sex plus” or “race plus” legal claims may be substantiated with evidence, especially statistical data; however, in general, Title VII discrimination claims are difficult to win (Gafford Muhammad, 2007).

Like Title VII with its safe havens for race and gender, college and university campuses tend to provide support for separate and discrete identity categories. Most four-year campuses respond to the needs of women of color through women’s centers, multicultural centers, counseling and health services, student organizations, and general student affairs offices (Rosales & Person, 2003). Given the divergent service providers, women of color are less likely than peers, White and/or male, to have support needs addressed in an integrated, holistic fashion (Rosales & Person, 2003).

In many instances, support is provided on a bifurcated basis: programming for women and programming for students of color. Women’s centers are useful in providing information on health and wellness, domestic violence and safety, as well as gender identity and leadership development. Multicultural centers support student individual racial/ethnic identity development and provide students connections to persons of similar heritages, as well as provide programming to connect students and other members of the campus community across racial and ethnic lines. Both multicultural and women’s centers often provide cultural programming, centered on race/ethnicity or gender. They may also provide academic support, such as tutorial and mentorship services, in addition to career and graduate school information/counseling services, directing students on the bifurcated basis of race/ethnicity or gender.

Structures like these beg the question of where does a young Black woman go if she experiences oppression, based on her sex, by a male of color? Sexism within the African American community is often unspoken (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003), but felt, and a Black female collegian may experience difficulties in navigating tensions with her male counterparts. She may feel ostracized from the Black student union, but is turning to the women’s center racially traitorous? Similarly, is confiding in support staff at the multicultural center about a White female roommate
who makes derogatory statements about one’s hair or otherwise engaging in antisocial behavior traitorous to women’s solidarity?

Some institutions have worked to provide support structures at the intersections of race and gender: sister circles, feminist programming at multicultural centers, as well as multicultural programming at women’s centers. However, sustained programming requires continued institutional commitment and leadership.

Units examined within the present study are structurally constructed to support Black women at their race and gender intersections. Of the more than 4,000 four-year colleges and universities in the United States, only 104 are HBCUs, spaces where African American students tend to find relative freedom from racism. In addition, there are fewer than 50 women’s colleges still operational in the US, spaces where women students can generally find relative freedom from sexism. Furthermore, there are only two colleges in which African American women can find relative sanctuary from both racism and sexism: Bennett and Spelman Colleges, the last two all-female HBCUs. In reflecting on the lessons learned from leading an HBCU designed for women of African American descent, Dr. Johnetta B. Cole (1992) remarked:

In an atmosphere relatively free of racism and sexism, where teachers care and expect the very best, parents and kinfOLks are involved, and the curriculum and those around the students reflect in positive ways who the students are – there are no limits to what individuals can learn and who they can become. (p. 181)

Studying Black women at Spelman or Bennett would not have afforded researchers the opportunity to isolate either one of these “isms” to see how they are supported. Instead, we selected a multicultural center on a women’s campus as a relatively sexism-free environment that was still racially activated. Similarly we selected an HBCU with a women’s center, as a relatively racism-free environment, still sexism charged. It is in these spaces that among other facets, we examined the mentorship of young Black women collegians by the directors of these centers.

MENTORSHIP AS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment most simply can be defined as a process of gaining power (Gutiérrez, 1990; Kar, Pascual, & Chickering, 1999; Masterson & Owen, 2006; Speer & Hughey, 1995) which requires not only the availability of information and means, but the willingness of the person(s) oppressed to access resources available to secure their own power (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). Mentorship, then, can be conceptualized as an empowerment tool wherein a mentor helps a willing protégé to access and incorporate resources, whether towards a specific goal or towards overall life improvement (Zachary, 2012). While we could focus on the self-efficacy of Black women students to avail themselves of campus resources, the present study centers on the level of active engagement of program directors as mentors.

Mentoring has several definitions (Healy, 1997). According to Bennett’s (1994), a mentor is “a person who achieves a one-to-one developmental relationship with a learner, and one whom the learner identifies as having enabled personal growth to take place” (p. 4). Traditionally, mentorship is defined as “one person, usually of superior rank, achievement and prestige, guides the development of or sponsors another person, who is seen as the protégé” (National Education Association, 1993, p. 17). However, mentoring relationships need not be hierarchical; non-hierarchical peer-to-peer, group, and reverse (wherein a younger person mentors someone older) mentoring configurations exist (Zachary, 2012).

Organic mentor relationships, according to Bennett’s (2002) are informal networks that are often recognized as such in hindsight — this is in contrast to formal mentorship,
which relates to future mentorship activities. Informal mentorship tends to be less recognized and go unrewarded (Ferman, 2002). On the other hand, while formal mentoring programs focus on institutionalized and thus more easily recognizable relationships, they may or may not be the most meaningful in terms of service to the protégé (Healy, 1997). Of special importance in formal mentorship arrangements is consideration of the ways that mentors and mentees are paired. Such arrangement can determine the success of the protégé (Bell & Treleaven, 2011). In synthesizing the literature on formal vs. informal, organic vs. inorganic mentorships, it seems that the deliberate, inclusive reach of formal mentorship strategies when combined with opportunities for mentorships to organically develop are optimal. In this vein, academic and student affairs venues within academe are prime spaces to develop mentoring relations and can function as such if there is intentionality. The key here seems the preparation of mentors, their readiness to engage a mentoring relationship (Zachary, 2012).

Context is a critical component of mentoring relationships. In addition to considerations of whether mentoring occurs in the context of a school, business, or community writ large, Zachary (2012) in The Mentors Guide encourages mentors to become multiculturally adept, engaging one’s own cultural assumptions, developing a working knowledge of and appreciation for cultural difference in order to effectively communicate with protégés. Towards this end, Hinton, Grim, and Howard-Hamilton (2009) discuss the importance of a multicultural mentoring model, proposing the employment of mentoring techniques that maintain the individuality of the students’ cultural background and experiences. The authors point to the importance of considering multicultural mentorship as, “[t]he traditional model of mentoring [that] has left many women and people of color on the organizational periphery” (p. 188).

Women and people of color need to know that a mentor cares in order for a mentoring relationship to develop and grow. As put by Zachary (2012), “women… put a priority on building relationships, valuing care, concern, and connection” (p. 58) and students of color generally, Black students in particular, “respond best to professors who care about them” (Gallien & Peterson, 2005, p. 11). Demonstrating that one cares may mean stepping outside of traditional approached to mentorship, which rely on protégés to initiate and maintain a mentoring relationship.

Whereas several mentorship guides link the effectiveness of mentoring relationships to the enthusiasm of the protégé (e.g., Castellanos, 2000; Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Zachary, 2012), students who feel disempowered may need mentor enthusiasm in order to initiate and develop a mentoring relationship. Cooper (1892) saw active intervention in the lives of “the mothers of the next generation” as a sacred endeavor, and spoke directly to the intellectual elite:

*We need men and women who do not exhaust their genius splitting hairs on aristocratic distinction and thanking God they are not as others; but earnest, unselfish souls, who can go into the highways and byways, lifting up and leading, advising and encouraging…*(p. 64)

For some, active mentorship means being ready and available should a protégé come along (Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Zachary, 2012).

However, for women of color, active mentorship may require an additional dimension, the capacity of mentors to go, to find protégés, and then bring them along. We label this set of mentorship strategies as proactive mentorship. For example, DeAngelo (2009) describes the “talent-seeker” style of mentorship which involves having a mentor approach a student and suggest that they have what it takes to succeed in graduate school. Beyond the power of suggestion, these mentors “fostered and engaged students
in critical research experiences and through academic engagement experiences” that not only prepared the students for a future in academia, but also mentored them through programs whose aim is “diversity in higher education” (DeAngelo, 2009, pp. 33-34). Intrusive mentoring is another approach wherein “the very active involvement of mentors as they ensure the student’s success” (Tuitt, 2009, p. 221; see also Hinton, Grim, & Howard-Hamilton, 2009). Both approaches are consistent with proactive rather than passive mentoring (Ferman, 2010).

Getting to the point of why proactivity is important for women of color, Bertrand Jones and Dufor (2012) explain that many students are hesitant to seek help. Some may have trust issues in an uncomfortable environment while others may be used to being overlooked or otherwise feel unworthy of another’s attention (Zachary, 2012). Being ready and willing to help such students is not enough. Seeing an opportunity to help someone grow, the authors advocate for mentors to initiate a relationship. Towards this end, they encourage mentors to set up the first meeting with a potential protégé (Bertrand Jones & Dufor, 2012).

METHODS

This study is part of larger one analyzing support systems for Black women undergraduates. The research design for this study is a qualitative case study in two sites (Yin, 2008): a women’s center on an HBCU campus and a multicultural center on a women’s college campus. Purposive sampling techniques were used to identify a woman’s college and an HBCU campus for study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The goal was to match campuses by scope as indicated by Carnegie Classification and relative success as measured by graduation rates. In particular, these campuses needed to have overall graduation rates above the national average and be similarly successful in the graduation of Black women students. Institutional profiles are provided in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Student Population</th>
<th>Private 1,782</th>
<th>Public 8,587</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Instructional Program</td>
<td>Professions plus arts &amp; sciences, some graduate coexistence</td>
<td>Professions plus arts &amp; sciences, some graduate coexistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Instructional Program</td>
<td>Postbaccalaureate with arts &amp; sciences (education dominant)</td>
<td>Postbaccalaureate comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Profile</td>
<td>75-90% undergraduate</td>
<td>75-90% undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Profile</td>
<td>Medium full-time four-year, inclusive</td>
<td>Full-time four-year, inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size and Setting</td>
<td>Small four-year, primarily residential</td>
<td>Medium four-year, primarily residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year student retention rate</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rates (4 years/ 6 years)</td>
<td>30%/ 49%</td>
<td>15%/ 38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.
Data Collection

Data were collected from three sources: interviews of center directors, document review and student focus groups at each campus. Interviews with center directors were open, beginning with an overarching question asking the directors to tell us about their centers, with probes directing them towards the center’s history, current mission, and programming. Documents included the center websites, press releases related to the founding of the centers, and center publications promoting center programming. Questions asked of the student focus groups mirrored those of Watson and associates (2002). For instance, we asked students about their experiences on campus, both positive and negative, and what campus resources they accessed when feeling upset. We also asked students about their engagement on campus, including leadership activities. Conversations with students occurred over the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years and were audio recorded. Student participants were recruited by the directors and are not individually identifiable in this manuscript to maintain confidentiality.

Scheduling women to talk with at ECSC was relatively easy. There were 11 participants in the focus group and several other campus informants who spoke regarding their ECSC experiences. While pizza was offered to attract PWSC, only one student, a student assistant, showed at the initial focus group. Donuts were offered on a second visit and 8 students participated in the conversation, one of whom was a male.

Data Analysis

We began our analysis by pulling together descriptions of the centers and their programming using documents provided, interviews with the directors, and field notes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). General descriptions of the centers’ founding and connection to the broader campus and surrounds are provided as part of the findings (Yin, 2008). In the next phase of data analysis we elected to compare student experiences and support across the two sites. To do so, we gleaned an overall narrative of student experiences at each site and examined transcripts for student articulation of campus support. These were directly connected to focus group questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In particular, we looked for terms in the transcripts focusing on how services and programming provided through the center influenced students’ lives. Preliminary findings were shared with center directors; however, no suggested revisions were communicated to the researchers.

Data is reported by institution under the broad themes of campus experiences and campus support. We complete this study analyzing the center director’s involvement in student experiences and as part of campus support as articulated by students. We identify the connections between the directors and students as ones where there is potential to build a mentoring relationship. We found greater mentoring connections when a proactive mentoring strategy was employed.

FINDEINGS

Data from this study suggested several major findings, which are outlined in this section.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton College

Elizabeth Cady Stanton College (ECSC) was founded as a women’s college, in a small city in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Like many women’s colleges in the South, it began just a couple of decades before the Civil War, with a strong seminarian/ finishing school focus (Farnham, 1995). The student body was White and exclusive, with students readily defined as middle class to wealthy. Overtime, however, that changed. ECSC’s website currently boasts of its academic and paracurricular diversity initiatives. While it is unclear when the first Black women were admitted, from the 1970s into the 1990s, there were limited Black women enrollments. According to campus informants, Black women were seldom seen together and would not integrate with Blacks in the town, as Blacks in the town...
often were poor to working class. In the 1990s, ECSC welcomed their first Black professor who at times would count the frequency, or rather infrequency with which Black women would walk by his office on the main quad. He then advocated with the president for a multicultural center and a director focused on the recruitment and retention of women of color on campus, as well as enhancement of cultural programming.

Established in the mid-1990s, the multicultural center at ECSC seems the hub of activity for Black women undergraduates. Programming includes a big sisters peer mentorship program pairing “freshwomen” with upper-class women, an alumni-student mentorship program, and two cultural houses or living learning communities—one Latina, one Afrocentric. However, the most prominent program is the Ida B. Wells (IBW) Scholars Program. Initially, the IBW Scholars program was a recruitment tool. African American women would be recruited into an IBW cohort and would begin their freshwomen year together, starting with orientation. At orientation IBW Scholars are met by the director and inducted into a scholarly Afrocentrically centered community.

Throughout the year, the IBW Scholars engage and lead a number of activities including cultural events such as a campus-wide Kwanzaa celebration and Black baby doll drive to benefit little Black girls in the local community. One of the researchers was privy to an IBW Scholars Tea where the young women hosted a reception for fellow students and faculty and were welcomed into the kitchen to help in preparations in a culturally meaningful way. The women adorned their heads with kente wraps, with the unskilled seeking the help of other head-wrappers, including the director who took a hands on role. The wear of years of on the center’s building is in part hidden through African/ African-American artwork and quilts constructed by students over the years, under the direction of the director. As we moved throughout campus, she seems to know each of the Black women on campus by name, and it is difficult to distinguish between IBW Scholars and other Black women students.

The core of the IBW Scholars program is leadership development which occurs through peer mentorships and induction into the campus community. The model is an exemplar of the scholarly observations of Tatum (1997), that African American students are empowered to assume campus wide leadership when nurtured, mentored culturally. While the program has evolved since data collection, it was now one of six programs through which ECSC initiates and integrates “freshwomen” into the college experience. In this vein, the IBW Scholars program was a campus trailblazer.

Campus Experiences. Students’ overwhelming experience with campus and the center was positive. One student remarked that, at this PWI, she was able to build relationships with Black women with whom she identified:

I got to bond with other students who are like me. I mean, all through grade school is tended to be predominately white schools, and you know, when you get into the high schools and AP courses and things, you may see more diversity and other leaders like you. And you’re kind of, I don’t really want to say sheltered, but you’re away from, like in our high school you’re not going with other African American students to AP European courses. So it’s kind of like they have different IQ’s. And so coming into the IBWells learning community, I was around, you know, women who, you know, aspire to do great things with their life and it wasn’t just “I’m going to take the easy road”. And so in preparation for the Kwanzaa celebration I really got to connect with them…

In addition to cultural connections, as one would expect as the foci of a multicultural center, time was taken to acknowledge student academic achievements: “So, I got to not
only bond with other students but I got to be recognized for my academics as well." This theme of academic achievement was echoed by other ECSC students.

Students spoke about their leadership opportunities and encouragement to pursue leadership on campus more broadly. Said one student midway through her course of study,

... they are really good about encouraging others to get involved and be student leaders. I’m involved in a lot of student leadership roles on campus and it’s because of you know, not only the community encouraging us all to get involved, but also outside people encouraging us to join different types of organizations as well.

In fact, it is clear through another conversation with a senior student that the framework for gathering Black women students together and build them up culturally is purposed to build students to assume leadership roles on campus more broadly and in the world beyond.

Students across the undergraduate spectrum found their interactions with the center as instrumental to their campus experience. When asked specifically about the pros and cons of attending ECSC, one student responded:

Definitely the pros, I would have to say the office. It’s definitely like the key point I have here. This is a predominately white institution, so we don’t have a lot of, you know, you would think that coming here compared to other schools, you don’t have a multicultural office like we have. For instance, stuff they do is preparing you for the real world. And I feel we have a very strong office. Also, you know that it’s like small here so we get a lot of opportunities to network with the campus as a whole, not just within the office. But the office is definitely a central as a factor in my life here on campus and one of the biggest pros I see here on campus. As far as cons, I would probably just say, I would like for our office to have a little bit, a stronger voice on campus. We try, but you know, it’s with money, and this, that, and the third, it kind of makes things a little difficult. But I can say that the girls that are trying, they’re very passionate about what we’re trying to get done and have a greater voice for us on campus. So that would be my con.

Another concurred:

I think my biggest pro is that it’s really easy to get involved. I know I mentioned organizations that we lacked, but there are also many, many organizations on campus for it to be so small. So I really like that opportunities are great to get involved and to become a leader. A con, a con I’m not really sure on. I guess I could comment on what she said about our office having a stronger voice. Because one, there aren’t many of us on campus, so it does require more for us to have that stronger voice, so all of us have to be strong in order for us to be heard.

In fact the biggest drawback several mentioned was the fact that the institution was located somewhat remotely, and as such the social scene, especially the availability of eligible young men to date, was severely limited.

**Campus Support.** When it came to where students turn when they needed support the center and its director seem the clear choice. Asked, “if you’re upset or in need of some support, where is it that you go primarily?” One student responded:

I go to my house suites. I live in the multicultural house here on campus … And all of those students are students that I’m either a mentor to or were students that came in with me as my IBWells sisters. We all have similar aspirations and things like that, strengths and what not. So I definitely can go to them, or anyone within the community as far as that goes. Those are the people that I feel really secure with. [Director name] even, and some of the faculty members. Like I can discuss issues with her as if she were a peer, so, that’s definitely my primary support system here on campus.
Another agrees:

If my roommate’s not available at the time then I can definitely rely on anyone in the community to talk because we all our sisters and we’ve developed that bond. So, I can trust in any one of them with my feelings or whatever is going on with me. And also [the director], cuz [the director] is truly one of a kind. She’s not your average breed. So, I can definitely depend on her you know, to talk to me, console me, with everything that’s going on.

It is clear that at ECSC, the multicultural center director makes herself accessible to Black women on her campus. She initiates relationships with these students when they arrive on campus as well as orchestrates peer mentoring relations among the students. Her approach to mentorship is a proactive one.

**PHYLLIS WHEATLEY STATE UNIVERSITY**

Phyllis Wheatley State University (PWSU) is located in an old tobacco town grown into a fairly large size city. The environment is urban and the community around PWSU is an older one, under-resourced, worn down by time. The new stadium and surrounding buildings at PWSU stand in stark contrast to the surrounds. Over the course of the study, the women’s center was moved from the student affairs building into a small, cozy cottage close to the residence halls. In both locales, it was clear that strong attention was being paid to the look, feel, and usability of the center: the smell of fresh paint, books for a center library, a technology rich conference room, and a small kitchenette. Establishing the right space for a women’s center on an HBCU co-educational campus is of prime importance given the rarity of their existence. With a founding in the 2000s, PWSU’s women’s center is one of the first on an HBCU campus. Its structure is already being used as a model for other co-educational HBCUs. Strengths of the PWSU center includes grant funding (a luxury ECSC has yet to access) and programming.

Programming in the center occurs across three streams: women’s leadership, gender violence, and women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Women’s leadership is fostered through a sister’s circle, where students have the opportunity to build relationships with peers, campus administrators, and faculty. Emphasis is placed on developing student self-esteem, confidence, wellness, problem solving and critical thinking skills. Included within the circle is a scholar’s program devoted to the integration of first generation freshwomen into campus life. In addition, there is a living learning center for upper-class women. Regarding gender and interpersonal violence, the center provides counseling and support to interpersonal violence victims. The center also provides education for men and women through a peer gender education project. A poster on the door of the center when located near student affairs showed the picture of a young Black man and asserted, “My strength is not for hitting.” It is a signature of a grant-funded program to promote gender equity and change by focusing on male dominance.

The approach is to provide interesting and engaging educational programming that attracts students to participate. Programming is advertised across social media as well as through traditional print and email postings around campus. The center sponsors/ co-sponsors events on campus, like *The Vagina Monologues*, as well as off campus community dialogues on gender violence.

**Campus Experiences.** The director of the center remarked how alumni have approached her at events supportively, wishing that the center was around while they were students. However, it took two attempts to gather a group of current students together for a focus group interviews. When asked about overall student experiences, a student remarked

For my two years on campus, I think [PWSU] has provided a lot of resources for
the students to succeed. There’s the writing studio, the Spanish studio, and different programs and student organizations to join and to establish a brotherhood or sisterhood or to network.

This sentiment is concurred by another student and another student goes further to describe

I like the events that go on. Like the various events, like special guests come in or like they have events at the walker, like sporting events, people playing basketball, sports, and like the dance groups performing and modeling troops. I like to see stuff like that.

An additional positive is “the connection with the students and the faculty and the leadership opportunities that’s been provided on campus and off campus.” However, there was no unprompted discussion about the women’s center or the connections students shared with the director. Instead, students expressed concern about personal and property safety on campus as well as complained about individual faculty in individual departments who did not seem supportive of student learning. They also complained about student services, such as financial aid, and fees.

Campus Support. When asked if PWSU was supportive of them as individuals, the initial sentiment expressed was “Well it is an HBCU...” Considering that HBCU affiliation regards racial/ cultural support, the researchers were concerned about student investment in their gender identities, particularly that of the women students. Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2003) speak to the extent to which young Black women are socialized racially, but gender identities tend to be under-developed as conversations about gender are suppressed, seen as divisive within the Black community. Students expressed a greater concern about campus support for LGBT students, remarking that there seemed to be more support on a predominantly white, rural campus elsewhere in the state, than at PWSU.

It’s more accepting. Like, for example, gay people. The gay community. ... But when you come on a black campus they’re like “oh look at that stud” or “oh look at that fag”. I mean we’re all one. We’re all one race, we’re all humans, so why are you judging me. Or another person? You see less judgment on a white campus than on a black campus.

Support here seems to be interpreted as cultural inclusivity and general camaraderie among peers, something another student remarked seemed lacking among students at PWSU:

Well I mean at PWI’s you’re going to have a few mean girls. But, or like the guys who are jocks and think “oh yea, I’m better than everybody”. But when you get here, it’s like, you would think an HBCU we’d all be working together, but then you find a small group of people working together and everybody else trying to kill each other. Not literally, but you get what I’m saying.

Another adds, “I think when you go to an HBCU every, most people, we all are mostly black. So it’s kind of like we’re judging more on light skinned vs. dark skinned, so it’s already like a stereotype coming in.” Most interestingly a student reflects, “Cuz I guess at a PWI, it’s like different people from all different races. So it’s like, you know, more accepting.”

Redirected to speak about gender, one student spoke to how women are predominant on campus, in leadership positions among faculty and the student body. The push seemed for greater inclusivity for numerically underrepresented groups, “So trying to bring out LGBT, trying to bring out students with disabilities, trying to bring out military people, you know, just getting everybody to really be open with who they are.” There was also a concern expressed for more male mentorship to teach male students how to be “gentlemen.”

When asked to whom they turn for support, individual students identified an advisor, student health and counseling services. Several students identified the Dean of Stud-
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dents. Not one mentioned the director of the women’s center, at least not without direct prompting.

DISCUSSION

The directors of both the multicultural center at ECSC and women’s center at PWSU stressed women’s leadership development through building student relationships with each other as well as with the campus community writ large. However, the variance in their approaches towards mentoring students seems to connect with the different ways students at ECSC and PWSU experience campus and seek on campus support.

Campus Experiences

ECSC students seemed to have an overall greater set of positive experiences on their campus, are genuinely enthusiastic about their college experiences, and express greater solidarity with each other. Students enjoy being able to connect to other smart Black women, to not feel racial or gender isolation. By contrast PWSU have a desire for greater intra-community interactions, but see a community badly fractured over within race struggles – colorism and sexual orientation seemed particularly prominent. PWSU students also expressed concerns about safety, not just from the low-income community surrounding the institution, but from student peers.

These fissures may give PWSU students greater attentiveness to diversities beyond race, most prominently sexual orientation and ability, while ECSC students seemed to normalize heterosexual relationships, lamenting the absence of men. Here is one space where institutional differences seem to matter. ECSC is Christian affiliated while PWSU, a state school, is more secularly grounded. In addition there perhaps are legacy effects, traced to ECSC’s history as a “finishing school,” the increase in student diversity along a number of facets notwithstanding.

The more community centered peer engagement at ECSC is directly traceable to the director of their multicultural center. Through the IBWells Scholars and other programming, she connects with almost all Black women undergraduates during their first year of study. She also creates opportunities for upper-class women to engage with the freshmen and sophomores. This is all purposefully orchestrated and because of her hands on, direct, even intrusive attention, students know that the center is a space where they can seek and receive support.

Campus Support

For students at ECSC, the multicultural center seems to be at the heart of their campus experience. Through connections with their peers at the center, center-supported initiatives, and the director, ECSC students feel culturally supported enough to not only engage the broader campus community, but to be successful academically and assume leadership roles. While students at PWSU did not envision barriers to leadership, and in fact the women students may perceive themselves as gender advantaged, none of the students indicated formal leadership roles. By contrast, students at ECSC seemed groomed toward leadership roles, especially in student governance.

The tone at PWSU is significantly more pejorative. Student complaints range from matters of safety and student fees to feelings of being uncared for by certain professors. When asked to whom they turn for support, students listed several offices on campus, most often the Dean of Students. Yet, during this conversation we sat in the cozy cottage of the women’s center. Neither the women’s center nor the director was not mentioned without specific prompting. This lack of mention in addition to the difficulty the director had in gathering students to a focus group session seems to demark not only a lack of centrality of the center to the overall student experience, but the lack of sustained mentor-
ing relationships between the director and individual students. Another point here is that while the women’s center was more tightly connected to the overall student affairs units and better resourced through grants and as demonstrated by investments in the center’s infrastructure, resource investments alone did not result in greater student connections with the center or stronger relationships between the students and director.

LIMITATIONS
In all fairness, the women’s center at PWSU is comparatively newer than the multicultural center at ECSC. With the latest move of the women’s center at PWSU from the student affairs building across campus to the residential section, it may even be premature to assess the center’s impact. The hope is that with closer proximity to the residence halls, the center will be more part of the fabric of student life. In addition, size differentials may matter. The student body at PWSU is four times as large at ECSC, and in our estimation it would be impossible for any one person to recreate the level of engagement at ECSC at PWSU (although several persons working collaboratively within the office could). Finally the differences in institutional context matter. Not so much the difference between public and private institutions, but the religious orientation of ECSC infuses a spirit of Christian fidelity absent in public institutions. That said, within HBCUs, regardless of affiliations, a healthy lean towards racial uplift persists.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE
The goals of these centers have the potential to create transformative experiences for Black women undergraduates. However, currently, more resources need to be taken into consideration, with special attention to the whole student. As mentioned earlier, the goal is not to examine portions of an identity in isolation, but to address issues of intersectionality, race and gender in particular. With an understanding of the need for a proactive approach to mentorship, a few suggestions for institutions wishing to run successful student centers based on our findings are covered.

First, consider what happens after a director has “built it?” Programming becomes extremely important for educating students at their intersections. Consciousness-raising (for both mentors and mentees) needs to be a central part of a center if it is to be successful. This means providing student with relevant literature on issues of race, class, and gender in academia. Providing an orientation, for example, upon entering the center would allow students to have an understanding of what the center is and what students can get out of it. This goes beyond sharing the learning objectives or official materials of the center. It means providing students with literature and space for exploration of issues raised in the readings.

Second, a bridge connecting the mission of the center and the experience of the students must be erected to facilitate student engagement of the center’s offering. Funding can help. Providing travel to attend a community event, conference, or research workshop provides students with resources to influence their perspective. Sometimes, the most formative experiences for students may come from watching an eye-opening presentation, working on a research report to be published in a student journal, or giving back to more junior students. Again, this comes from assessing the specific needs of the students and working on an action plan that includes financial support.

In this age of shoe string budgets, creativity will have to make up for funding lapses in order to connect center mission and student experience. Yet, one thing that is demonstrated through this study is that people power, that direct connection with students, seems to matter more than money alone. Putting together cultural enrichment
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events that focus on students racialized, gendered and holistic beings, utilizing on campus faculty/administrator experts, and intentionally involving students and providing students with a diverse array of experiences and leadership engagement becomes very important.

Finally, sustainability is an important ingredient for ongoing success. One way of creating a sustainable center includes creating opportunities for seasoned-to-novice students. Peer mentoring or buddy systems may help African American women make connections with one another and also protect faculty from overcommitting. Providing African American women with the perspective of being a mentor may help them understand their own experiences. This simultaneously creates a self-sustaining center, as the director clones, create “mini me’s” who can embody the center’s mission and help in the support of their peers.

Proactive mentoring needs to be intentional, deliberate, well-planned and sustained. Context and student needs should be accounted for and support should be aimed at the whole of students’ being: their racialized, gendered, and otherwise identified selves. Speakers and plays excite and inspire, but concerted efforts to support consciousness raising with reading materials and opportunities to self-reflect on experiences are best toward supporting sustained growth and engagement. If asked to justify institutional expenses in this regard, the positive student experience should translate to a positive alumni donor. As a point of data driven advocacy research, future work connecting not only student success with engagement, but positive institutional and programmatic regards should include inquiries into association with alumni giving. In addition, future research should explore the reasons why women of color may hesitate to actively seek mentorship. In the meantime, it is not enough to be active to reach women of color subpopulations. We should strive to be proactive. We are our sister’s keeper.

CONCLUSION

The difference in student perceptions of their overall scholastic experience and the influence of the center directors on their lives is stark. One point that seems analytically generalizable to other institutional contexts is the consideration that just because you build it does not mean that students will come. The difference in the impact between the two director mentors and their students is not the difference between active and passive mentorship. The director at PWSU is ready, willing, and able to help students. She provides quality programming to campus, some of which is grant worthy. In this regard, she meets the definition of being an active mentor (Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Zachary, 2012). Yet, having grant support, state of the art programming, and well-kept facilities means little in terms of outcomes if students are not engaging it.

A proactive approach means getting out there and making connections with students when they first arrive on campus, then having sustained programming wherein students can interact peer to peer as well as under the director’s auspices. Personal connections built breed loyalty, of particular value to alumni and development offices, but seem of import to student development generally, the leadership development of Black women students in particular.

Showing care is of primacy to begin a successful mentoring relationship with women of color. For many reasons not explored in the present study, women of color may be hesitant, not as likely to engage support services even when they know they are there. This is where proactivity is of import. Identifying women who would benefit from the knowledge and services provided by student centers early in their academic careers and continuing to follow them through seems an avenue for fostering campus experiences that are not only successful (like that of Michelle’s from UnChosen Me), but are positive like those of the students at ECSC.
REFERENCES


Using Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality to Explore a Black Lesbian’s Life in College: An Analysis of Skye’s Narrative
Christa J. Porter, Candace E. Maddox

Abstract—This qualitative study is centered on the individual experiences and narrative of a Black undergraduate lesbian student enrolled at an institution in the Southeastern region of the United States. This study sought to address the role of intersectionality in one’s identity development and the application of critical race theory as an analytic frame in narrative research. The theoretical underpinnings of the study are informed by the concepts presented in sexual and racial identity formation, intersectionality, and the employment of critical race theory. The full narrative of one participant is uncovered in findings of this study. There are direct implications for student affairs practice and higher education’s approach to sustaining a healthy campus cultural climate in addition to serving the needs of and supporting Black lesbian college women.

Key Terms—Black, Lesbian, Woman, Higher Education, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, Narrative Analysis

Adjustment to a predominantly White college environment for students of color consists of many transitions. In addition to managing their academic workload, students of color must develop and make meaning of their personal identities in relation to the various social interactions and environments in which they find themselves. Moreover, Pope’s (2000) study of Black, Asian, and Latino traditional aged college students revealed that students of color showed psychosocial maturation related closely to their racial identity formation. Specifically, racial identity is a fundamental part of student development for Black students (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine & Broadnax, 1994). Black students must have a healthy perspective of their racial identity to find growth in their academic success and personal development (Cokley, 2001). In addition to racial identity development, students of color who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, and/or transgender (LGBT) at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) must also navigate their sexual identities (Patton & Simmons, 2008). For women, this navigation process involves developing a lesbian identity status and becoming a lesbian offspring (D’Augelli, 1994a) or sharing their sexual identity with family members. Despite the processes one may experience, personal subjectivities and behaviors, interactive intimacies, and sociohistorical connections influence one’s journey through identity...
development. The nonlinear sexual identity development structure, in addition to the aforementioned variables present in D’Augelli’s (1994a) model have been confirmed by other empirical research studies (Evans & Herriott, 2004; Stevens, 2004) and thus are more helpful when considering the intersectionality of identities for LGBT students of color.

At the intersections of race and gender is where the emergence of this study resides. Particularly, Black, female, lesbian, traditionally aged college students have a story related to their collegiate experiences at a PWI. This study engages the lived experiences of one particular student’s narrative that explores the intersections of her identities in the form of a counter-narrative to the master narrative of Black lesbians at PWIs.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of a Black undergraduate lesbian student at a PWI in the southeastern region of the United States (US). Specifically, we were interested in how she narrated her experiences broadly, and her identity development specifically, using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality as useful theoretical and analytic constructs. Before describing our methods, we review the literature in the next section.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to explore the experiences of a Black undergraduate lesbian student at a PWI, we found it necessary to review the literature in three areas: (a) the experiences of Black women in college, (b) racial identity development, and (c) sexual identity development in Black lesbians. Accordingly, this literature review is organized around these areas.

Experiences of Black Women in College

Winkle-Wagner (2009) shared the voices of 28 Black undergraduate women at a predominantly White institution by articulating their struggle to define and maintain their racial and gender identities. Her study challenged the participants’ notions of self, the multiple layers through which Black women mentally considered before acting upon certain behaviors in public (e.g., a collegiate classroom). The constant process of negotiation as Black women often depended on the environment and with whom one was interacting. The participants shared feelings of isolation, culture shock, being a “good” woman, competing for Black men, being “too White” or “too Black,” and being the only one in the classroom, while also feeling invisible.

Banks’ (2009) study described the navigation processes related to social and academic success in higher education. Her sample included narratives of 19 Black undergraduate women from four different institutions (one community college and three universities). Banks (2009) argued that educational spaces were constructed around Whiteness, and students of color specifically had to negotiate how to create and articulate their own knowledge and identity. Banks (2009) claimed specialized work was needed to investigate the complex negotiation processes that Black undergraduate women experienced as members of these educational spaces. Because Black undergraduate women are so diverse in their identities, they often show up in the spaces very differently.

As a result of oppressive behavior, dominant views of what Black women should be and how they should act (Collins, 1986), and the inability to articulate one’s own notion of self through identity development (Winkle-Wagner, 2009), Black women remain silenced.

Black women enter college at different ages and at varying stages in their development. The diversity of experiences may include socioeconomic background and status, spirituality and/or systems of belief, visible or invisible disabilities, and sexual orientation (Rosales & Person, 2003). Boyd-Franklin
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(1989) and Hamilton (1996) acknowledged roles Black undergraduate women may play within their families and/or communities and the impact their responsibilities have on their educational attainment. The socialization processes (e.g., interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic, social, and cultural) Black women endure manifest in college in positive and negative ways and often depend on their identity development and interactions. “The way Black undergraduate women wear evidence of their membership in these socially constructed spaces, in connection with society’s understanding of these spaces, is a root of the oppression Black women face and work to overcome” (Banks, 2009, p. 11).

This study incorporates the counter-narrative of a member of the aforementioned community as way of honoring her situated knowledge and its relation to the discourse of Black lesbian women.

Racial Identity Development

Racial identity development is offered as a disciplinary focused theory used in the field of student affairs to, in particular, give depth to the development of Black students (Marks, Settles, Cooke, Morgan, & Sellers, 2004). While racial identity development has its roots in the research perspectives of Erickson (1968) and Marcia (1966, 2002) describing development as a process of self-efficacy, ego identity, and psychological commitment that all adults experience throughout their lifespan, for the purpose of this study, racial identity development was discussed with regard to how one makes meaning. While stage modeling of identity development has informed our knowledge base of Black identity maturation, developmental theorists have discussed the importance of identity development across the life span and its implications for understanding how Black people make meaning of being Black (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Phinney, 1989). It has also been theorized that ethnic identity changes over the course of one’s life with particular attention to the notion that identity exploration begins during childhood and concludes in adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966, 2002). Most notably, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) have provided insight into the concept of racial identity development across a life span. Their approach explores the impetus for the process, adolescence, of identity exploration where one can have a less well-developed sense of one’s self. Later in a life span, adults form an identity and presumably have a clearer and more complex sense of self. Moreover, their research found that adults are more likely to report an exploration of and commitment to a sense of ethnic identity (Cross & Fhagen-Smith). It is important to recognize that as people mature, they experience changes in social and identity roles which, through their development, can lead to more complex ethnic identities over time (Cross & Fhagen-Smith). Further exploration of Black identity development and its intersections with gender and sexual orientation provides a richer understanding of the experiences of particular students within the Black community that may otherwise be overlooked in the larger discourse of Black identity development.

Sexual Identity Development in Black Lesbians

Examining the processes of sexual identity development is necessary to the overall development of this counter-narrative. D’Augelli (1994a) established an identity development model based on the belief that identity is a social construction shaped by circumstances and environment; both of which are changeable during the course of an individual’s life span. D’Augelli (1994a) assumed that attitudes, feelings, and behavior can change over time and sexual identity may be fluid or solidified at various points in a person’s experiences.

The following six interactive processes make up D’Augelli’s (1994a) model: exiting heterosexual identity, developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status, developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity, be-
coming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring, developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status, and entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community. D’Augelli (1994a) provided a necessary framework that described various processes by which an individual may experience. However, for Black lesbian college students, the intersection of sexual identity, race, and gender, calls for greater attention and exploration. Patton and Simmons (2008) examined the experiences of Black lesbian women in college. Findings of their study revealed how women made meaning of their identities in connection with expectations and influences from those around them. Greene and Boyd-Franklin (1996) argued that Black lesbian women experience triple consciousness due to the simultaneous oppressions and relationships between their identities (i.e. race, sexual orientation, and gender).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the importance of race and social identities to the experiences of Black lesbian college students, we found it necessary to draw upon two frames: CRT and intersectionality. This section is organized around these foci.

Critical Race Theory

CRT grew out of critical legal studies in the late 1970s. It initially served to highlight the negative implications of racial discrimination inherent in historical developments and implementations in case law (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Since its inception, this theoretical framework has served to emancipate underrepresented ethnic groups from the oppressive development and implementation of the law in the American justice system (Crenshaw et al.). CRT promotes an impending need for researchers and decision makers to recognize the systemic racial prejudices that exist within social, political, economic, and educational structures through the voices of the oppressed party. CRT challenges policies and laws to create more accessibility for the party within the aforementioned structures (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Goldberg, 1993; Omni & Winant, 1994). Moreover, CRT expands traditional notions of scholarship by advocating for less objectivity as defined and promoted by the normative culture in research (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). In essence, CRT “goes beyond the experience of Whites as the normative standard and instead grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive historical context that places an emphasis on the experiences of people of color” (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, p. 607).

In tandem, the concepts of power, oppression, and knowledge support the notion of counterstorytelling within the CRT framework. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) noted that “the use of counterstories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups” (p. 27). Moreover, Collins (1990) discussed the significance of highlighting specifically Black women’s subjugated knowledge for the purpose of developing an epistemological approach that does not reflect a ‘way of knowing’ projected through a White American perspective. Her proposal for this uniquely applied epistemological approach is completely informed through an intersubjective critical race theory viewpoint (Collins). In other words, in order to capture fully this new theory of knowledge that is situated within a particular culture, a multidimensional perspective should be garnered. One’s situated knowledge is the basis for his/her counter-narrative.

CRT provides a lens for which to view experiences in relation to the master narrative of American society. This study serves as a counter-narrative to the master narrative of a Black lesbian’s experiences at a PWI. The notion of counter-narrative exists “in relation to master narratives, but they are not necessarily dichotomous entities” (Andrews, 2004, p. 2). One’s counter-narrative is inherently
situated in the lived experiences of one’s individual story “of resistance, rather implicit or explicit,” to the master narrative (2004, p. 1). In essence, within the framework of critical race theory exists a counter-narrative that is informed by multiple positioning (Andrews, 2004).

This study discussed the concepts of subject and knowledge as they related to CRT. The concept of the subject in CRT offers an introduction to the notion of intersubjectivity on multiple levels of consciousness. Intersubjectivity refers to the multiple subjects within this framework. The original subject was the injustice within the law, yet the intersubjective nature of this theory allows for multiple subjects including but not limited to, systems, curriculum, polices, and intracultural relations (Griffin, 2010). This intersubjective knowledge can be defined as counterstorytelling. For example, within the Black community a focus for a critical theorist offers a dynamic perspective on experiential knowledge of the Black community from multiple dimensions. This approach within the paradigm of emancipatory work can provide a newly visited understanding of the intragroup oppressions that may plague a particular community (Griffin). Ultimately, CRT presents a necessary critique of the humanist paradigm. While any concept can be explored with this theory, the concurrence of subject and knowledge allow CRT to provide the critical strategy of counterstorytelling that challenges the structures dictated by the dominant culture.

**Intersectionality**

Most developmental models of identity have only addressed one dimension of identity, such as race and sexual orientation (Jones & McEwen 2000). Research and theoretical models have addressed differences in one’s development based on values, norms, behaviors, social conditions (D’Augelli, 1994a) and definitions (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998); however, have stopped short of examining the intersecting identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000), such as those in Black lesbian women. Crenshaw (1991) argued that because of Black women’s intersectional identity as both women and of color, Black women are marginalized within both identities. Reynolds and Pope (1991) tackled the discussion of multiple identities by the exploring multiple oppressions one may endure. The significance of their research lies within the notion that only considering one dimension of identity presents a narrow view when examining one’s development (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Jones and McEwen’s (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) depicted the relationships among college students’ socially constructed identities. They recognized that each dimension of identity cannot be fully understood without taking into account an individual’s additional identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savage, 2002). Building on the work of Reynolds and Pope (1991) and Jones (1997), the MMDI described the unique construction of identity and contextual influences on the salience of multiple identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Crenshaw’s (1991) focus on intersectionality illustrated the “need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 1245). Specifically, depending on the context of a particular situation and environment, a Black lesbian woman may elect or be forced to ‘show up’ differently than she would in another setting. Although her identities intersect, environments and institutions play vital roles in her ability to present her authentic self as opposed to pieces of her identity. Thus examining the intersection of ones’ multiple identities is key to understanding the interlocking systems of oppression and marginalization that Black lesbian women face on college campuses.

**POSITIONALITY OF RESEARCHERS**

We approach this study from a collectivist position. It is imperative that qualitative researchers recognize and label their own
subjectivity to reduce the amount of researcher bias within the research design (Maxwell, 2005; Peshkin, 1988). Our subjectivity is shaped through our personal and professional exposure related to the research topic. Throughout our careers, we have engaged in the stories of Black students attending PWIs. As researchers, it is important for us to connect our reactions and subjectivities to our voices. We show up in our research as two Black women whom have navigated our collegiate experiences through cultural climates at PWIs. We also have served in student affairs administrative roles at PWIs, while attending to the multiple identity development of students. Our perspectives are informed by our past experiences and observations.

W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) explained the past struggles of our ancestors, while addressing the present-day obstacles that we face as we negotiate our place in the American society. Du Bois’ (1903) message reigns true over our life experiences as Black women. Indeed, the double consciousness that Dubois speaks of can be used to characterize our collective experiences. Particularly, as Black women, our experiences, specifically related to our identity development evoke our multiple consciousness and awareness of the intersectionality of our own identities. There have been a variety of events, individuals, and messages that have helped shape our Black identity development and our philosophy on ethnic group relations in America. The condition of Black people must be viewed through multiple levels of consciousness that have “more democratic concepts of knowledge and leadership that highlight human fallibility and mutual accountability, notions of individuality and contested authority that stress dynamic traditions and ideals of self-realization within participatory communities” (West, 1999, p. 93). It is important to recognize that individuals’ identities are not defined by one instance. To gain an understanding of Skye’s multiple identity development, one needs to incorporate the full context of her experiences that have informed her perspectives on and self-concept of race, coupled with her additional identities. By addressing our subjectivity and how it can potentially influence research methods, we have made our biases transparent to the reader and, ultimately, reduced its influence on this research study (Maxwell, 2005).

METHODS

Design

This qualitative study illuminates the individual experiences and narrative of Skye, a Black undergraduate lesbian student enrolled at an institution in the Southeastern region of the United States. Conducting research using CRT and intersectionality as theoretical frames involves the use of alternative methods of research to the larger discourse on knowledge acquisition. In particular, CRT uses “narrative and storytelling as a means to challenge the existing social construction of race” (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013, p. 607). The term ‘narrative’ is often associated with many definitions and requires interpretation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed narrative research as a strategy of inquiry through which the researcher requests an individual to share stories of her life. Mattingly (1998) stated,

They do not merely describe what someone does in a world but what the world does to that someone. They allow us to infer something about what it feels like to be in that story world. Narratives also those events that happen unwill, unpredicted, and often unwished for by the actors, even if those very actors set the events in motion in the first place...Narratives do not merely refer to past experiences but create experiences for their audiences. (p. 8)

Narratives are accounts of people’s lives that develop over a single or multiple research interviews (Reissman, 2008). Narratives do not speak for themselves; they must
be interpreted. The family of methods used to interpret the interview transcriptions is referred to as narrative analysis (Reissman).

Skye was originally recruited to participate in a previous study of the identity development in Black undergraduate women, through a listserv hosted by the Office of Multicultural Affairs at her institution (Porter, 2013). The previous study solicited participants with the following three criteria: a) must identify as Black, b) must identify as a woman, and c) must academically hold sophomore through senior level status. Through her involvement in the previous study, she revealed her interest in additional opportunities to share her story and experiences as a Black lesbian student at the institution. Skye was the only participant who identified as a lesbian in the previous study (Porter, 2013).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

A semi-structured interview was used to ascertain Skye’s experiences. Questions were semi-structured to allow the primary researcher the ability to pose follow-up questions during the interview (Esterberg, 2002). The goal of narrative interviewing however, unlike other methods, is to generate detailed accounts as opposed to short statements (Reissman, 2008). As part of the original study, an additional interview took place in order for Skye to further elaborate on her experiences as a Black lesbian woman. The original interview focused primarily on the identity development of Black undergraduate women, while the second interview enabled Skye to discuss her coming out experience and support systems within the predominantly White institutional environment. Some of the question prompts from both interviews included the following: define and describe yourself as a Black woman; discuss where you learned to be a Black woman; discuss your identities and what they mean to you; tell me your story of when and how you came out; talk about your support system while in college; discuss the institutional environment and its effect on your experience and your identity; and tell me about the challenges of identifying as a Black lesbian at a predominantly White institution. Both the original interview and the second interview for this study lasted approximately 45 minutes each.

Thematic analysis was employed in order to focus in on the content of ‘what’ was being said during Skye’s interviews as opposed to the ‘how’ and ‘for what purpose’ (Reissman, 2008). The story was then kept ‘intact’ by “theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases,” (Reissman, 2008, p. 53). Thematic analysis allows for the researchers to bring “…together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone” (Leininger, 1985, p. 60). Researchers then place aspects of the story together to form a collective picture of the participant’s overall experience. Essentially, Leininger noted that the "coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together" (p. 60). Since there was only one story, a focused coding process was used to generate a general description of Skye’s experiences. Examining Skye’s narrative through the use of thematic analysis coupled with focused coding permitted a more accurate picture of her experiences and intersections of identity. Focused coding allowed for the primary researcher to gather chunks of data throughout Skye’s full story for analysis (Charmaz, 2006) and to confirm the themes with the categories. The 36 focused codes were then collapsed into nine categories. For instance, the following codes were compiled into the category affirmation from campus administrators and community: supportive environments, support system, support from faculty, straight allies, campus resources for LGBT students, hearing other people’s stories, healing process, and LGBT affirming church. The categories then led to the following three themes that embodied Skye’s expe-
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rience as a Black lesbian woman at a PWI: developing a lesbian identity status (D’Augelli, 1994a), becoming a lesbian offspring (D’Augelli, 199a), and intersectionalities of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and validity of a research study determine whether it is considered of high quality (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Validity refers to the accuracy of one’s interpretation of the data and is more often used in quantitative studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The trustworthiness of this qualitative study was enhanced by Skye's participation in member checking. She agreed that the transcriptions, coding interpretation, and thematic analysis were representative and an accurate depiction of her experiences. The counter-narrative presented by the participant, Skye, serves as her individual account of navigating a PWI situated in her multiple identities. The findings presented in this study are not transferable to other situated knowledge and narratives of similar identities held by Skye.

FINDINGS

Introduction of Skye

Skye is a 22 year-old graduating senior with plans to attend medical school after graduation. Although she is an undergraduate student, she is also taking graduate level courses within her major. She identified herself as a Black lesbian woman, member of a National Panhellenic Council (NPHC) sorority, an honors student, liberal, very opinionated, and free spirited. She was adopted and raised by middle class, Christian parents, both of whom Skye considered older than typical parents with students in college. Her adopted father is a 65 year-old pastor and her adopted mother serves as his ‘first lady.’

The first time Skye came out openly about her sexuality was in high school basically to my friends and it wasn't really a big deal. I had the hardest time telling my two best friends; I don’t know why, not that anything would happen. So my male best friend, I told him on Yahoo Instant Messenger. My other best friend, I wrote her a note and put it in her pocket and told her, ‘don’t read it until you get home.’ After that, to my peers, I was just out and didn’t care. Same thing when I got to college. But that’s where I would say I was forced out by my parents. I had a girlfriend at the time and my dad would see the number on my cell phone log. He got all my passwords to my emails and he was reading all of them. My parents made me come home that weekend from [institution] and they were like, ‘who is this person’ and I wouldn’t say anything. My dad was getting really irritated and he was yelling at me and stormed

Yahoo Instant Messenger, and the other she told by placing a note in her friend’s pocket and not allowing her to read it until she went home. When Skye came to college, she was forced out by her parents. Her parents were adamant about checking her cell phone call log and retrieved all of her passwords to her email accounts and voicemail. Her parents made her return home that weekend from school and shared their frustrations by reminding her that being gay was an abomination, that they were going to place her in counseling, and remove her from school. After the incident with her parents, Skye returned to college and did not communicate with her parents for two months. She did not attend class nor did she want to eat; all Skye wanted to do was sleep. She found herself in a state of depression.

Skye’s Narrative

The following section includes certain portions of Skye’s actual interview transcriptions that we, as researchers, have excerpted and organized in such a way to present a cogent narrative of her experiences:

The first time I actually came out openly about my sexuality was in high school basically to my friends and it wasn’t really a big deal. I had the hardest time telling my two best friends; I don’t know why, not that anything would happen. So my male best friend, I told him on Yahoo Instant Messenger. My other best friend, I wrote her a note and put it in her pocket and told her, ‘don’t read it until you get home.’ After that, to my peers, I was just out and didn’t care. Same thing when I got to college. But that’s where I would say I was forced out by my parents. I had a girlfriend at the time and my dad would see the number on my cell phone log. He got all my passwords to my emails and he was reading all of them. My parents made me come home that weekend from [institution] and they were like, ‘who is this person’ and I wouldn’t say anything. My dad was getting really irritated and he was yelling at me and stormed
off; my mom said, ‘you need to tell him who it is.’ So finally it came out. My parents are ministers so I got the whole, ‘being gay is an abomination.’ They were really pissed off and they said, ‘if you don’t change this, we’re going to send you to counseling and we’re going to take you out of school.’

So I went back to school and we [my parents and I] didn’t talk for a few months. It was really hard for those two months. I was really depressed, I didn’t even go to class, and I didn’t want to eat. I just wanted to sleep all the time. And then on top of it being my first semester [in college] and just transitioning from high school; being in honors and having all of this pressure to do well. It was a lot to handle all at one time.

Both of my best friends ended up coming to [institution] with me. One of my friends came out to her parents and it was the opposite; it was really peaceful. She was really there for me and my two best friends were there for me; also my roommates across the hall. They would help me; when I needed to talk to my girlfriend they gave me a landline phone and allowed me to call her on their cell phones if they had text messages. Also my psychology professor; I felt really comfortable going to her and she kind of gave me an adult perspective. She showed me some of the resources on campus that I could go to, so me and my friend started going to the [meeting], held by the LGBT resource center and that really helped me get connected.

The experience [with my parents] happened September 15 and it took me from September until the end of November to the point where I would actually share my story and the experience of my parents. Just being there at [the meetings] and hearing other people’s stories made me feel a lot more comfortable and helped me deal with it a lot better. It was just a good healing process to be able to talk to people who understood what I was going through. I was about to have issues with my sexuality and my religion; it really bothered me, the things my parents were saying and so I started going to the [church] in [city where institution is located]. I never really talked to anyone there, but just being there, hearing the messages from the ministers, hearing that I can be a lesbian and still have a strong Christian faith, and seeing people who had that in their everyday lives was definitely reassuring.

The environment at [institution] was really supportive; I felt I could just be myself. I was not really involved in the Black community on campus until I became Greek. It’s not where I came in and I was not drawn to it really. I was really involved with housing; housing is just a very happy, gay friendly place. In housing we have higher ups that are openly gay and Black and women. Then just being in organizations where advisors who are openly gay shows you that you can succeed in what you want to do by just seeing those role models of people who are navigating their identities successfully even though they may not be exactly the same as you.

I definitely feel supported just being around other students at [institution]. Also in my graduate classes, my undergraduate classes, with my line sisters, or in the Office of Multicultural Affairs just because everyone is very different and they’re all doing different things. But it’s really inspiring to see because they are so different and all the opportunities that you have available to you by being a student. I would say I feel the least supported sometimes when I realize I’m the only one of my kind in the group and it’s just like you feel that spotlight effect like now I have to represent everybody and be perfect and I can’t mess up; don’t say anything stupid, make sure your hair is done, and make sure you say the right thing. I am also supported by my family of choice that I’ve created with my two male best friends. They came out to me through our college careers that they were bisexual and gay, so that helps that I had already been through it. My outlet is helping people deal with their issues because I’ve had to deal with all these identities and many of them from a young age.
My dad has really made a 180, which was really surprising for me. It took until this past summer, until I actually realized that he was supportive of me. So that was years. When he says stuff it kind of shocks me. I’m like ‘whoa, who is this talking to me.’ Recently, we were talking and somehow Chick-Fil-A came up. He was like ‘yeah, I don’t even eat there anymore.’ I was shocked and I wasn’t expecting him to say that. He grew up in Jim Crow segregation and hearing him talk about his grandmother and how she took care of her grandkids and cleaned White people’s houses; she was really dedicated to her family and was respected among all the different groups. Hearing that it just allowed me to see how you can handle yourself regardless of what you’re facing. Being raised by older parents, my experience is a lot different. I’m also adopted and the youngest of six kids and my siblings are older. I think the older part is just that my parents are more traditional so I had a lot of rules, then adding the whole sexuality part onto it…my parents never had the sex talk with me, so anything that’s just not in the little box just blows their minds.

My mom, she’s more traditional so we don’t really talk about it [sexuality]. Me and my mom, we’ve had issues my whole life, like being adopted. I actually came in contact with my birth family my freshman year. She thinks I’m trying to replace her. Me and my birth mother’s relationship is fine. I’m a lot more open with her about stuff. It’s definitely a more organic mother-daughter relationship just because I feel it’s something we both wanted for so long, and not having that eighteen years of actually growing up and having to raise and going through the teenage years and the pre-teen years just makes our relationship a lot easier to start off. Then understanding why she put me up for adoption. I have a lot of respect for her because of that.

I would define myself as a Black woman; I would say that I’m young, educated, very opinionated, liberal, free spirited and that I identify as a lesbian. I’m also a member of an NPHC sorority. Being a Black woman especially in the south is a sisterhood; you’re already a double minority because you’re Black and you’re a woman and so that already excludes you from those main groups and then being in an area where there is a history of not really respecting women or not really respecting African Americans is another pressure.

When I put them [all of my identities] altogether I feel like it makes me a much stronger person just because it’s a lot to handle when you add being a lesbian on top of the Black woman; you have more pressures on you and so because of that, I just think it’s made me more aware, more open minded, more accepting, and more forgiving. I know what it’s like to be a woman. I know what it’s like to be Black, know what it’s like to be gay and I understand why you feel the way you do in your group. I think it’s made me a stronger person but it’s definitely a challenge because you always have to think about, ‘well, ok if I didn’t get something is it because I’m a woman or was it because I’m Black, was it because I’m gay, because I’m Black and a woman or Black and gay. People don’t understand being Black, gay, woman and at a PWI in a sorority in the Christian world – all those things put together. It’s definitely a challenge and I don’t think people realize how much I have to think about it.

Challenges I face are definitely the social life aspect because it’s kind of like you have to choose which identities you’re going to embrace this weekend because in the [campus] community there’s not really a big Black lesbian community. There are a lot of Black males and there are a lot of White lesbians. If I do want be around the [local city] LGBT community I’m going to be probably the only Black person and then when I’m doing my activities because I’m Greek, so going to Greek parties and going strolling, it’s all sexually suggestive, no girls are going to dance
with me and I don’t want to dance with him, so I’m just kind of chilling. It’s like I just have to pick and choose who I’m going to embrace for the day.

To other Black lesbian women, I would say definitely use the resources on campus, just because they are there to help you. And if you’re having a difficult time, someone is there. That’s the only way you’re going to get through, using those resources. Because you’re best friends, they haven’t really come out, they don’t know what you really need, so go to the LGBT resource center, and if you’re Christian, go to [local church]; use what’s there because that’s what’s really going to be important for you to get through that. And also I would say, ‘be out,’ don’t be ‘I’m sort of out on the weekends;’ just do it. Because that’s the only way that you’re going to learn to be comfortable with yourself and college is a place where you can establish your identity and practice it.

DISCUSSION

Skye’s narrative consisted of her coming out process, relationship with her parents, support she received from various communities, and her ability to articulate the intersectionality of her identities. Her counter-narrative to the master narrative of the experiences of Black lesbians attending PWIs provides an additional perspective in which administrators and faculty can assist Black lesbian students. Skye felt supported within the predominantly White institutional environment and attributed her identity development to her overall campus involvement. The three themes gleaned from the nine categories compiled during the primary researcher’s analysis and coding process, are rooted in both the model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development (D’Augelli, 1994a) and the model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Themes discussed in Skye’s narrative are developing a lesbian identity status (D’Augelli, 1994a), becoming a lesbian offspring (D’Augelli, 1994a), and the intersectionality of identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Developing a Lesbian Identity Status

LGBT students of color are often forced to select a primary identity or one of their multiple identities as highest importance (Wall & Washington, 1991). This forced selection process in predominantly White environments (e.g. classrooms, student organizations) not only invalidates the intersections of identities, but also additional group memberships in which a student of color may be a part. Skye made meaning of her identity as a Black lesbian woman during her late high school years and throughout college. She began her first year of college in a committed, intimate relationship and decided that no matter the circumstance, she was adamant about acknowledging who she was. Skye was not drawn to the Black student community on campus in the beginning of her collegiate experience; however she held a high racial salience (Cross, 1991). She was able to articulate who she was as a Black woman and the feelings and actions of those around her based upon those identities. It was not until later in her college career that she eventually found support of her multiple identities as a Black lesbian woman with her sorority sisters. Skye was determined to remain authentic with herself, her peers, and her parents, despite the lack of support she received within the Black community and by her parents.

Becoming a Lesbian Offspring

D’Augelli (1994a) noted that establishing a positive relationship with one’s parents may take time; thus while becoming an offspring, an individual must disclose one’s identity to one’s parents and define or redefine that particular relationship. Despite her parents’ initial resistance based upon their Christian faith and ideology, Skye surrounded herself with a crucial support system. In part, Skye’s experience confirms D’Augelli’s model. She had to redefine for herself what the relationship would be with her parents. Instead of being as close as they had been in
the past, Skye had to learn how to exist and ‘be’ without their emotional support for a certain length of time. Patton and Simmons (2008) discussed the how impact of family and external pressures ultimately influence a Black lesbian woman’s sense of self. Supportive networks and communities are crucial to the success and well-being of Black lesbian students. Skye’s campus and community support systems became her lifeline as they transitioned her from a depressive state while managing her experience with her parents. She maintained relationships with her best friends, became connected to campus resources and a local church, in addition to seeking out advice and guidance from a professor. She became more engaged on campus by serving as a resident assistant and joined an NPHC sorority in which she was eventually able to gain the support of her sorority sisters.

**Intersectionality of Identities**

Warner and Shields (2013) noted that intersectionality recognizes power relations and inherently includes multiple identities. Therefore, an identity can be negotiated in relation to the other. Essentially, “relying solely on fixed identities constrains analysis and limits the possibility of challenging dominant paradigms (Warner & Shields, p. 807). As Skye grew stronger in her identity, she found herself assisting others with their personal journeys. The progression of Skye’s growth and identity development is supported by her ability to articulate the intersection of being a Black lesbian woman at a PWI in the South. As a graduating senior and at age 22, Skye was able to understand how her experiences navigating her multiple identities served as an example to others coming into college after her. This study confirmed two themes revealed in Patton and Simmons’ (2008) study – coming in and triple consciousness. Skye discussed her knowledge of politics on campus and she explained how she internally negotiated various relationships. At times, she had to reflect on ‘which’ identity would be salient (e.g. in a job interview), while at other times she felt comfortable ‘showing up’ as her whole self among her circles of support and while serving in campus leadership roles. Patton and Simmons (2008) defined ‘coming in’ as “participants’ experiences with coming to terms with their internal comfort and understanding of their lesbian identity either in response to or in spite of external sources” (p. 204). As Skye grew older and progressed in her identity, she obtained a triple consciousness (Greene & Boyd-Franklin, 1996; Patton & Simmons, 2008) by successfully juggling the oppressions related to her racial, sexual orientation, and gender identities.

**Critical Race Theory**

As noted earlier, the concept of the subject in critical race theory provides an inlet into the exploration of intersubjectivity on multiple levels of consciousness. Intersubjectivity, in this context, relates to the multiple perspectives of subjects within this framework (Griffin, 2010). Additionally, as people speak of truth, their truth is completely informed by their experiences or knowledge. This framework promotes a situated understanding of how truth can be represented depending on the persons sharing the knowledge and power. Skye’s narrative of viewing her college experience at a PWI as having a positive influence on her identity development is a direct representation of subject and knowledge. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) explained that counter-narratives provide voice for underrepresented or marginalized groups to challenge the dominant normative discourse. Within the framework of CRT exists Skye’s counter-narrative, which is informed by multiple positioning (Andrews, 2004). She is respected as an exemplary student by White administrators, however in the same breath, at times she still needs to question which identity is ‘acceptable’ to present depending on the context of the interaction.
Her situated knowledge and experiences serve as a counter-narrative to the master narrative of Black lesbians within a PWI environment. Despite Skye’s challenging experiences with her parents, her Black sorority sisters, and being a Black lesbian on a predominantly White campus in the south, she found community and support from specifically non-Black administrators and peers.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The educational enterprise of today is facilitated through a commitment to collaborative partnerships for the purpose of advancing a holistic approach to the development and learning of students. For Black lesbian students and any cultural group in an educational environment, the transformative educational experiences that institutions seek to create can only be achieved through a campus wide initiative and culture that fosters communication in and out of the classroom on race (Tatum, 2007). In her book *Can we talk about race?*, Tatum outlined the path that our educational system has taken over time, while noting the complexities associated with incorporating discussions of race into the classroom and in policy development. It is important to recognize that it is challenging for some students, administrators, and faculty members to discuss issues of race, sexual orientation, and the intersections of identity. However, college campuses cannot continue ignoring the issue or, more importantly, the outcomes that develop from this cultural norm. Tatum (1997; 2007) explained the challenges and ultimately the implications preventing Americans and, indirectly, students from having such educational and social conversations. This lack of discourse has directly affected the holistic identity development of persons of all ages.

**Parental Support**

Skye’s narrative provided insight to the influence her parents had on her coming out process. Although Skye had a supportive network including friends, a professor, campus resources, and a church community, the relationship with her parents had a lasting effect on her development throughout college. Campus administrators and faculty should be more intentional in providing supportive spaces and environments to students of color, because of how difficult it can be for the students to come out to family members (e.g. parents). Administrators and faculty should recognize the implications of parental support and its connection to social adjustment, intersections of identity development, and academic success for Black lesbian students in a PWI environment. Close attention to developing initiatives that support and advance the intersections of their identity development, while increasing their exposure to diverse social settings, will help Black lesbian students further explore conversations related to co-constructed realities. Once students are able to advance this intentionally informed self-concept, they can make greater meaning of their curricula and co-curricular experiences. These recommendations will help to improve student affairs practice.

**Multicultural Competency Development**

Currently, many institutional missions recognize the concept of pluralism and exposing students to a diverse educational experience in and out of the classroom (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2009). Colleges and universities can exhibit their dedication to diversity education in a variety of ways. Particularly, the work of student affairs professionals in the area of multicultural education can have a lasting effect on students’ collegiate experience. Student affairs divisions use programs and services that focus on the advancement of diversity education, and expose the campus community to pluralistic environments. Individually however, administrators and faculty members must facilitate dialogue around the intersections of student identities, the value in developing multicultural competencies, and welcoming spaces for students to authentically present...
their holistic selves.

Based on the literature, more research is needed to assess the impact of diversity, inclusion, and equity standards on educational outcomes (Cokley, 2001; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Taub & McEwen, 1992). Obtaining a better understanding of this linkage will help the profession gauge whether or not its programs and services are actually fostering inclusiveness, diversity, and equity throughout the student population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) and support for the intersections and multiple dimensions of student identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Ultimately, the employment of this paradigm will positively influence the effectiveness of student affairs programming and services with a focus on student development and learning through participation in pluralistic environments.

REFERENCES


Abstract—Multi-institutional interview data from 24 African American males in college were analyzed using a blended qualitative approach to explore the relationship between internalized racism and impostor syndrome. Two research questions guided the present study: (a) How do African American males experience impostorship in college settings? (b) In what ways (if at all) do these experiences reflect internalized racism? Results confirm the presence of impostorship vis-à-vis institutional racism and participant self-imposed limitations; a relationship between impostorship and internalized racism; and identity tensions in the development of an authentic self. Implications for policy, practice and research are discussed.

Key Terms—Black Males, Higher Education, Race, Racism, College, Impostorship

In his classic work, The Souls of Black Folk, DuBois (1903) discussed the ways in which racism produced a new ethnicity in an international world, African Americans. Furthermore, he introduced the concept of double-consciousness, arguing that the invention of African American culture simultaneously imbued its people with the gift of second-sight. He cogently wrote:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 12)

Inherent in DuBois’ observation is the notion that identity development is a reciprocal process; as Josselson (2005) writes, “we build a bridge between who we feel ourselves to be internally and who we are recognized as being by our social world” (p.161).

As social institutions, colleges and universities become sites of identity development (Chickering, 1969; Dancy, 2012). In recognition, researchers have tested student identity theories, contributing to the field’s understanding about how college affects students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Strayhorn, 2012; Watson, Terrell, Wright, and Associates, 2002). However, relatively little research engages African American college men’s efforts to construct identity in an American world which persistently views them as problems (Dancy, 2012, DuBois, 1903, Howard, 2013). Unfortunately, with the exception of a few studies (Dancy, 2010b; 2012), the DuBoisian concept of double-
consciousness has not been applied to this group.

Nevertheless, the complex relationship between colleges and African American males has inspired a large body of literature (Allen, 1988; Bonner, 2010; Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Cuyjet, 2006; Dancy, 2012; Dancy & Brown, 2007; Dancy & Brown, 2012; Davis, 1994; Harper, 2009; 2012; Palmer & Dancy, 2010; Palmer & Wood, 2012; Strayhorn, 2008; 2010). Across many of these studies, findings demand deeper investigations of race and racism.1 For instance, several studies investigate African American male experiences with White peers and personnel, but only a few discuss the role of internalized racism (Harper, 2006; 2009). And even more rare is a focus on the relationship between internalized racism and impostor syndrome.

Internalized racism refers to the innate challenges that people of color experience as they absorb messages in a society where racial prejudice thrives (Hill-Collins & Andersen, 2007). When people internalize racism, they support the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by “maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group’s power” (Bivens, 1995, p. 44). The literature suggests that impostor syndrome is a nascent condition of internalized racism (Dancy & Brown, 2011; Dancy & Jean-Marie, forthcoming). Impostor syndrome refers to the condition of internal fraudulence which affects college students, particularly women (Brookfield, 1999; Clance & Imes, 1975; Dancy & Brown, 2011; Dancy & Jean-Marie, forthcoming).

In this article, I report data from a multi-institutional, qualitative study of 24 African American males in 12 different four-year colleges and universities. The research questions guiding this study are: How do African American males experience impostorship in college settings? In what ways (if at all) do these experiences reflect internalized racism? Data from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were theorized with notions of the Black experience in a White gaze (Fanon, 1963; Memmi; 1991; Yancy, 2008) and the ways this reality produces the impostor syndrome (Brookfield, 1999). Following literature review on impostorship in society and education, the article closes with a data-driven discussion of self-authorship, critical consciousness, and civic contributions to the public good as collegiate outcomes (Baxter-Magolda, 2009; Freire, 2000; Prakash & Waks).

THE BURDEN OF WHITE GAZE: HOW INTERNALIZED RACISM PRODUCES IMPOSTORSHIP

W.E.B. DuBois, in his groundbreaking book, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), asked a rhetorical question that seems as relevant as ever today: How does it feel to be a problem? To be sure, there is a profound difference between having a problem and being a problem; the former is a state of affect while the latter is a state of existence. The pathological construction of African American males as problems responds to colonial White desire to dominate and define everything advanced, good, and civilized in European terms (DuBois, 1995; Yancy, 2008b) and to dehumanize people of color in support of these aims (Fanon, 1963). This pathology is maintained through a system of racism that assigns people with white-skin privilege an unequal distribution of power in four main areas: a) the power to make and enforce decisions, b) access to resources (broadly defined), c) the ability to set and determine standards for what is considered appropriate

1At a micro-level, race is defined in the literature as social consciousness of groups based on skin-color (Omi & Winant, 1989). Furthermore, skin color becomes “a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups” along power lines (Banks, 1995, p. 22). Racism is defined as a system of oppression based on race that is perpetuated by White people in America against people of color (Bivens, 1995).
behavior, and d) the ability to define reality (Bivens, 1995).

The White colonial gaze is a central tool in the system of racism. Yancy (2008a) elaborated:

Within the white hegemonic colonial order of things, the Black/native body bears the imprint of the colonial gaze, its myths and its lies. The imaginary projection upon the Black body becomes the imagined in the flesh…Of course, the Black body is also the object of colonial sadistic brutality. The [White] colonial gaze is that broadly construed epistemic perspective, a process of seeing without being seen, that constructs the Black body into its own colonial imaginary. Masking any foul play, the colonizer strives to encourage the colonized to embrace his/her existential predicament as natural and immutable. The idea is to get the colonized to accept the colonials point of reference as the only point of reference. (p. 6)

In Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race, Yancy (2008b) identifies seven elements of White gaze: mythos, codification, ritual, ontologization, constructivity, stereotypification, and over-determination. This first element, mythos or mythopoetic, refers to White projection of fear onto Black bodies in the form of stereotypical myths (“the Black rapist”). In White minds, any exploration of these fears is unnecessary and thus constructs the fantasy as real. The second element, codification, refers to White pathological coding of Black bodies as evil, dirty, and promiscuous. Through the third element, ritual, White people’s “sight” of Black bodies through myths and codes informs certain responsive rituals (e.g., white woman clutches her purse and avoids eye contact when a Black man boards an elevator). Rituals lead to the fourth element, ontologization, a process where the historical and cultural signifiers of Black (and White bodies) become fixed, natural, and eternal realities.

The White gaze also involves a fifth element of constructivity in which, as Yancy (2008a) points out, “the social construction of the Black is dialectically linked to the construction of the White, where the latter occupies a superior place in the construction” (p. 8). This relationship is therefore asymmetrical. In addition, this relationship embeds the sixth element, stereotypification, which refers to the ways in which Blacks and Whites are locked in their roles as “solid types” as assigned by nature. The seventh and final element, over-determination, refers to the ways Whiteness projects ugliness, immorality, and “zoological characterizations as primitive animals” on the Black body (p. 8).

The White gaze narcissistically believes it discerns with “accuracy” and “clarity” the “truth” about certain human bodies vis-à-vis hegemony, or tools of domination. One example is the social interpretation of Black people as a collective and homogeneous group—a reality several researchers on Black males in higher education have sought to disrupt (Dancy, 2010; 2012; Harper & Nichols, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). For example, Harper & Nichols (2006) drew upon a heterogeneous race model to speak to the erroneous assumption that Black men on campus have similar experiences and backgrounds. In their work, the researchers found that participants came from a range of home backgrounds, made different choices regarding affiliations and the expenditure of their out-of-class time, communicated in culturally dissimilar ways, and had varying levels of interaction with their same race peers prior to college. However, the notion that Black men are the same is an oppressive one. In his seminal work, The Colonizer and the Colonized, Memmi (1991) noted that a White gaze understands Black bodies as a part of the same collective essence: “The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity—‘They are this; they are all the same’” (p. 85).

As Yancy (2008a) noted, the tools of the
White gaze are designed to place the colonized in a pathological relationship with him/herself. This is accomplished through the process of “getting the colonized, through a process of ideological inculcation, to internalize the stereotypic image in terms of which they are depicted by the colonizer” (p. 2). In addition, Yancy’s description of White colonial aims aptly suggests how the White gaze seeks and expects internalized racism and subsequent impostor syndrome in Black subjects:

The [White] colonialist strategy was to get the colonized Black (or native) to undergo a process of epistemic violence, a process where the Black begins to internalize all of the colonizer’s myths and thus begins to see his/her identity through the paradigm of White supremacy/Eurocentricity. Indeed, the objective of the colonialist was to get the Black (or native) to become blind to the farcicality of the historical “necessity” of being colonized. The idea here was to get the native, and in this case the Black to conceptualize his/her identity/being as an “ignoble savage” (Pieterse, 1992, p. 79), bestial, hyper-sexual, criminal, violent, uncivilized, brutish, dirty, inferior, and as a problem…” (p. 7)

In general, people of color suffering from internalized racism adopt the belief that Whites are superior to people of color as a natural, innate, and fixed perspective (Yancy, 2008b). Acceptance of harmful messages about societal place works to undermine Black self-esteem, leadership and attempts at racial solidarity (Harper, 2006). In educational settings, the persistent accusations that African Americans who achieve are “acting White” confirm the work of the White gaze in convincing African Americans of their own inferiority and societal unfitness (Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2006). Byproducts of this belief may include racialized self-loathing at worst and self-questioning of one’s abilities at best (Hill-Collins & Andersen, 2007). As Bivens (1995) notes,

Even people of color who have ‘high self-esteem’ must grapple with internalized racism. We must understand internalized racism as a system to be grappled with in the same way that even the most committed anti-racist white people must continue to grapple personally and in community with their own and other white people’s racism until the oppressive structures, ideologies and systems are abolished and replaced. (p. 45)

The following body of literature suggests that impostorship is a derivative condition of internalized racism (as well as other internalized systems of oppression).

**IMPOSTORSHIP AS EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research and scholarship offers the following signs of impostor syndrome: a) feeling like a fake, or, the belief that one does not deserve his or her success or professional position and that somehow other have been deceived into thinking otherwise; b) attributing success to luck, or, to other external reasons and not to one’s own internal abilities; and c) discounting success, or, the tendency to downplay or disregard achievement of success (Brookfield, 1999; Clance & Imes, 1975; Dancy & Brown, 2011). Additional studies find impostor syndrome correlated with locus of control, psychological, and general well-being (Hayes & Davis, 1993; Niles, 1994; September, McCarrey, Baranowsky, Parent, & Schindler, 2001). Because the general trend in research is to focus on the experiences of White high-achieving adult learners, scholars are missing valuable opportunities to study impostor syndrome in students of color.

**Women Academics and Gender Socialization**

Psychotherapists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes are largely associated with bringing the term, impostor syndrome, to the research literature. The term emerged from their work with high-achieving clients and students, particularly college women and
women faculty, who doubted their successes and stressed about their abilities (Clance & Imes, 1978). During their study, the researchers noted that

“...despite their earned degrees, scholastic honors, high achievement on standardized tests, praise, and professional recognition from colleagues and respected authorities, [impostors] do not experience an internal sense of success.” (p. 241)

Subsequently, Clance and Imes (1978) argued that both social and familial expectations fuel impostorship in women. They identified four different types of behaviors which tend to maintain the impostor phenomenon once the posture of being an intellectual phony has been assumed: a) the internal drive to work hard, b) they maintain an internal sense of phoniness, c) they use charm and perceptiveness to win the approval of superiors, and d) they may avoid success in order to reduce social rejection. They argued that impostors maintain thoughts and feelings of phoniness despite much evidence that impostors are outstanding academics and/or professionals. Furthermore, impostor syndrome was found to contribute to women faculty’s decisions to leave colleges and universities prior to tenure.

Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz (2008) studied impostor syndrome in women graduate students. The authors found issues of adult attachment and a sense of entitlement as significant predictors of impostor syndrome. In addition, women were more likely to develop impostor syndrome and were unable to internalize feedback because of a negative view of self. Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz suggest that individuals with high levels of entitlement are possibly compensating for a lack of self. Not only does impostor syndrome emerge in a patriarchal world, but it affects high achievers who are marginalized by social appreciation of anti-intellectualism.

**High Achievers in Postsecondary Contexts**

Many studies of how impostor syndrome behaves were conducted with individuals engaged in postsecondary, graduate and professional education. For instance, Leary, Patton, Orlando, and Funk's (2000) study discovered that participants with high levels of impostor syndrome respond differently in public and private environments than participants displaying lower levels. Furthermore, Leary et al. argue that, although people may experience true feelings of impostor syndrome, characteristics attributed to impostors are partly interpersonal, self-presentational behaviors (e.g., perfection) designed to minimize the implications of poor performance.

Studies link impostor syndrome and perfectionism as cyclical conditions (Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Thompson, Davis & Davidson, 1998). Perfectionism, in psychology, is a belief that perfection can and should be attained (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In its pathological form, perfectionism is a belief that work or output that is anything less than perfect is unacceptable. At such levels, this is considered an unhealthy belief, and psychologists typically refer to such individuals as maladaptive perfectionists (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Thompson, Davis and Davidson (1998) tested the relationship between impostorship and perfectionism, particularly as these conditions intersect, following success and failure feedback. The study revealed that, among 164 college students, impostors felt less satisfaction, reported lower self-esteem, higher levels of anxiety, lower self-estimates of ability and lower expectations of future success than non-impostors. Additionally, the study revealed a significant difference between impostors and non-impostors who perceived themselves as failing at an endeavor.

In the Thompson et al. study, impostors were more likely to attribute poor performance to internal factors to a greater extent than non-impostors. Furthermore, impostors generally reported lower academic self-
Black Males and Imposter Syndrome

esteem than non-impostors and lower levels of global self-esteem than non-impostors. Perfectionism shaped the extent to which participants externalized success, set high standards for themselves, and self-analyzed. Finally, the study found impostors to display greater negative emotions (anxiety, dissatisfaction, guilt, humiliation), attribute failure internally, and over-generalize a single failure to overall self-concepts. Thompson, Foreman and Martin (2000) found links between impostor fears and perfectionistic concern over mistakes as well as significant levels of anxiety and negative affect when exposed to a situation in which a high frequency of mistakes were possible. Thompson et al. argue that these individuals find such situations stressful and aversive. In addition, impostors not only exhibit a high fear of negative evaluation from other people they also fear being socially exposed to others as fraudulent and lacking in ability. Though many studies on personality and behaviors among impostors utilized college students, research also considers college environment factors more explicitly.

College Students as Adult Learners

Studies on impostorship among adult learners consider the experiences of teachers and faculty, graduate students, and college students. In Stephen Brookfield’s (1995) Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, he offers a definition similar to Clance and Imes (1978). He writes that the impostor syndrome is the innate fear of being unmasked as something we are not. With uncanny similarities to negotiations of “the mask” in studies of race and identity (Dancy, 2012; Fanon, 1963), Brookfield observes:

> We wear an external mask of control, but beneath it we know that really we are frail figures, struggling to make it through to the end of each day. There is the sense that around the corner is an unforeseen but cataclysmic event that will reveal us as frauds. (p. 230)

Describing further, Brookfield (2005) situates impostorship, or, deeply embedded feelings that one does not belong or is untalented, in four emotional states that exist within adult learners. Another emotional state, cultural suicide, brings to mind cultural conflicts (i.e. “acting white”, “putting on airs”) experienced by people of color. Cultural suicide happens to learners “who are in the critical process and who are seen by those around them to be reinventing themselves” (p. 51). Therefore, they risk consideration as threat to the affiliated culture and are at risk of being ostracized (Brookfield, 2005). In the third emotional state, loss of innocence, students lose “belief in the promise that if they study hard and look long enough they will stumble on universal truth as the reward for all their efforts” (p. 51). In the fourth emotional state, peer support, students feel a need to belong to an emotionally sustaining learning community of peers.

Studying the critical thinking of adult learners, Brookfield (1999) argued that impostorship affects adult learners such that critical engagement of literature is not authentic but performed. Brookfield also describes barriers that prevent adult students from engaging in critical analysis. The first barrier is that students are intimidated in questioning organized and published knowledge. These types of knowledge, he writes, carry an aura of academic authority. Second, students report that the idea of critical analysis is difficult to grasp as the process is unclear and seems highbrow. Third, students consider the practice of critical analysis as less important to social and political action.

King and Cooley (1995) considered the relationship among family, impostorship, and academic achievement for college students. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the impostor phenomenon and (a) family achievement orientation and (b) achievement related behaviors for college students. They found that
a family environment, in which achievement is emphasized, is associated with higher rates of the impostor phenomenon within students. In addition, the data suggest that the impostor phenomenon may be a better predictor of achievement and achievement-oriented behavior for women vis-à-vis men. Similarly, Sonnak and Towell (2000) found that greater degrees of perceived parental control and lower levels of self-esteem emerged as significant predictors of impostor fears in British college students. In addition to parental protection, poorer mental health was significantly related to increasing levels of impostor scores. Study participants who attended private school reported lower levels of impostor feelings. Finally, the study revealed that participants classified as impostors were found to report significantly higher general health questionnaire scores (poorer mental health) than non-impostors.

Studies have also investigated the prevalence of impostor syndrome among medical students. According to a study of students and alumni of Pacific University medical school, impostor syndrome was found to decrease after four years of professional practice (Prate & Gietzen, 2007). The authors propose that on-the-job learning, reinforcement from tasks done well, and continued study may help to decrease the feelings of “masquerading” for health professionals experiencing impostor syndrome. In addition, Prate and Gietzen speculate that there may be two types of impostorship experienced by students. One type, true impostor syndrome, persists in spite of continued success whereas transient impostor syndrome occurs temporarily as individuals gain self-confidence in abilities over time.

College students and future medical professionals are not the only adult learners susceptible to impostor syndrome; graduate students are also vulnerable. Brookfield (1995) suggests that graduate students may internalize notions of unintelligence to inform an understanding as not belonging in graduate classrooms. Therefore, they seek silence in class to prevent unmasking as a fraud. In one of few studies involving African American graduate students, Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, and Russell (1996) examined the relationship among impostor syndrome, academic self-concept, racial identity attitudes, and worldview perspectives among African American graduate students. Findings confirmed the presence of impostor syndrome, emphasizing the importance of worldviews (i.e. ideas about the world in which they live) over racial identity (e.g. sense of blackness).

Exploring impostor syndrome in the lives of faculty, Brems, Baldwin, Davis, and Namyniuk (1994) studied the ways in which impostor syndrome influenced college faculty interactions with students. The authors found that among 112 tenure-track faculty members at a Northwestern university, impostor syndrome influenced their availability to students, student advising, and teaching evaluations. More specifically, instructors who rated themselves as highly goal-directed and idealistic, received significantly higher ratings on a number of teaching evaluation items. Specifically, they were rated as more helpful to students having difficulty and effective in inspiring enthusiasm and desire to learn among students. Those faculty also received higher overall ratings for their competence as instructors, as well as for the overall quality of their courses. If instructors showed little evidence of impostor feelings, overall instructor ratings were even higher. This trend held with respect to advising as well. Instructors with little feelings of impostorship reported more comfort with advising and involvement with students than instructors with high feelings of impostorship. If instructors also self-appraised/held high self-esteem, they tended to take on more advisees than their colleagues.

In sum, the research literature describes the feelings of inadequacy that define impostor syndrome and supports the presence of
Black Males and Imposter Syndrome

this condition in oppressive contexts. More specifically, the literature highlighted the experiences of women with impostorship syndrome, personality and behavior factors attributed to impostor syndrome, and the experiences of adult learners in postsecondary contexts. However, there is a persistent silence around issues of race in the impostorship literature even in studies on faculty. Given what we know about the link between marginalized identities and impostorship, the dearth of research on racial identity is curious. The sections that follow attempt to address this gap.

METHODS

The research questions guiding this study were: How do African American males experience impostorship in college settings? In what ways (if at all) do these experiences reflect internalized racism? A qualitative research approach advanced this study. Specifically, tenets from grounded theory, transcendental phenomenology, and case study methodologies were used to examine the relationship between racial identity construction and college experience. Grounded theory guided participant selection and initial coding of data while phenomenological and case study methods guided categorical and contextual analyses respectively. Furthermore, the blended methodological approach employed the most rigorous data analytic approaches from each tradition to render robust findings at macro- and micro-levels.

Institutions

The men selected for this study attended 12, four-year colleges situated across the 19 southern and border states of America2. More specifically, the 12 institutional sites for this study were selected according to their Carnegie Commission (2010) classification. Using the most recent classifications, I selected doctorate-granting institutions, master’s institutions, and baccalaureate institutions. Within these classifications, institutions were disaggregated according to their historical and predominant student population (HBCUs and HWIs) and institutional funding (public, private). This matrix resulted in four colleges per Carnegie classification (see Figure I). Given this site selection design, tribal colleges and special focus institutions were ineligible.

Figure I.

Participants

Twenty-four men enrolled in 12 four-year colleges and universities were selected to participate in the study. Respondents were African American, traditional college-aged (18-24), and upperclassmen (sophomores, juniors, and seniors). The participants in this study were majoring across a breadth of disciplines, maintained at least a 2.5 grade point average (G.P.A) and were involved, or engaged, students in college. Drawing from

2 Arguably, 19 states continued to operate dual systems of higher education despite Title VI of Civil Rights Act of 1964 barring legalized segregation: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia despite Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Brown 1999).
Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) seven principles of student engagement (e.g., student-faculty contact, cooperation among students), I selected students who participated in activities that reflect best institutional practices including utilization of an institution’s human resources, curricular and extracurricular programs or organizations, and other opportunities for learning and development. Participants were nominated by student affairs professionals, graduate-level fraternity officials, fraternity chapter advisors, and fraternity chapter presidents.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were gathered in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Average interview length was over two hours long. Interviews, transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, were reviewed for accuracy and then compared against research journals for consistency. In general, the interview instrument, prompts, and protocols were modified as appropriate to inform research questions. Specifically, the interview instrument to gather this data partially included questions from Terenzini and colleagues’ (1992) *Transitions to College* interview instrument which assessed participant pre-college, in-class, and out-of-class experiences in college. Questions from this instrument included: “What is it like for you as a black man getting used to life as a student at (institution)?” and “Are black men valued here? If no, who is valued? In what ways? If yes, in what ways?” Other questions were inspired by an interview instrument developed by Janet Billson in *Pathways to Manhood* (1996) (i.e. “Imagine that you are attending a social event at this university where you are one of many black men. If all of the black men behaved differently from you (i.e. “nerds”, “bougie”, “thuggish”, “ghetto”), in what ways (if at all) would you change your behavior to fit in? Why or Why not (Where does that come from)?” Additional questions were informed by theory and research around African American male behavior, identity, and manhood development.

Grounded theory approaches guided participant selection and initial coding of data. More specifically, a rigorous coding technique described by Charmaz (2006) was used to keep codes close to data and provide responses to how and why participant experiences were as they described. In addition, phenomenological methods were used to add rigor to the analysis of the interviews. After an initial coding, statements were compared to the research questions to discover “horizons” of racial identity formation and how different collegiate contexts shape these constructions (Moustakas, 1994). Last, case study methodologies were elected to draw contextual understandings (HBCUs and HWIs). In this effort, I drew most heavily upon the process of correspondence (Stake 1995). Stake defines correspondence as searching for patterns or consistency when data are aggregated. I grouped patterns across respondents, collegiate classification (i.e. Carnegie classification, collegiate funding type (public vs. private), and collegiate context (i.e. historically black vs. historically white) to display themes that are consistent across these categories. After conducting analysis on each interview, I compiled textural-structural descriptions for each participant. Textural-structural descriptions are simply the “whats” and “hows” of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). These, which captured the themes of each participant’s interview, were e-mailed to participants to serve as vehicles for member-checking.

Five additional procedures supported the inference quality of this study. First, I maintained a reflexive journal to note assumptions, perspectives, biases, and thoughts. Findings were compared from data analysis to journal notes for consistency. Second, thick description techniques captured participants’ non-verbal responses, verbal responses and inflections, demeanor, and behavioral responses. Peer debriefing also
enhanced the credibility of the study vis-à-vis three researchers disconnected from the study. Peer debriefing is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). Fifth, an audit trail was used to address issues of dependability and confirmability. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) define an audit trail as documentation of the research process. Six types of documentation are considered for inclusion in audit trails: (a) source and method or recording raw data, (b) data reduction and analysis products, (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products, (d) process notes, (e) materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and (f) instrument development information. To illustrate confirmability, I maintained a record of the inquiry process including all taped interviews, notes from interviews and discussions and copies of all transcriptions.

Limitations

The scope of the inquiry focuses on the racial identity constructions and collegiate experiences of selected college men. This approach in selecting participants lent itself to a participant group likely to be thoughtful and articulate about national, social, and personal movements in relation to a range of college experiences. In addition, participants were similar in their social dispositions, social capital, GPA, and race awareness. Study findings are not generalized to other African American men at the institutions represented in this study or those enrolled in colleges in other areas. The following section reports emergent themes.

FINDINGS

“Trying to be as proper as possible”: Coping with White Gaze

All study participants discussed negoti-ating anonymous collectivity (Memmi, 1965) at various levels of awareness. Recall that anonymous collectivity refers to the understanding of Blacks as a stereotypical collective. Martin, a senior at the prestigious James Buchanan University, was already critical about this lived reality in his observation of himself as a “non-standard” Black male given rearing by immigrant parents. In addition, it was not long before White gaze began to shape his school and collegiate experiences. In a representative quote, Martin reflected:

[At Buchanan University], I try to be as proper as possible, as dignified, as respectful as possible to feel as though that will hopefully change people’s expectations…I think I take it upon myself to set an example to be a Black male... I feel like um, what America’s perception of Black males, or Blacks in general you know, are based on a lot of what they see in pop culture. And so you know, I try to carry myself in a way in which I want to change their perceptions of what it means to be a Black male…

Hakeem, who attends John Adams University, discussed similar ways in which White gaze manifests in the college experience. In his statement are not only perceptions of anonymous collectivity, but also several elements of White gaze including constructivity and stereotypification. He argued:

Black men don’t have those “comfort zones” to be a part of to go to and just relax at [Adams University] without having to be that only Black person at a party, or that only “token friend” or having to worry about what you say cuz it could be taken the wrong way, or you have to do a representation for your race and sometimes you don’t want that…and as a result you get so overwhelmed, not with courses just with trying to fit in just trying to be a part of the community that you lose focus, you can’t concentrate as well, you don’t do as well…
“If it wasn’t for Affirmative Action, we’d all have your jobs”: The Institutional White Gaze at Work

Several men provided examples of professors who “could care less” about their students. In a quote representative of the views of students in PWIs, Nigel described his in-class experience with a professor whose pedagogy was not culturally responsive. In fact, Nigel reported that he and other African American students believed the professor was racist. This understanding only reinforces mistrust of Whites in general. Nigel describes:

I had a professor in Economics once that, I don’t know if he was racist, but we were talking about minimum wage, and he said that if we raise minimum wage to $10.00 that might be a really good idea. A Black person in the class [asked] “why?” And then he was like, “because if you raise minimum wage then you all won’t have any jobs anymore.” So then I said, “What do you mean you all?” The professor said, “Well if you raise minimum wage to $10, then all the White kids, even the ones in high school, they’ll take your jobs, even the low-level jobs like McDonalds and retail and things of that nature.” You know I’m like, “Man, what are you talking about man?” And [the professor] said, “it’s just like a proven fact that you know that we” and I’m like okay man, who is we? The professor said, “White people today, we can still get a job over you all you know. If it wasn’t for affirmative action, we’d probably have all your jobs.” I lost it and I had to leave the class...

Faculty comments like this one access the stereotyping power of racism to develop imposter syndrome in students. More specifically, the observation that Black college students rely on affirmative action policy as a means of college access presumes their abnormality in educational settings. Interestingly, the faculty member’s observations clearly describe his investment in maintaining racism.

Similarly, Hakeem (Adams University) provides an example of “being left out” by professors in-class and out-of-class. These relationships become unsurprising contexts for constant internal reflections on belonging and fraudulence. He asserted:

I’ve often found that I did not associate myself with White professors very much. I just didn’t feel we have similar interests, or we didn’t connect on different levels. I didn’t play hockey, I didn’t play golf, and I found that some of my White counterparts would talk to my teachers about that, just various things about going to country clubs. You know, I never had that, that wasn’t my passion or my avenue, so I never could connect with my teachers on that level outside of the classroom...

While the White gaze assigns superiority to White interests, data analysis also reveals the ways Black communities have internalized this supremacy.

“Trying to be down”: Authenticity Tensions in Black Communities

Attempting to meet White expectations for respectability while trying to “be down”, or demonstrate racial solidarity, is a real source of cognitive dissonance for these men (as the two states are fundamentally at odds). Similar to the double-consciousness frame, Emmanuel (John Adams University) astutely describes this double-consciousness as “dueling expectations”. In a quote representative of African American male struggles with authenticity, his statements illustrate the complexities and risks:

I think [the words] “Black male” [have] a lot of different meanings [which] come with a certain amount of pressure, as well as a certain expectation, dueling expectations if you will. Um, it becomes important to dispel one side of it, while exceeding the other. I think the “majority” [which is] corporate, White, America, there’s an expectation that Black men are like 50 cent (a gangster rapper) or something like that. So that’s the type of im-
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age I don’t want to be categorized with, whereas, from a certain proportion of the Black community, and there’s a certain proportion of the Black community that [thinks about you as a “50 cent” too], but a certain proportion of the Black community, realizing the small numbers of educated Black men, there is this expectation that any Black man that goes to college will be on a higher level such as Barack Obama or something like that. So there’s that pressure to live up to that standard and exceed that if possible, and to get away from the other stereotype as much as possible…

Similar observations about potential accusations of fraudulence emerged in Corey’s ideas about the participation of African American male communities in racial identity development. A student at Martin Luther King University, he described:

It’s important to “adapt” to be able to get a point across to [Black men] sometimes…You don’t want to become a “White washer” I think they call it here…I always wanted to be a person able to have a conversation with the President [of the United States], and still be able to have conversations with thugs out in the streets. I didn’t want to compromise who I am as a person but I admit I have done it under pressure…I feel Black men are pressured by the Black community and Black men [to hide themselves] because they want to become a part of something…

Martin, who attends Buchanan University, described a pressure he faces to mask his upbringing which he believes is different from many African American men with which he comes in contact. Martin was raised in a middle-class family with two professional parents. He describes:

You don’t want to be seen as a “sell-out” or anything…I try to adapt a little bit to [different] groups of Black males. I mean, I grew up in the inner-city so I know kind of how to talk the slang or you know to act in that sort of manner, I don’t really feel comfortable doing it. [If groups of Black males]

are different from me, I try to find one or two people who are not as extreme, stick to them, and not try to associate myself with the larger crowd…

The negotiations of authenticity and impostorship are not only producers of stress but demonstrate the destructive limits of race as a social organizer. In the following section, I discuss study findings and implications for practice in higher education and student affairs.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS: FIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION

Study participant efforts to make meaning of their identities are burdened by institutional White gaze. Representative statements, including “being proper”, “entertaining others”, “keeping a smile on my face” and “making others laugh” to appear “good” responded to the afflictions of internalized racism. While coping mechanisms, these enactments were also self-imposed limitations on their campus freedoms; self-imposition is the cornerstone of the impostorship definition (Brookfield, 1975; Clance & Imes, 1975; Dancy & Brown, 2011). Furthermore, the biases against study participants as undeserving of collegiate access and success simultaneously fostered and/or reinforced impostor syndrome.

Study findings align with extant research which found impostorship to manifest in marginalized bodies in the ways participants identified (Brookfield, 1995; 2005; Clance & Imes, 1978; Gibson-Beverly and Schwartz, 2008). As African American men used performance to disrupt racist stereotypical notions about their identities, women in the Clance & Imes (1978) study used performance to disrupt sexist stereotypical notions. As women removed themselves from academic environments (e.g., leaving institutions before tenure) following messages of unwelcome and internalized patriarchy (Clance & Imes, 1978), participants moved in
similar ways (e.g., leaving class) following messages of unwelcome and internalized racism. In the perspectives of both groups, institutions of higher education attempted to convince them of their intellectual phoniness and, in response, both groups use perceptiveness (e.g., double consciousness) to win approval of peers and faculty.

Each participant talked about the stresses of moving as impostors on campus, or inauthentically, as they focus unrelenting attention on doing perfection in a White gaze, namely outperforming peers while also vigorously attempting to embody a less stereotypical self. This data supports the findings from a previous study which found relationships among stress, impostor fears, and perfectionistic concerns (Thompson, Foreman, and Martin, 2000). Ironically, the men in this study not only battled the impostorship associated with self-esteem in academic participation (Brookfield, 2005) but also the kind of impostorship that is a “wearing of the mask” in a highly racialized collegiate world. Simultaneously, this movement also risks cultural suicide or ostracization, “acting white” for instance (Brookfield, 2005). While these themes were most strongly reported among study participants in PWIs, African American men enrolled in HBCUs noted how the White gaze affected their lives outside the college campus. While students in historically Black institutions did not attribute their college experiences to White supremacy, data analysis highlights Black collective internalization of racism as a (mis)shaper of their identity. In all, findings confirm a link between internalized racism and impostorship in study participants, within and beyond the traditional definition, and confirm suggestions of a link in previously published scholarship (Brookfield, 2005; Dancy & Brown, 2011).

The men in this study all describe moments of “twoness” (DuBois, 1903) as college students, either on campus or beyond university walls. In both institutional contexts, study participants are haunted by the predominant images of African American men in the media. Unsurprisingly, study participants in PWIs were most directly reminded by Whites about the problematic presence of Black bodies. In these environments, students were even more attentive to where they sat, what they said, how they said it, and what they were seen doing in recognition of their presence in an American institutional world that “cursed and spit upon them” (DuBois, 1903, p. 15). Moreover, the men hold reasonable impostor fears (Thompson, Foreman, and Martin, 2005) that collegiate counterparts reference the images of the “thug” and “criminal” to understand these men’s identities and to inform a read of their presence in college as fraudulent. While many White counterparts continue to seem astonished by the notion of Black male collegiate success, Black acknowledgement of this success (vis-à-vis family and communities) unrealistically coexists with expectations to maintain stereotypically “cool”, “hard”, and “real” identity dispositions. While this finding supports previous research confirming a relationship between family, impostorship, and academic success (King & Cooley, 1995), it also finds the creation of identity tensions in the process. The rigid realities of these tensions require the men to walk a delicate balance between the actual and the performance, the authentic and the inauthentic, the real and the impostor. Furthermore, participants feel they shoulder the heavy responsibility to dismantle this form of systemic oppression. In the following paragraphs, I discuss five overarching areas of intervention in policy and practice.

First, institutions of higher education must articulate the purposes of a college education beyond issues of labor market access and national competitiveness. The ways in which diminished college access risk U.S. global competitiveness and industry productivity is common parlance, especially following the publication of the report, *A Nation at
Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform

which required more rigorous academic standards (Henfield, Moore & Wood, 2008; Howard, 2013; Prakash & Waks, 1985). However, national obsession with quantifiable assessments of mental proficiency (e.g., GPA, standardized test scores) overshadows other conceptions of educational excellence—namely, high-ordered analytical thinking and consciousness, self-actualization, and social responsibility which benefit society in sundry and immense ways (Baxter-Magolda, 2009; Freire, 2000; Prakash & Waks, 1985). Colleges and universities must mine institutional resources, both in and out of class, to set the stage for critical engagement of issues of identity and social justice. Additional priorities must include developing or supporting African American studies programs, which fulfill the study participants’ longing for critical consciousness and stronger cultural situatedness at the institutions they attend.

Second, I take a similar position as Patricia Williams (1991) in her essay, The Alchemy of Race and Rights. In the opening line of text, Williams declares that “subject position is everything” (p. 3). African American male students need an equitable and just education which does not force them into the pre-established stereotypical tropes. Therefore, all personnel in colleges and society, not just White, must commit to decolonizing their minds and bodies. As an orientation and professional development priority, institutional practices must involve critical reflection on the when, where, why, and how all personnel enter and experience institutions of higher education. Attempts to locate Black male authenticity have no place in college and universities; on the contrary, colleges are sites of possibility. Study participants need their colleges and universities to continue addressing issues of institutional climates toward the intolerance of prejudicial thinking and actions.

Because African American males enter educational settings from marginalized positions, engagement efforts should help them gain confidence likely stripped by years of discrimination and/or profiling. In her essay, Of Gentleman and Role Models, Lani Guinier (1997) suspects that people of color are only as empowered as their own polar experiences—marginalized identities and professional roles—will allow. Thus, supporting African American males in drawing upon the rich literacies of their own experience, models anti-deficit work and empowers this group to overcome silencing among both the malevolent and the well-intentioned (Guinier, 1997).

Third, participants’ experiences clearly point to mentoring as salient in their pre-college and college experiences. In addition, mentoring provided study participants spaces of vulnerability and coping. Culturally relevant mentoring models, like those in the work of Brown, Davis, and McClendon (1999), provide three options in mentoring and advising relationships toward eliminating unintended assumptions. The first option, academic midwifery, involves college personnel assisting students in producing new ideas and intellectual insights. The second option, role molding, involves college personnel taking an active role in shaping intellectual and professional aspirations. The third option, frientoring, infuses the friendly relationship into the faculty, administrative, and staff posture with students (Brown et al. 1999). Fourth, college personnel, particularly White faculty, are encouraged to adopt postures as cultural workers and guardians. Cultural guardianship is defined in the literature as advancing professional and personal development of students by nurturing and protecting the respect for different cultural identities (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) (Mobley, 2000). In addition, one manifestation of the White gaze is language usage; therefore, institutions must focus on the ways that language is political and can work to betray even well-intentioned faculty and staff.

Finally, this study joins several others in
its support for affirmative action policy and efficient college leadership and management for social justice (Altbach, Lomotey, & Rivers, 2002; Dancy, 2010; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Strayhorn, 2012). This work is critical in reversing exclusive ideologies and creating institutional environments that signify institutional commitment to valuing African American men. One study participant stated how seeing the majority of African Americans in janitorial capacities does nothing for his perception of an equitable campus community; however, the presence of faculty of color contributed to all study participants’ feelings of centeredness. Furthermore, colleges and universities should not culturally tax personnel of color by expecting them to singularly bear the responsibility for serving African American males (or students of color) in college. Cultural taxation is defined as the obligation to show “good citizenship” toward the institution by serving its needs for ethnic participation (Padilla, 1994). The success of African American males is not just an African American imperative, but a university-wide one as well.

The men in this study identified the pain and suffering associated with internalized racism and impostorship. Institutional stakeholders are reminded that colleges and universities function as microcosms of society and therefore reflect its social ills. Several policy and practice interventions can work to filter out oppression and support the expansion of race meanings in African American males. Culturally sensitive hiring practices, mentoring programs, lecture series, and symposia on race and racism are beginnings in the disruption of a hard status quo.

REFERENCES


Toward a Framework for Black Male Professional Identity
Terrell L. Strayhorn, Royel M. Johnson

Abstract—The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand how Black male doctoral degree recipients make sense of their professional identity. Three major research questions guided our analysis: (a) How do Black male doctoral degree recipients define their professional identity? (b) What factors do Black male doctoral recipients attribute to the development of their professional identity? (c) What is the role of race in the development of Black male doctoral degree recipients’ professional identity? Three major themes were identified. Implications for research, theory, policy and several campus constituencies, including graduate faculty and mentors/advisors are noted.

Key Terms—Black Men, Higher Education, Professional Identity

One of the consummate goals of doctoral education is to train individuals for highly technical and scientific professions that specialize in knowledge production, research development, and technology, to name a few. For instance, Jules LaPidus, former president of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) headquartered in Washington, DC noted, “The role of doctoral education is to produce chemists, historians, mathematicians, and individuals in a host of other disciplines…” (1995, p. 34). Indeed, doctoral education is a training ground of sorts for those who enter specialized professions in society.

Not all people who earn a doctoral degree, however, perform well in the profession they enter. For instance, approximately 267,087 individuals pursued doctoral degrees in the United States (U.S.) in 2011. Yet, we’ve known for years that upwards of 50% of doctoral students fail to complete their degrees and attrition rates can be higher for historically underrepresented students such as Black men. For instance, in 2009, Black men represented less than 35% of all doctorate degrees awarded Blacks that year (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). And, many of them report difficulty in their professional role or unreadiness for professional practice (Niemi, 1997).

One factor that has been shown to be related to the career success of recent doctoral recipients is professional identity. Professional identity refers to “the formation of an attitude of personal responsibility regarding one’s role in the profession, a commitment to behave ethically and morally, and the development of feelings of pride for the profession” (Bruss & Kopala, 1993, p. 686). It has been examined in a number of ways—such as teachers’ professional identity (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000)—but more recent studies focus on professional identity as a function of doctoral students’ socialization to a professional role (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). And while we know that professional

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identity is associated in part with one’s educational context (Colbeck, 2008; Sweitzer, 2008), we know comparatively little about (a) the role race plays in students’ professional identity generally and (b) factors Black male doctoral recipients attribute to the development of their professional identity specifically. These are the gaps addressed by our study.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand how Black male doctoral degree recipients’ make sense of their professional identity. Three major research questions guided our analysis: (a) How do Black male doctoral degree recipients define their professional identity? (b) What factors do Black male doctoral recipients attribute to the development of their professional identity? (c) What is the role of race in the development of Black male doctoral degree recipients’ professional identity? Before describing the methods we employed to answer these questions, we review the literature related to this topic.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
To conduct this study, it was necessary to review the literature in three areas. First, we sought information, from research, about doctoral education broadly. Then, we recognized the need for information about doctoral socialization and finally, racial and sex differences in doctoral socialization. The literature review is organized around these major themes.

Doctoral Education
To date, there has been a good deal written on the purpose and nature of graduate education (Berelson, 1960; Bowen, Rudenstine, Sosa, 1992; Golde, 2005, 2006; LaPidus, 1995). Indeed, graduate education is “…an integral part of higher education, providing not only the next generation of scholars but also the creation and transmission of knowledge to constituencies both inside and outside of academia” (Gardner & Barnes, 2007, p. 370). And while much has been written about its nature and purpose, we know considerably less about the role that doctoral education plays in preparing students to assume careers upon graduation (LaPidus, 1995). Other research related to doctoral education focuses on student attrition and retention.

Upwards of 50% of doctoral students in the United States do not complete their degrees (Berelson, 1960; Bowen, Rudenstine, Sosa, 1992; Noble, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Doctoral student attrition can be associated with a myriad of factors: financial stability, time to degree, time to career, dissatisfaction with the degree program, fit in the department, lack of mentorship, and connectedness with community (Gardner 2008; Golde & Walker, 2006; Lovitts, 2001). To date, there are no comprehensive national statistics available on doctoral attrition, as it is difficult to accurately measure, given the variation in ones’ time-to-degree, program structure and transfers. Consequently, doctoral attrition has been often described as “the invisible problem” (Lovitts, 2001).

Prior research suggests that formal and informal socialization experiences such as faculty collaborations, peer mentoring, and even orientation activities promote graduate students’ (i.e., doctoral and professional) readiness to assume the roles of the profession to which they aspire. For instance, doctoral students’ relationship with their faculty advisor/mentor has been identified as the single most important factor in determining satisfaction and subsequent attrition decisions (Lovitts; Tinto, 1993). Relationships influence other aspects of doctoral training; this is discussed further in the next section.

Doctoral Students’ Socialization
Researchers in a wide range of disciplinary traditions have directed scholarly attention to graduate student socialization—that
is, the process through which students acquire the skills, values, disposition, and knowledge necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced degree (Brim, 1966; Gardner, 2010; Tierney & Bensimon, Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). For instance, Gardner (2010) identifies a three-phase model for doctoral student socialization including: (a) pre-/early entry, (b) entry up to candidacy, and (c) candidacy and beyond. Within each phase of the model, Gardner underscores the role and importance of interpersonal relationships to the students’ success.

Indeed, meaningful relationships and purposeful engagement with faculty and peers are important to socializing doctoral students to the norms, attitudes and values of their professional community (Baird, 1995; Barnes & Austin, 2009; Weidman et al., 2001). For example, scholars document the significance of peer collaborations (Golde, 2005), graduate student involvement in professional organizations and associations (Gardner & Barnes, 2007), and the relationship between students and their faculty advisor/mentor in fostering healthy socialization experiences. For doctoral students specifically, their faculty advisor/mentor has been identified as the most important socializing agent. It is important to note that these roles (i.e., faculty advisor and mentor) are not necessarily interchangeable or occupied by the same person. While “advisor” typically refers to a contractual obligation of faculty members, Crosby (1993) defined mentor as “a trusted and experienced supervisor or advisor who by mutual consent takes an active interest in the development and education of a younger less experienced individual” (p. 13).

Mentors who provide both psychosocial and career development are most effective in the socialization of doctoral students (Gardner, 2010; Kram, 1985). Psychosocial development refers the emotional and mental support that mentors might provide by caring for a student both personally and professionally (e.g., encouraging and affirming guidance). Career development refers to ones’ ability to offer professionally beneficial opportunities to engage—that is, opportunities for students to conduct/publish research and present at national conferences, to name a few. One conceptualization of these factors has been posited by scholars who study graduate and professional student socialization.

**Weidman Graduate and Professional Student Socialization Model.** As an extension of Weidman’s (1989) model for undergraduate socialization, Weidman, Twale and Stein, (2001) highlight the role of the individual and institution in the socialization of graduate students. For instance, the institutional level of socialization refers to the acquisition of the norms, attitudes and values of the professional community, however the individual also plays an important role in changing and “reformulating normative expectations” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 35).

The socialization process for doctoral students is chiefly responsible for acquainting them with the formal and informal roles, responsibilities, and expectations of their advisors, department, and career field. Accordingly, ones’ success is dependent on their ability to successfully manage and meet the demands of their academics while also recognizing varied, informal and subtle attitudes, values, interests, skill, knowledge and culture of the group (or field) they aspire to join (Merton, Reader & Kendall, 1957).

There are two important characteristics of socialization: (a) that socialization is a developmental process, and (b) that certain core elements are associated with the development of role identity and commitment (Stein, 1992; Thornton & Naradi, 1975). Four stages have been identified in the socialization process: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. Each stage is reflective of the “different levels of understanding and commitment to the professional roles for which graduate
students are being prepared” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 5).

Within the anticipatory stage, the student becomes aware of the expectations (e.g., behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive) that are held for the role. This stage takes place prior to the student entering a program, and is informed by stereotypes and preconceived expectations. The formal stage however refers to the role expectations the student receives via formal instruction from their school and department. Within the informal stage, expectations are transmitted through interactions with others who presently occupy the desired role. And in the personal stage, “individuals and social roles, personalites and social structures become fused” (Thornton & Nardi, 1975, p. 880).

There are also core elements of socialization that are critical for ones’ identification with and commitment to a professional role. These include: knowledge acquisition, investment and involvement. Knowledge acquisition refers to both cognitive and affective knowledge and skills necessary to perform in their professional role. The latter, affective knowledge, includes ones’ awareness of dominant values and expectations of the profession, a personal assessment of their ability to meet the demands of professional successfuully, and an awareness of the confidence others might have of their capacity to carry out their roles.

Investment refers to ones’ commitment to some aspect of a professional role or preparation for it (e.g., time). For example, investment of time in learning a particular skill or specialized area reflects an investment in the profession, particularly as these skills are not typically transferable to other areas. Third, involvement, relates to ones’ participation in activities related to their professional aspirations and goals. For instance, involvement with teachers might expose one to profession ideology, motives and attitudes (Weidman et al., 2001).

Taken together, faculty and peers are important socializing agents for graduate and professional students. Indeed, well-socialized doctoral students understand the values and beliefs of their field (Bragg, 1976); report higher levels of satisfaction (Gardner, 2008); and sense of belonging in their program and field (Strayhorn, 2012). Ones’ socialization however may be affected by a myriad of other factors like race/ethnicity and sex.

Racial and Sex Differences in Doctoral Student Socialization

Graduate education in the United States has historically and disproportionately served white men (Berelson, 1960), resulting in a lack of diversity. This is a growing concern in the United States, particularly given its efforts to strengthen global competitiveness. Subsequently, programs aimed at recruiting and retaining women and students of color have spawned across many disciplines in order to diversify the academy. More scholarly attention has been devoted in recent years to understanding the experiences of underrepresented populations in graduate education (Ellis, 2001; Gardner, 2008; Lovitts, 2001; Strayhorn, 2009).

Historically, Blacks have been sorely underrepresented among graduate students and doctoral degree recipients in the United States. For instance, while in 1985 Blacks represented approximately 12 percent of the U.S. population, they represented only 3.1 percent of earned doctorates (Solórzano, 2005). While moderate progress can be noted, in 2010 Blacks comprised only about 7% of all earned doctorates, in comparison to their white counterparts who made up approximately 78% (Aud et al., 2012). Race is a salient factor in the experiences of doctoral students.

Black doctoral students report more difficulty than whites in identifying supportive academic advisors and mentors, leading to lower levels of satisfaction with doctoral study (Ellis, 2001). They also receive fewer
teaching and research assistantships than their White counterparts (Pruitt & Isaac, 1985). As a result, attrition rates for Blacks are considerably higher than for White students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2004; Lovitts, 2001). In a qualitative study of socialization in doctoral education, Gardner (2008) reveals that students of color report difficulty “fitting the mold” of graduate school (p. 125). A chemistry student in Gardner’s study discussed the role of race in her experience, highlighting issues of discrimination, respect and hardwork. These negative outcomes, however, are more pronounced for Black who are grossly underrepresented in doctoral education (Strayhorn, 2008).

The experiences of Black men in graduate school have been under researched. Using nationally representative data from the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, Strayhorn (2009) described the status of African American male graduate students in United States. Findings from his study report that only 40% of all African American males bachelor’s (B.A.) degree recipients enrolled in a graduate degree program by 2003, 10 years after receiving their undergraduate degree. Additionally, only about half of those enrolled in graduate school completed a degree. This raises important questions about barriers to degree completion for Black men, particularly in comparison to their white and female counterparts. Still, other factors shape graduate students’ success; professional identity has been associated with the persistence of doctoral students and, thus, frames the present study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the importance of graduate school training and doctoral socialization to students’ understanding of and sense of responsibility to their roles, we use professional identity as a theoretical framework for our study. Although no single theory exists that explains professional identity as a social phenomena, which, after all, is the expressed purpose of theory (Anfara & Mertz, 2006; Strayhorn, 2013), we critically synthesize conclusions from prior research to theorize about professional identity, how it develops, and the role that social identities and other factors play in shaping individuals’ professional identity generally and for Black male doctoral recipients in the field of higher education specifically. Before describing a model of professional identity, we offer an operational definition of the concept that informs the present study.

Professional identity is a term with many definitions. An extensive review of the literature revealed a collection of terms with contradicting interpretations. For instance, some early authors equated professional identity in various fields such as law, psychology, and education with professional aspirations, a duty of care, and understanding of one’s professional field (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Woody, 1978). More recently, professional identity has referred to the “formation of an attitude of personal responsibility regarding one’s role in the profession [or field to which one belongs], a commitment to behave ethically and morally, and the development of feelings of pride for the profession” (Bruss & Kopala, 1993, p. 686). In this way, professional identity refers to multiple dimensions of identity at once—what one understands as their roles or duties in a specific occupation within a professional field, a sense of responsibility regarding such roles, and a commitment to certain values and beliefs that enable them to operate effectively in their respective profession.

As Flapan (1984) explained, professional identity can be exceedingly complex for some individuals, as an individual’s personal traits (e.g., self-esteem, self-worth, self-efficacy) and other facets of identity (e.g., race, social class, gender) comprise healthy development of a professional identity. Factors such as self-esteem or self-efficacy (i.e., confidence) influence professional identity by determining for the individual the degree to which one be-
believes they are able to carry out the roles and functions of professionals in their desired occupation or to assume responsibility of a professional's role in their field. Flapan stated succinctly that professional identity is “based on how one conceives the role of [the professional] and how one sees oneself measuring up to one's own standards and ideals as a [professional]” (p. 18).

Drawing on what's known from previous studies (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Hall, Townes O'Brien, & Tang, 2010), we posit a three-phase model of professional identity that, while generally linear and marked by progressively increasing levels of identity awareness over time, allows for several alternatives such as “stalling out” (i.e., staying at one phase longer than anticipated), “regression” (i.e., returning to earlier phases), and attrition or “dropping out” (i.e., leaving the development process, usually caused by leaving one's graduate program). Like others (Bruss & Kopala, 1993), we theorize that graduate school training can be viewed as professional infancy where individuals enter with limited awareness and understanding of the profession to which they aspire and an underdeveloped sense of professional self or identity. In this context, they proceed through at least three phases that can be described as:

**Phase One.** Initially, students are inundated with a vast array of expectations and demands that may be unfamiliar; their professional identity is largely externally-defined and influenced, in part, by supervisors (e.g., faculty) and other superiors' ability to respond to changing needs. Phase One is typically marked by confusion regarding one's personal and professional identities; the nature and duration of this phase is determined, to some degree, by the distance that must be traversed from the students' role prior to graduate entry (e.g., student, employee, veteran) to the students' role in graduate school and the norms, practices, and expectations of the graduate field of study or broader profession.

**Phase Two.** Because of confusion and uncertainty regarding one's personal and professional identities that mark Phase One, individuals are motivated (i.e., intrinsically or extrinsically) to reconcile these conflicts and, thus, proceed to engage in any number of purposeful activities that shed light on professional duties and responsibilities, expose one to the realities of professionals in a particular field or occupation (no matter how daunting or incongruent with their initial fantasized beliefs (Bruss & Kopala, 1993), and help to promote (or extinguish) confidence in one's ability to complete tasks and roles expected of competent professionals in such a field. Here students depend heavily on experienced individuals (e.g., faculty, mentors, and supervisors) to help guide their development; mentors, for instance, can have long-term effects on professional development including a significant influence on protégés self-image (Wright & Wright, 1987). Insecurities and doubts may still exist, but one grows in his capacity to manage such inconsistencies and to answer questions of professional worth. Messages received in this phase through feedback, evaluation, or however otherwise conveyed can help to clarify roles and self-images.

**Phase Three.** The third phase is characterized by clarification, internalization, and subsequent commitment to professional roles and responsibilities—that is, not only understanding what professionals do in one's desired field, but seeing oneself as fully capable of doing so and assuming responsibilities expected of a professional (Colbeck, 2008). Characteristics like anxiety, excitement, and dependency that marked initial and earlier phases give way to increased confidence, calmness or “coolness,” and autonomy; our hypothesis here is consistent with findings from Friedman and Kaslow (1986) in their work with counseling psychology doctoral students.

Though some authors have referred to this period of professional development as “integration,” we consciously resist such lan-
guage for several reasons, one being that it reflects our epistemic beliefs about the role of race, racism, and other social pathologies that pervasively and insidiously shape the lives (and opportunities) of Blacks in the United States. The term “integration” is indelibly linked to the segregationist history of this country that required Blacks to assimilate to the dominant norms, customs, and perspectives established by those in power and, thus, brings antiquated, historic meanings with it. Instead, we use “negotiation” as it refers to a more dynamic process of deftly balancing external expectations with one’s own internal commitments, interests, aspirations, and other important aspects of identity such as race or sex (Hall et al., 2010; Woody, 1978). For example, as Black men negotiate the larger system(s) in which they are situated (e.g., society, discipline, profession), they enhance their understanding of professional roles and responsibilities, clarify their own internally derived commitments, and also may begin to identify with people in the environment such as faculty, staff, and other professionals.

Several points deserve mention or repetition. For instance, the initial phases, while marked by confusion, uncertainty, and instability, are not tangential but rather crucial to

**Figure 1.** Strayhorn and Johnson’s Hypothesized Model of Professional Identity. (Digital Image Created by Author; do not duplicate without permission)
Black Male Professional Identity

the healthy development of the individual and his professional identity. As Niemi (1997) explained, “It is essential for the development of professional identity that the student develops a realistic view of the challenges and opportunities of the profession. Identity formation consists of exploring the available alternatives and committing to some choices and goals,” after working through initial uncertainties (p. 408). Also, there are certain stresses that can occur during doctoral training that, without intervention, can negatively influence, retard, or compromise professional identity development; these include negative feedback, poor relations, and incongruence between one’s expectations and realities (for more, see Kaslow & Rice, 1985). Figure 1 presents a graphical depiction of the hypothesized professional identity model.

METHODS

A constructivist qualitative approach was employed in the present study. Constructivism views knowledge as a social construction that changes depending on circumstances (Glesne, 2006). Crotty (1998) defines constructivism as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality...is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). This paradigm was selected because of its epistemic underpinnings about the nature of knowledge and how participants in a social setting construct multiple realities (Glesne, 2006). Furthermore, this approach is congruent with our own ethics and values as educational researchers (i.e., that knowledge is socially constructed and truth is subjective and known in part, if ever); enabled us to probe for deeper understandings rather than examining surface features (Johnson, 1995); and allowed us to give voice to our participants’ experiences without causing harm to their authentic voice (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Participants

Participants in this study were selected using a purposeful sampling approach (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) argues, “the logic and power of purposeful sampling...leads to selecting information-rich cases for the study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 46). Drawing on various professional networks of the researchers, prospective participants were identified who met the sampling criteria. To qualify for the study, participants had to (a) identify as “African American” or “Black” and “male,” and (b) hold a doctoral degree in the field of higher education and student affairs or other related areas. Prospective participants were asked to share their contact information with the authors, who contacted them and shared information about the study.

Both participants (n=2) agreed to be interviewed, although participant recruitment was still in progress at the time of this writing. We deemed the sample size sufficient for our current purposes for at least two reasons. First, both participants were ready and willing to talk with us about their experiences in great detail. Since qualitative research focuses on the breadth and depth of the information collected rather than the sheer number of participants, we proceeded with our analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). To this point, Patton (1990) advises qualitative researchers to strive for rich, thick descriptions and to select a sample size based on the question(s), purpose, and what one needs to know. Indeed, it is this logic that guided our decisions in this study. Second, our participants were cases of interest: that is, “cases of

2 Throughout this article, we use the terms “African American” and “Black” interchangeably to refer to individuals who ancestral origins lie in groups of African descent, including African Americans, Africans, Haitians, West Indians, among others.

3 Male refers to one’s sex or biological assignment at birth to avoid conflating issues of sex with gender, gender performance or sexuality, in consonance with current literature.
interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview subjects” (Patton, 2002, p. 182). Third, we admit the limits of our sampling size and offer these findings as useful information for understanding the phenomenon under study but we do not claim generalizability.

Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews and a short, open-ended questionnaire. The purpose of interviewing is to “find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Indeed, interviews provide an opportunity for researchers to create and capture insights of depth and level of focus rarely achieved through casual conversations, observational studies and surveys (Forsey, 2012). The interview protocol consisted of 10 questions to elicit stories from each participant about how he defines professional identity, the factors associated with his professional identity and the role of race in his professional identity development. For instance, one question was: “How have you come to understand and learn about the roles and functions of professionals in your field?” Interviews, on average, lasted approximately 75 minutes and were recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

To analyze data, we drew on techniques outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), specifically the constant comparison method. First, interview transcripts were read and re-read to generate initial categories of information or “codes;” this is known as open coding. Coding refers to the process of “organizing the material into ‘chunks’ before bringing meaning to those chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171). Second, we collapsed codes by grouping categories that seemed to relate to each other while leaving intact those that stood independent from all others. This smaller list of categories was used to generate “supercodes,” or preliminary themes. Finally, themes were compared and contrasted to understand the degree to which they were similar; closely related themes were collapsed or renamed so that the name represented the sum of its parts. This iterative process was repeated until no new codes or themes were found—a point called saturation in the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each participant was given the opportunity to review the final list of themes, clarify statements from interviews, or ask questions about our conclusions (Miles & Huberman).

Trustworthiness and Quality

In consonance with Lincoln and Guba’s (1986) methods of maintaining rigor and accuracy in qualitative research (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) we followed several steps. First, credibility was assured through member checks. Study participants were presented a list of preliminary results, including a priori description of themes, to which they responded with corrections, questions, or suggestions. We also relied on peer debriefing, whereby we called upon peers to aid in probing our thinking around professional identity, to add to the credibility of our findings and trustworthiness of our design. Transferability was enhanced by providing thick rich descriptions of the participants and research sites wherever possible. Lastly, an audit trail of data analysis and emerging themes was conducted to promote dependability and confirmability.

FINDINGS

Three major themes were identified using the analytic process described in the previous section. Each major theme is explained in the following sections. Where possible, verbatim quotes are included to illustrate the meaning and significance of findings.
**Professional Identity Defined**

Participants used a litany of words to describe professional identity generally and their own sense of professional identity specifically. Words ranged from terms that speak to what professionals in their field do (e.g., “deep thinker”) to phrases that imply a more cognitive assessment of how participants view themselves (e.g., “student-centered”), how others may view them, or a blend of both. Words and phrases used to describe professional identity included: aspirations, abstract, deep thinker, field, job, lifestyle, responsibility, and “to be scholarly,” to name a few. Related to the relatively long list of words that participants used to talk about professional identity, both of our participants reported feeling uncertain about, unsure of, or unfamiliar with the profession and their professional roles or responsibilities upon entry into their doctoral degree program. For instance, Nolan admitted being unsure or uncommitted to his “initial professional aspiration [to be] a faculty member” since his goal was based on limited information about possible career options and “not know[ing] what else to do.”

Not only did participants use choice words or phrases to describe their professional identity, but they also spoke at length about their own sense of professional identity, the origins of their professional understandings, and how they came to construct their professional identity. For example, Gabe, who was raised in St. Louis, Missouri and selected his doctoral institution based on its proximity to home (i.e., location) offered the following comments about professional identity:

> I think the role of [professionals] in the field is to produce knowledge, not just publish to publish. I definitely think its service to the field and even the campus...so service is important too. And, I think it’s about advising and mentoring...oh, and teaching.

Nolan, too, offered his perspective on professional identity and described the major roles and functions of professionals in his field (i.e., academic profession) such as faculty members. He shared:

> Major roles and functions of professionals (pause) include like being adequate at teaching, to do good research, to be entrepreneurial which I think brings prestige to the institution, and to be a good colleague.

Our questions also elicited information about the origins of participants’ professional understandings. Generally, participants attributed development of their sense of professional identity to at least three sources: (a) meaningful conversations with experienced professionals in the field; (b) deep, educationally purposeful engagement in structured or guided activities that expose one early on to the nature of professionals’ work including internships, apprenticeships, and assistantships, to name a few; and (c) information gleaned from the doctoral program’s curriculum such as readings, course assignments, and candid in-class discussions about career options. For example, Gabe shared that his professional “aspirations changed from administrator to faculty during the dissertation process...mostly because [he has] a lot of questions that [he] want[s] to answer.” Nolan, on the other hand, spoke at length with faculty, administrators, and mentors about professional values, beliefs, and dispositions; their explicit conversations fueled his professional aspirations and helped to clarify his own professional identity.

To recap, participants used a battery of terms to describe the concept of professional identity ranging from lifestyle and responsibility to deep thinker and scholarly, although both admitted to feeling uncertain, unsure, or anxious about professional matters upon entering their doctoral degree program. They also spoke at length about their own sense of professional identity, the origins of their professional beliefs/values, and how they came to construct their professional selves, using a blend of behavioral and cognitive valuations of what professionals do, believe, or value.
Factors Associated with Professional Identity

Another major finding revealed several factors that seemed to be related to Black male doctoral degree recipients’ professional identity. Generally, factors included the nature or form of his doctoral socialization process, frequency and nature of meaningful interactions with faculty and other professionals, years of professional work experience, and a capacity to evaluate the appropriateness of prescribed values and beliefs (or those inherited from advisors or mentors) in order to create new or revise existing ones based on a set of internally derived commitments, which is related to the concept of self-authorship. For instance, participants spoke in detail about how their understanding of their own professional identity matured over time as they learned more about the profession in which they worked, the values of their employing department or unit, and the kind of work in which professionals were involved.

For instance, Nolan, who secured a tenure-track faculty position upon graduation from his doctoral program, shared:

A [few] years ago it emerged, just as I was engaged in research with my advisor. I vividly remember analyzing data for [my advisor’s] large project and it hit me. I felt like I started to get a sense of ‘what faculty do’ and I thought that I could do it too.

There were other experiences that shaped Black male doctoral recipients’ sense of professional identity. For example, Gabe described several experiences, such as informal conversations and working on a research team:

Somewhere I went from ‘I don’t know’ about the things that a faculty member does to here are some basic things a faculty member does and I think working in the [said] lab was it...reading more about the role of faculty has helped clear it up for me too...and like conversations with people, especially older students in the [doctoral] program...I mean, this is an indoctrination process into the academy.

Taken together, their comments highlight how the nature and form (e.g., research- vs. teaching-focus) of one’s doctoral socialization process can powerfully shape the professional identity of Black male doctoral degree recipients, even early on. By engaging in research with faculty, talking candidly with faculty about their duties, and engaging meaningfully with the curriculum or others in the program, Black male doctoral recipients established, clarified, or revised their sense of professional identity.

Professional Aspirations Clarified

A final finding suggests the importance of professional activities to Black male doctoral recipients’ professional identity. Engagement in professional activities (e.g., research) during graduate training influenced participants’ professional identity by clarifying their aspirations for a particular occupation within the profession. For example, both participants talked about engagement in research, although the influence of such engagement differed across each. For Nolan, research engagement strengthened his interest in a faculty career, while Gabe’s research experience diminished his initial interest in becoming a faculty member. Consider the following:

I became involved in research primarily through my advisor...who is really the first person that exposed me to research. He was doing a large qualitative study project and I worked to analyze data...but I never knew that would be part of my assistantship with him. And so for me that was like my first introduction to research and I really enjoyed doing it so I sought out other opportunities by asking faculty members what types of things they were working on and if they needed someone to help...it was really through...my advisor exposing me to research where I really formed that interest [in being a faculty member]. (Nolan)
Nolan’s comments not only underscore the importance of engagement in research for clarifying Black male doctoral students’ aspirations, but how such engagement promotes career aspirations by effectively raising one’s confidence in his ability to “do” what is expected of professionals in the field. For instance, he went on to say:

I took a course with [my advisor] that really….ummm...one the major projects from that course that we were all suppose to write chapters...it was a students outcome course. And the chapter that I wrote became a chapter in the book that I ended up editing with [my advisor]. I think as a first-year doctoral student that’s when I started thinking I could do this...I think it was the process of working on that book like actively with him that really showed me like the process of like writing and putting a project together, as something that faculty do, which led me to believe that it’s something I could do because I really had fun with it and I liked it...and I think I was pretty good at it. I think the combination of those two lead me to see something that faculty do...that made it more tangible.

Indeed, it was through meaningful engagement in professional activities such as research that clarified (i.e., affirmed) Nolan’s professional aspirations, thereby facilitating development of his professional identity.

Whereas research engagement clarified Nolan’s professional aspirations, research involvement had reverse effects on Gabe’s initial interests in becoming a faculty member. Consider the following excerpt he shared:

When I entered [my doctoral program]...I always wanted to be a professor...so I came here wanting to do that. I got a research assistantship and I had a terrible time...ummm I feel I like I didn’t have any guidance. I didn’t know what I was doing half the time and my writing wasn’t where it needed to be...and I didn’t feel like anybody was taking the time to help me to get there. So that first year of being a research assistant...ummm it really deterred me from being a faculty member. For that to be my first big taste and not have guidance, it really deterred me.

Contrary to the support that Nolan received from his advisor, Gabe recalled feeling frustrated, alienated, and unsupported during his research involvement. Generally, he described his experience using words with negative connotations and attributed his lack of sustained interest in a faculty career to his negative research experiences. Interestingly, Gabe experienced another pivoting moment during his doctoral program where his faculty career interests were stoked: post-candidacy engagement in independent research (i.e., dissertation). Consider the following:

The summer after my fourth year, in the middle of my dissertation data collection and writing I began to open up again the idea of faculty for a couple of reasons. One, I felt like I have more questions that I wanted to get answers to... And two, during the dissertation process and throughout my last four years, I’ve gotten better [sic]... and I’ve gotten to be a better thinker.

Like Nolan, Gabe’s comments reveal how research engagement promotes professional identity development by raising one’s confidence in his abilities in a domain related to the professional role. All of this extends what we currently know about professional identity and we discuss these findings in the context of prior literature in the next section.

**DISCUSSION**

Recall that the purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand how Black male doctoral degree recipients’ make sense of their professional identity. Three major research questions guided our analysis: (a) How do Black male doctoral degree recipients define their professional identity? (b) What factors do Black male doctoral recipients attribute to the development of their professional identity? (c) What is the role of
race in the development of Black male doctoral degree recipients’ professional identity? Findings from the present study suggest several major conclusions.

First, participants deployed a litany of words to describe professional identity in this study, similar to earlier studies (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Woody, 1978). Words ranged from beliefs to assumptions, as well as more psychological assessments of the extent to which one feels a sense of belonging in their respective field. However, more akin to Bruss (1993), we found that Black men in higher education tend to distinguish what professionals do in their field from what professionals believe. Both behavioral and cognitive valuations were part of our participants’ evolving professional identity.

Second, participants defined professional identity as process—that is, something that develops over time from initial confusion and uncertainty to clarified understandings of what one does as a professional and believes about the profession (Bruss, 1993; Friedman, 1986). Our research, like that of Reybold (2003), provides evidence to support our hypothesis that doctoral socialization is related to professional identity development through cognitive and affective maturation marked by refined aspirations, internally-defined beliefs, and confidence in one’s ability to assume professional duties.

Third, several conclusions can be made about the role of engagement in professional activities, specifically research. For example, findings from this study underscore its role in facilitating professional identity development for the participants in our study. Recall the experiences of Nolan who discusses in detail the role of research in clarifying his aspirations and promoting his confidence. Indeed, through purposeful and meaningful engagement in research with his advisor, Nolan gained interest in a faculty career. These findings are consistent with literature on doctoral socialization, specifically the role of meaningful relationships and purposeful engagement with faculty (Baird, 1995; Barnes & Austin, 2009; Weidman et al., 2001). And consistent with our theoretical framework, Nolan was able to advance to phase 2, sorting through feelings of confusion and doubt as he engaged in professional activities (e.g., research). The opposite is also true.

Negative professional experiences and activities may cause a student to question or revisit professional aspirations, leading to decreased levels of confidence, and concerns of “fit”. In our study, Gabe discussed in detail the nature of his engagement in research and relationship with his “advisor” who he distinguishes from his “mentor.” Similarly, he describes his research experience as negative, lacking structure and support. These findings with consistent with literature on the role of “mentors” providing psychosocial and career development to students. Indeed, the absence of these supports during his engagement in research inhibited professional identity development. As our model suggests, negative experiences with research and lack of useful supervision led Gabe to “stall out” temporarily. However, his professional aspirations are clarified and refined during the latter stages of his doctoral program as he engaged in prolonged, in-depth, and meaningful professional activities (i.e. dissertation). Taken together, findings may suggest the importance of situated learning where students move beyond peripheral participation or mere observance to deep, hands-on engagement in activities that nurture their professional interest.

Findings from this qualitative investigation of Black male doctoral recipients’ professional identity affirm or lend persuasive support to our hypothesized model of professional identity development. For instance, information shared by our participants demonstrates that the initial phases of their professional development are marked by confusion, uncertainty, and instability, similar to more general results reported elsewhere (Bruss & Kopala, 1993; Flapan, 1984). Recall
how both participants initially were unsure of what they wanted to become or could become after earning their doctorate in higher education. And even when career aspirations came into view early on, our participants were uncertain of the path to such careers. Not only does this finding relate to the hypothesized model but it also provides information about where some Black male doctoral students begin developing their professional identity.

Consistent with our hypothesized model, findings from the study suggest that confusion and instability motivate Black males’ attempts to reconcile uncertainty by engaging meaningfully in professional activities such as research. Again these findings relate to those reported by Bruss (1993) and others, although results from the present study relate directly to Black male doctoral students and those who study in the field of higher education. Purposeful engagement in professional activities such as teaching, service, and research help Black men resolve professional identity conflicts, clarify their aspirations, nurture their self-confidence, and enhance their self-image. Advisors, faculty members, and mentors seem to play a critical role in this process, especially at this point of doctoral study. While we’ve known from other research that mentors play vital roles (e.g., Wright & Wright, 1987), our work underscores the role they play in the evolution of Black male doctoral students’ professional identity.

IMPLICATIONS

The study was significant for several campus constituencies. One group that might benefit from the results of this study includes graduate faculty members in the field of higher education. Findings from this study provide faculty members with information about Black male doctoral recipients’ initial aspirations, perceptions of their involvement in research activities, and details about how their professional identity evolved over time. Faculty might use this information to nurture such students’ professional aspirations early on, improve their experiences in research activities, and foster development of their professional identity. For instance, the study’s results suggest the effectiveness of reading assignments about professional roles, close supervision during research internships, and explicit instruction about the norms and values of the profession. Faculty should consider these results when revising doctoral curricula, planning new courses or seminars, and working directly with students through assistantships and collaborative research.

Another group that might benefit from the results of this study includes professional advisors and mentors who work with Black male doctoral students and their peers. Findings from this study provide advisors and mentors with information about the process through which professional identity evolves for Black male doctoral recipients. Advisors might use this information to guide advising sessions with students throughout their doctoral career; for example, early sessions during the first year might be designed to encourage students to explore various career options, “try out” different perspectives (e.g., research- vs. teaching-focused), or learn about possible pathways. Mentors might consult this information when contemplating their role at a certain phase of a student’s doctoral career; mentors can be particularly helpful during latter stages by coaching protégés through conflicts regarding their aspirations, supporting them through moments of insecurity, and persuading them to believe in themselves and their ability to be professionals in the field. Using tactics like those employed by Nolan and Gabe’s mentors may be effective.

Findings from our study also have implications for future policy. For example, both of our participants seemed to stress the role that research involvement played in shaping their professional identity, by exposing them to what professionals do, how they do it, and building their confidence to do it too. This
has implications at the federal and state level, stressing the need for continued support of programs that provide research opportunities to students such as Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP), Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate program, and even more local initiatives. In fact, our findings may motivate policy at the institutional level to foster meaningful research collaborations between faculty and graduate students, to expose doctoral students to various career options through assistantships and curricula, and to adopt appropriate learning outcomes for each phase of doctoral study such as “clarified aspirations,” an outcome educators might desire for first- and second-year doctoral students.

The present study was significant in terms of future theory. To date, much of what is written about graduate and professional students focuses on their socialization process—that is, the mechanisms through which they become bona fide members of their graduate and professional communities—as posited by Weidman and colleagues (2001). Our study offers additional insight into the doctoral socialization experiences of Black males and extends what we know about the evolution of their professional identity. This study might be used to develop new or revise existing theoretical frames, such as our model presented earlier in the paper.

Information from the present study has implications for future research. Consider our findings related to Black male doctoral students’ professional identity development. Essentially our participants described a process through which they evaluated prescribed beliefs (i.e., received knowing) about professional roles and career options, assessed the suitability of each in light of his interests and values, and then make decisions based on internal commitments; in this way, professional identity development is akin to other cognitive processes and models such as self-authorship (Baxter-Magolda, 2001). Future research should pursue this topic further using a longitudinal, qualitative design.

The present study attempted to understand the ways in which Black male doctoral recipients defined professional identity, as well as the litany of words used to do so. It seems equally as important to access the meaning they make of their doctoral experiences and the extent to which that influences professional identity. Both of these go beyond the scope of our study, but future researchers might explore this area using sense-making frames and other qualitative methods like critical ethnography that appreciate the various contexts in which students are situated. Portraiture, too, may be used to analyze images produced by students. Finally, we urge the research community to remember the value of mixing methods when studying complex social phenomena.

CONCLUSION

When we began this study, we expected to learn a bit about Black male doctoral students’ socialization and we sought answers to our three research questions. But once the study was underway, we realized that our participants were poised to offer so much more. They spoke candidly about their experiences—the good and the bad—and they trusted us enough to share their aspirations, their frustrations, and their vulnerabilities. What we offer here is more than answers to questions; we present a preliminary model of professional identity, conceptual distinctions between overlapping terms and perhaps most importantly the stories of students whose voices have been rendered silent in extant literature on doctoral education. Despite popular belief, Black men do enroll in doctoral education, and many succeed by developing a healthy professional identity like Gabe and Nolan. It is our hope that this study enables future generations of Black men to do the same.
Black Male Professional Identity

REFERENCES


Using Critical Theory to Measure the Relationship between Psychological Factors and Black Students’ College Satisfaction

Terrell L. Strayhorn, Michael Steven Williams, Joseph A. Kitchen

Abstract—This study estimated the impact of sense of belonging, self-esteem, and academic self-efficacy on satisfaction with college for a sample of 139 Black collegians. Findings suggest a statistical link between each of these psychological constructs and satisfaction with college— together, factors explained approximately 51% of the variance in the dependent variable. Findings are further considered using critical race theory (CRT) as an analytic lens. Implications for future practice, research and policy are highlighted.

Key Terms — Blacks, Sense of Belonging, Self-esteem, Academic Self-efficacy, Critical Race Theory, Undergraduates, College

Despite scholarly attention to the academic success of underrepresented minorities (URMs) in college, sizeable racial disparities in student achievement persist. Specifically, Black college student persistence rates remain much lower than that of their non-Black peers—with just over 30% of Black college students persisting to graduation within 5 years (NCES, 2011). Moreover, research demonstrates that Black students generally perform lower than Asians and Whites on standardized tests of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy and, on average, their grades are lower (Allen, Epps, & Hanniff, 1991; Carey, 2004; Chubb & Loveless, 2002; (Lascher & Offenstein, 2012; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008a). Indeed, significant improvements in persistence rates and achievement levels for Black college students is the target of much policy, as is the success of all students. One need only look to the recent signing of a presidential executive order establishing a White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans as evidence of its importance (White House, 2012).

The extant literature has approached the topic of Black achievement from a number of perspectives. For instance, Hu and St. John (2001) found that financial aid and tuition rates bear on the persistence of Black students; this segment of research we refer to as financial studies. Others have asserted that pre-college academic preparation—or lack
thereof—may be a key factor in the educational success of Black college students (Strayhorn, 2011, 2012); studies like these we refer to as academic studies. Still further, Allen (1992), and many others since, have probed a combination of student background factors and institutional characteristics that seem to promote Black college students’ success, uncovering the importance of supportive relations with faculty and campus racial composition.

Still, other research examines factors that contribute to Black college students’ achievement outcomes. One line of inquiry attempts to explain Black college students’ academic achievement as a function of psychological factors. An important segment of this research explores self-efficacy and college satisfaction, focusing on URM (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002), especially since satisfaction is associated with college retention and improved academic performance (DeWitz & Walsh). Generally, results suggest that confidence in one’s academic abilities facilitates satisfaction and, in turn, success in college for most students including ethnic minorities.

Indeed, psychological factors seem to influence students’ satisfaction with college (Fleming, 1984; Carter & Wilson, 1993; Tinto, 1993), which may in turn influence academic performance, grades, and persistence to degree (Bean, 2005; Steele, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). For instance, Black student perceptions of racism, racial stereotypes, and feelings of marginalization can affect whether or not they are satisfied with college (Johnson, 2003) which consequently influences whether or not they persist to graduation. Strayhorn (2009) found that racial stereotypes and expectations also affect high-achieving Black students’ grades at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and the feeling that Blacks students must prove themselves to others academically. Prior studies have several limits however; many of them focus on specific groups such as high-achievers versus more traditional students. More work is needed to explore the influence of psychological factors on Black college students’ academic success, as reflected in their overall evaluation of college experiences.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to measure the effect of various psychological constructs on Black college students’ satisfaction with college. Specifically, we wanted to know about the influence of sense of belonging, self-esteem and academic self-efficacy on Black student satisfaction. Since we believe that each of these factors are inextricably shaped by race and racism for Black students, we further consider our findings using critical race theory (CRT) as an analytic lens. Before describing the study’s methods, the next sections briefly review of relevant literature and outlines the theories that helped us frame this study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To conduct this study, it was necessary to review the literature that speaks to those aspects of the college experience that specifically influence satisfaction with college for Black students. Thus, after synthesizing literature on the Black student experience in higher education, we turn to a small body of literature that specifically sets out to explore satisfaction among minority students generally and Black students specifically using psychological variables.

Black Students in Higher Education

Black students have long since been the focus of literature in higher education (Gasman, 2008). The institution of chattel slavery left Blacks with little opportunity for education, and even after the Civil War, scholastic prospects were slow to improve. Educational restrictions for Blacks were implicit and explicit, formal and informal. For example, while many southern states had actual legislation that precluded Blacks from gaining literacy, academic discouragement often manifested itself through mental and
physical intimidation and attacks (Anderson, 1988). Even in northern states, Blacks remained largely undereducated and had little in the way of employment opportunities even if they were fortunate enough to obtain postsecondary education (Moss, 2009). No matter what part of the country they found themselves in, Blacks in the Reconstruction era were forced to contend with dehumanizing questions about their ability to be educated while simultaneously coping with outright opposition to the extension of educational opportunities to their race (Anderson, 1998; Brown & Yates, 2005; Moss, 2009).

Still today, despite over a century of increases in college attendance, and the extension of educational opportunity to many groups, Blacks continue to encounter disaffirming environments in higher education. This is especially true at PWIs. Though Black students at PWIs have been the focus of a number of studies (Allen, 1992; Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), the majority of this scholarship comes from a deficit perspective that offers myriad reasons why Blacks have difficulty adjusting to, learning in and ultimately graduating from these institutions. For example, early on, Blackwell (1987) explained how economic obstacles like unemployment, underemployment, and fear of debt stymie, or prevent, Black families from seeking educational opportunities for their children. In a qualitative study of 180 Black college students across the United States, Feagin (1992) found that oppressive racial climates often serve as a barrier to retention for Black students at PWIs. Students in the study reported feeling stereotyped as unintelligent, lazy and incapable of handling the academic rigor of college life. Forced to cope with a racist environment that seldom acknowledges their abilities or presence left many Black students at PWIs feeling simultaneously isolated and alienated. The weight of evidence suggests that feelings of isolation and alienation lead to lower levels of academic achievement, persistence and psychosocial development for Blacks when compared to their White counterparts in these spaces (Allen, 1992; Astin, 1982; Blackwell, 1987; Cuyjet, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008b, 2012). Campus environments and other individual factors may influence other aspects of students’ development and perceptions such as satisfaction with college; these studies are reviewed in the next section.

Satisfaction for Students of Color

Strayhorn (2008b) found that supportive relationships with faculty and peers played an important positive role in facilitating Black male student satisfaction with college. His work suggests that opportunities to foster positive supportive relationships for Black male students in college could prove to be an important socialization tool that may foster a sense of connectedness and affiliation with the college campus. These feelings beget increased satisfaction, improved college success rates, and positive educational outcomes. His findings were consistent with previous scholarship that suggests the important role that relationships with faculty and peers as well as positive supportive communities play in college student success (Aitken, 1982; Tinto, 1993; Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Other scholarship has explored the influence of faculty-student mentoring on a variety of college student outcomes noteworthy for this investigation. The lack of racial minority peers and faculty has an impact on minority student perceptions of their college experiences, which in turn impact a variety of student outcomes including satisfaction (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Hurtado, et al., 1999; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). Undeniably, given that the presence of same-race faculty facilitates student-faculty interactions for students of color, the dearth of minority faculty at most postsecondary educational institutions is additional cause for concern (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

There are several studies that demonstrate the influence of mentoring on minority student outcomes. First, Santos and Reigadas (2000) found that a faculty-student mentoring program positively influenced Latino students’ self-efficacy and goal definition. In another study, Tekian, Jalovecky, and Bruska
(2000) found that informal mentoring was significantly related to college academic performance among underrepresented minority students. Previous scholarship also demonstrates that faculty-student mentoring is predictive of Black student college satisfaction for both men and women (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). The weight of evidence suggests that there is an influence of faculty-student mentoring on a number of student outcomes, including persistence and retention. Strayhorn and Terrell theorize that because mentoring facilitates students’ involvement in college, it may also influence college satisfaction and ultimately student intentions to persist.

Taken together, these studies illuminate the fact that academic success, intellectual development and satisfaction with college for Black collegians is shaped by myriad factors ranging from environmental (i.e., campus climate), financial, and social psychological variables such as relationships with others. These topics require specific attention if educators are going to offer effective strategies that lead to positive outcomes for these students. Given the powerful role that psychological factors can have on helping students to overcome these barriers (Strayhorn, in press), there is a clear need for more information on the influence of psychological factors on Black college student retention, persistence and success. The present study addresses this gap and contributes to the extant research on Black students in college by exploring the impact of three distinct psychological factors on the reported satisfaction of Black college students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study was influenced by two theoretical frames. The overarching framework relies on a blend of elements drawn from Maslow’s (1954, 1968) hierarchy of needs—explicated in his seminal work on human motivation—framed the current study. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs has been selectively applied in higher education to understand the academic and social experiences of college students (e.g., Strange & Banning, 2001; Strayhorn, 2012) and thus it was deemed appropriate for our purposes. Maslow postulated that human needs are organized in a hierarchy that spans from physiological needs at the base, on to safety needs, then social needs and sense of belonging, then self-esteem, achievement, and confidence (e.g., academic self-efficacy), and finally self-actualization at the pinnacle. Needs on each level of the hierarchy must be satisfied to advance on to the next level toward the ultimate goal of self-actualization (Maslow, 1968; Strayhorn, 2012). Therefore, more basic needs (e.g., sense of belonging, self-esteem, and academic self-efficacy) must be satisfied before a student can deploy the knowledge and understanding gained through participation in higher education (Strayhorn, 2005, 2012) in self-actualized ways. Relationships between basic needs such as belonging, esteem, and satisfaction on the journey toward self-actualization undergird our examination.

Three fundamental needs were relevant to our study. Sense of belonging consists of cognitive and affective elements whereby a student appraises his or her position in the group, which in turn yields specific behavioral outcomes and responses, as explained by Strayhorn (2012). Belonging reflects the sense of connectedness and feelings of being cared about, valued, and respected by others. Self-esteem, on the other hand, is character-
ized as the set of beliefs about oneself regarding their global self-worth (Meggert, 1989). Self-esteem is associated with academic success and life satisfaction among many other positive outcomes (e.g., Michael, et al., 2007). Finally, self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief that they have the capacity to organize and execute the behaviors necessary to be successful in a particular situation (Bandura, 1997). Academic self-efficacy, then, refers to an individual’s belief in their ability to accomplish particular academic tasks and accomplish specific educational goals. The link between academic self-efficacy and performance and persistence in educational settings is well established (Chemers, Hu, & Gracia, 2001; Choi, 2005), and we deemed it necessary for our study.

Critical Race Theory

In general, critical theory challenges dominant theoretical perspectives by promoting awareness, critique, and deconstruction of social institutions with particular attention to power differentials and inequities with the ultimate goal of advancing social justice (Evans, et al., 2010). Critical race theory is a broad and interdisciplinary theoretical perspective focused on naming, examining and transforming the relationship between race, racism and power in everyday life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). More specifically, CRT calls attention to the role of race as it comes to bear on inequities of power and privilege in social institutions (e.g., organizations, laws), and seeks transformation of material conditions (Delgado & Stefancic; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Race still matters, and it contributes significantly to imbalances in the social and educational experiences of marginalized student populations (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Scholars in law, sociology, and education, among others, utilize CRT because it represents an important shift in the discourse around race and racism in society.

Most scholarship recognizes a number of hallmark themes or tenets of critical race theory including (a) the permanence and prevalence of race and racism, (b) interest convergence, (c) the social construction of race, and (d) intersectionality and anti-essentialism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). The permanence of racism tenet suggests that because racism is ordinary rather than aberrational, it is especially difficult to overcome. Only the most obvious and overt forms of racism can be remedied by legal action. Laws cannot, however, directly attend to the more subtle forms of racism that play themselves out in daily life. Interest convergence notes the ways that both elite and working-class Whites benefit from racism. For working class Whites, the benefits are psychic, positioning them as inherently “better” than people of color regardless of their material conditions. For elite Whites, the benefits are material, since racism allows for the relatively unchallenged reproduction of their social, political and economic ascendancy. As a result, no matter their position in society, Whites have little incentive to actively work to eliminate racism.

There are other tenets of CRT that deserve brief mention as they may arise in our discussion of the study’s findings. CRT holds that race is a socially constructed concept that is invented, reinvented, manipulated and retired when convenient, though it has nothing to do with higher order traits like personality, intelligence and morality. This allows for the differential racialization of non-White groups in service of the sociopolitical needs of White elites. Finally, intersectionality and anti-essentialism should be understood as an acknowledgement that people have multifaceted and complex social identities (e.g. race, class, gender, sexual orientation). A Black single mother may have different experiences, say, in college than a Black young woman without dependents since individual identity
categories intersect in unique ways over time within a larger matrix of privilege and oppression (Strayhorn, 2013a).

The present investigation centers race in our exploration of the relationship between psychological factors and satisfaction with college among Black students. In doing so, this research contributes to a growing body of transdisciplinary work (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Strayhorn, 2013a) dedicated to understanding the racialized educational experiences of Black students with the intent of empowering students and addressing racial oppression and marginalization in higher education.

METHODS

The current study utilized an ex-post facto survey design. The survey was conducted as part of a larger, ongoing research project on the experiences of collegians in the United States. While the larger study contains both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as data collected from students at various institutional types (e.g., historically Black, predominantly White, 2-year, 4-year, online), and all racial/ethnic backgrounds, the current investigation focuses on information on the experiences of Black students at 4-year, degree-granting PWIs gleaned from survey analysis only.

Sample

The analytic sample was drawn from 628 students who responded to the initial survey, which included members from all racial/ethnic groups. We reduced the sample to only those who indicated their race as Black/African-American. The analytic sample consisted of 139 Black student respondents enrolled at a large PWI in the southeastern region of the United States. The majority of respondents were female (60%) and the mean age of all respondents was 21 (SD = 3.22). About a quarter of the sample reported that they were members of a fraternity or sorority and approximately 9% indicated that they were student athletes at the institution. The majority of respondents were upperclassmen, with seniors, juniors, sophomores and first-year students representing 38%, 23%, 14% and 12% respectively. Table 1 presents additional descriptive information for the sample.

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<th>Table 1. Descriptive Statistics</th>
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<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
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<td>Academic Self-Efficacy</td>
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Data Collection & Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected in the spring 2008 semester using the Student Success Questionnaire (SSQ), which was designed by the third author. A web-based approach was employed because response rates to mailed surveys are frequently low (Crawford, Couper, & Lamia, 2001; Fowler, 2009). Further, there is evidence suggesting that the psychometric properties of online surveys meet, and in some cases exceed, those of paper-and-pencil or otherwise offline surveys (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004; Riva, Terruzi, & Anolli; 2003).

Individuals were invited to participate in the study via e-mail. The electronic invitation included a hyperlink to the URL of the web-
site where the survey was located. Several strategies were employed to encourage student participation. For example, reminder messages were sent to non-respondents at 2-week intervals over a period of 2 months. In addition, ten $10 gift cards were distributed through lottery. Only those who completed the survey in its entirety were eligible for the prizes. These strategies yielded an overall response rate of 51% after accounting for undeliverable invitations to participate (e.g., incorrect or outdated e-mail addresses). A response rate of 30 to 40% is considered “good” for web-based survey data collection techniques (Crawford, Couper, & Lamia, 2001).

The SSQ consists of 50 items designed to illicit information about various aspects of students’ experiences in college. Items are organized into four major sections: (a) demographic characteristics, (b) student engagement, (c) student transition and adjustment, and (d) non-cognitive traits. Measures for the present study were drawn from the demographic, student engagement, and student transition and adjustment sections. For more information about the survey, see Strayhorn (2009, 2012).

Measures

The dependent variable (satisfaction) for this study was operationalized using information drawn from extant scholarship on students’ subjective evaluation of their college experience (e.g., Bean, 2005; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009) and college student retention theory (Tinto, 1993). The index is a sum of three separate items that measure college students’ satisfaction with college. A sample item asks respondents to rate the extent to which they are “satisfied with your overall college experience.” Initial response options for each individual item were placed on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Results of a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation reveal that these items loaded on a single factor, which accounted for 67% of the inter-item variance. As a result, we calculated a summated satisfaction index by combining the three items ($\alpha = 0.75$). In this analysis, the composite index scores ranged from 3 to 21, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of satisfaction.

Independent variables measured students’ self-esteem, sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. Self-esteem refers to an individual’s cognitive appraisal of their self-worth (Meggert, 1989). In the present study, the self-esteem scale ($M = 10.99, SD = 1.37, \alpha = 0.63$) included three items, one of which is, “I think I am a person of worth.” Response options ranged from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much).

Another measure was sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), which refers to a student’s appraisal of their position in various spheres and reflects a sense of connectedness rooted in mutual care, concern and respect. For this investigation, the sense of belonging scale ($M = 8.88, SD = 2.16, \alpha = 0.67$) included three items. A sample item from this scale is, “I feel a sense of belonging at my college.” Response options ranged from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much).

A final measure was academic self-efficacy. Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief or confidence in their ability to complete academic tasks (Bandura, 1997; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). In the current investigation, academic self-efficacy ($M = 18.88, SD = 2.51, \alpha = 0.65$) consisted of three items related to collegiate success. For instance, sample items assessed students’ belief in their ability to write a term paper or maintain good grades. Response options ranged from 1 (no confidence at all) to 7 (complete confidence).

Additionally, we controlled for an array of potentially confounding variables including age (in years), year in college, enrollment status (i.e., full-time, part-time), athlete status, fraternity membership, graduate degree aspirations, ACT scores, self-reported high school grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0
scale, and college GPA on a 4.0 scale, as reported by the university’s registrar.

Several steps were taken to assess the validity and reliability of the measures on the instrument. Face validity was established by consulting with two survey development experts and a team of experts on Black students in college about the clarity of the survey items. In addition, the survey was pilot tested before data collection with 74 similarly situated undergraduate students. Procedures were tailored based on the results of the pilot study, resulting in the rewording, clarification or removal of several items. Several other evidences support the validity of our interpretations including, but not limited to, (a) content representation (i.e., using multiple items to measure single constructs), (b) construct validity (i.e., using factor analysis to test the internal structure of scales), and (c) external validity (i.e., measures are correlated in expected directions with objective measures of performance).

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in four stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the analytic sample and to determine any existing patterns among data points. Second, correlation analyses were conducted to estimate the magnitude and direction of statistical relationships among independent and dependent variables used in this analysis. Third, independent samples t-tests were used to probe for differences in satisfaction across demographic characteristics of interest in the sample. Finally, hierarchical linear regression analysis with forced entry of the independent variables was used to estimate the net effect of self-esteem, sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy on Black collegians’ satisfaction with college. Hierarchical regression analysis is a method of regression analysis where “the choice of a particular cumulative sequence of independent variables is made in advance, dictated by the purpose and logic of the research” (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003, p. 158).

LIMITATIONS

Before presenting results from this analysis, several limitations deserve mention. First, data were drawn from a relatively small sample of Black students at a 4-year PWI, so care should be taken not to overgeneralize the results of this investigation. There are important differences between 2- and 4-year institutions and the experiences of Black collegians can also be greatly influenced by other institutional factors (e.g., geographic location, HBCU designation) that are not accounted for in this analysis.

Finally, this analysis relied on student self-reports of students’ collegiate experiences. The validity of self-report data is contingent on item clarity, students’ understanding of the question, and their decision to answer honestly (Fowler, 2009). Though self-report data is widely used in college student research, its inherent problems may limit findings and their generalizability in unknown ways.

Although noteworthy, these limitations do not reduce this study’s usefulness in understanding the ways psychological factors influence Black collegians’ satisfaction with college.

RESULTS

The mean satisfaction level for Black students in the sample was 14.70 (SD = 3.63). Students in the sample performed reasonably well academically as reflected by their college GPA (M = 2.83, SD = 0.62). Table 2 presents means and standard deviations the main independent and dependent variables.

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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>10.99</td>
<td>1.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-efficacy</td>
<td>18.88</td>
<td>2.51</td>
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Bivariate correlation analyses revealed several statistically significant correlations among the independent and dependent variables. Notable correlations include those between the primary independent variables and the dependent variable, as well as those between key demographic variables and the psychological constructs. For example, self-esteem ($r = 0.39$), sense of belonging ($r = 0.56$), and academic self-efficacy ($r = 0.30$) were positively and statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) correlated with satisfaction, indicating that Black students who felt good about themselves, a sense of belonging on campus, and confident in their academic abilities tended to be more satisfied with their college experience and vice versa.

There is also a noteworthy moderate, correlation between satisfaction and college GPA ($r = 0.30, p < 0.05$). In other words, Black collegians who were more satisfied with their collegiate experience tended to report higher grades. Interestingly, a number of statistically significant correlations emerged related to transfer status and fraternity/sorority membership, but no statistically significant correlations emerged among gender lines. Table 3 presents the correlations for all independent and dependent variables included in the present analysis. Correlation results support our use of multivariate regression techniques to estimate the net effect of individual sets of variables.

An independent samples $t$-test was conducted to assess differences in satisfaction between Black male and female collegians. Homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene’s test for equality of variances, which indicated equal variance. Independent samples $t$-test was conducted to assess differences in satisfaction between Black students who began their postsecondary educational career at their current college and transfer students. In this analysis, equal variance was not assumed. Though results indicated that satisfaction was higher ($M = 14.96, SD = 3.32$) for students who started at their current institution than for those who transferred to the institution ($M = 13.16, SD = 5.01$); still, these differences were not statistically significant, $t(135) = 1.51, p = 0.15$.

An independent samples $t$-test was conducted to assess differences in satisfaction between Black fraternity and sorority members and their same-race non-member counterparts; equal variances were assumed. Results indicated that Black fraternity and sorority members’ satisfaction with college ($M = 16.11, SD = 3.51$) was higher than non-members’ satisfaction with college ($M = 14.23, SD = 3.56$), and mean differences ($\Delta M = 1.88, SE = 0.70$) were statistically significant, $t(135) = 2.72, p < 0.01$.

Finally, hierarchical linear regression techniques were used to examine the degree to which Black collegians’ satisfaction with college could be explained by their self-esteem, sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy after controlling for potentially confounding variables, such as demographic factors, academic achievement, and grades in college. In the final model including all statistical controls and predictors, the linear com-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.75</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>M GPA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>College GPA</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Year</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.99</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Athlete</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Sense of Belonging | | 8.88  | 2.16 | -0.15 | -0.04 | 0.13 | 0.15 | 0.09 | 0.06 | -1.54** | -0.12 | -1.79** | 1.00 | 84
Combination of independent measures was significantly related to Black students’ satisfaction with college, $F(13, 125) = 9.93, p < 0.01$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient ($R$) was 0.71, indicating that approximately 51% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.46$) of the variance in Black students’ satisfaction with college can be explained by the factors in the final model. Interpretation of the regression results revealed six significant predictors of Black students’ satisfaction with college: college grades ($b = 1.49$), ACT scores ($b = -0.15$), year in college ($b = 0.68$), self-esteem ($b = 0.46$), sense of belonging ($b = 0.74$), and academic self-efficacy ($b = 0.26$). Results suggest that Black students’ who earn higher grades in college, feel good about themselves, find a sense of belonging, and feel confident in their academic abilities are, on average, more satisfied with college, compared to their peers who perform less well, feel alienated on campus, and lack self-esteem and self-efficacy. Collinearity diagnostics, including tolerance statistics, eigenvalues and condition indices are all within acceptable limits suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem for this analysis. Table 4 presents a summary of the regression analysis.

**DISCUSSION**

Recall that the purpose of this study was to measure the effect of sense of belonging, self-esteem and academic self-efficacy on Black collegians’ satisfaction with college. Each of these psychological constructs was positively related to satisfaction with college for Black collegians even in the presence of a broad array of statistical controls. Results suggest several important conclusions.

First, the results of this study provide empirical information about the relationship between satisfaction, a correlate of retention, and Black collegians’ self-esteem, sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. No prior studies provide a look at the relationship between these factors and satisfaction for Black students at PWIs; this is an important contribution to existing knowledge. And these findings open up a new set of questions that could occupy future lines of research on the topic.
Second, results from this study affirm previous research asserting that self-esteem (Michael, et al., 2007), sense of belonging (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012), and academic self-efficacy (e.g., Chemers, Hu, & Gracia, 2001; Choi, 2005) are positively associated with desirable academic outcomes for Black college students, but there are important new understandings from this analysis. For instance, results from the present study support prior conclusions about the importance of academic achievement for college students (Strayhorn, 2013b); Black students in the sample who earned good grades were more satisfied with college than those who performed less well. Using psychological theory helps explain this finding in that Black students who perform well and earn good grades may interpret grades as a sign of their ability to meet or exceed institutional expectations about performance. Those who are able to satisfy academic standards at their institution are likely to feel more positive about their overall experience.

Self-esteem, sense of belonging, and academic self-efficacy also were positive, significant predictors of Black students’ satisfaction with college in our study. Generally speaking, results affirm previous conclusions about these relations (e.g., Strayhorn, 2012). Still two points deserve mention. First, correlation results support the fact that psychological variables such as self-esteem, belonging, and efficacy are positively related to satisfaction for Black collegians, which was our initial hypothesis. However, correlations were moderately low, ranging from 0.30 to 0.56, indicating that these are likely separate and discrete constructs and exhibit dissociative behaviors among this sample. Second, while similar in direction, the influence of each psychological variable on Black college students’ satisfaction varies when holding constant all other effects. For example, sense of belonging had the greatest influence on Black students’ satisfaction with college in this analysis, followed by academic self-efficacy and then self-esteem. In other words, one of the most powerful levers available to us as educators for raising Black students’ college satisfaction is sense of belonging. Helping students find a sense of belonging on campus, quite often by encouraging meaningful engagement with faculty, staff, and peers in conducive environments (Strayhorn, 2012), will improve their overall evaluation of the college experience. Similarly, helping students develop confidence in their academic abilities will not only improve grades and test scores but our results suggest that it will improve their satisfaction with college overall.

Before turning attention to the implications of our results, several findings lend themselves to interpretation through CRT. For instance, results from the present study suggest the importance of college readiness, as measured by one’s GPA and ACT scores, and grades in college. However paying close attention to the ways in which educational opportunities are structured in this country by race/ethnicity reveal that some students may be afforded opportunities to develop the skills and capacities needed for college success in wealthy, largely White school districts while those attending predominantly minority, low-resource schools are denied such opportunities. So what does it mean for ACT scores or college readiness to predict Black students’ satisfaction in college? Are those from low-income schools or low ACT performers doomed to dissatisfaction with college? No, but we must admit that race and racism are permanent fixtures in American society and will likely continue to structure educational opportunities as they have in the past. Still, interventions can be fashioned with this in mind that expose Black students to meaningful activities that aim to compensate for lack of resources at the school- or district level. Drawing on findings from this study, such interventions might aim to nurture students’ efficacy, facilitate their belong-
ing, or improve their self-esteem to name a few.

An interesting, but spurious, finding from our study suggests an inverse relationship between ACT score and Black college students’ satisfaction. Literally this translates as Black students who earned higher ACT scores were less satisfied with college than their peers who scored lower. This finding awaits replication but CRT offers a perspective for interpretation that may be useful. A critique of liberalism would reveal that high achievement may not beget other forms of achievement (or satisfaction) for those whose lives are touched by race and racism such as Black college students. Indeed, Black students may need to recruit other resources and energies to achieve a level of satisfaction with college—mere readiness may not be enough. Replication of this finding would lend support to our assertion, especially if the findings do not hold for non-Black students.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study have implications for future practice, research and policy. From a practical perspective, numerous groups could benefit from the results of this work. For example, academic advisors might use these findings to ensure that Black students engage in activities that contribute to their self-esteem, sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. Specifically, academic advisors can intentionally allot time during their advising appointments to ask questions tailored to gauge student self-esteem and sense of belonging. They might also consider forming meaningful relationships with offices and units that are known to excel at connecting Black students to campus and promoting academic success. By recognizing, honoring and utilizing these important campus agents, academic advisors can positively contribute to Black student satisfaction in college.

Results presented here may also inform future research and theory investigating the role of race in cognitive appraisals of ability. There should be a concerted effort to cross disciplinary boundaries and investigate the ways that race and psychological states are inextricably intertwined. We challenge researchers to move beyond stereotype threat, and racialize other psychological constructs like those featured in the present analysis. What we know must be interrogated further taking into account the racial realities that CRT and other critical theories permit us to see.

Finally, given the social and political importance of college access and graduation, these findings have important implications for policymakers. Since satisfaction is a correlate of retention decisions, the relationship of self-esteem, sense of belonging and self-efficacy to satisfaction should be considered through various policy interventions. For example, investing in large-scale research programs that probe the way these psychological constructs are developed and nurtured in the postsecondary educational environment might provide insights that can ultimately improve achievement levels and graduation rates for Black collegians, students who persistently lag behind their non-Black counterparts in terms of retention, persistence and graduation (Aud, Fox, KewelRamani, 2010) not due to deficits created on their own but rather likely a critical consequence of race, racism, and racial realities that manifest through educational disparities of this kind.

REFERENCES


A Critical Comparison of Website Marketing at For-Profit Colleges and Community Colleges
Constance Iloh

Abstract—In light of the disproportionate number of students of color enrolled in the for-profit and community college sectors, the author explores website messages that might influence such students to enroll. Data from a comparative textual and visual analysis of the website homepages of 10 community colleges and 10 for-profit colleges illustrate the nature and frequency of race-targeted content. The study ultimately highlights variations in the positioning and representation of students of color on both for-profit and community college websites. From this study, future directions for for-profit and community college research are highlighted.

Key Terms—For-profit Colleges, Community Colleges, Marketing, Websites, College Choice, Critical Race Theory, Privatization, Higher Education

Today, more students of color are gaining access to higher education by enrolling in for-profit and community colleges. Community colleges enroll approximately half of all undergraduate students of color in the country (AACC, 2011; Snyder & Dillow, 2011). And in 2010, private, for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) enrolled 11% of all students in postsecondary education (Borden, 2012). Students of color represented approximately 40% of these enrollments, compared to 29% and 23% at public and private, not-for-profit institutions respectively (Borden, 2012). Empirical research on for-profit college choice is still emerging, however public discourse has already questioned why students would choose to attend a for-profit institution that places them at risk for debt and uncertain job placement, over a community college that is a lower cost option (Iloh & Tierney, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to analyze the websites of for-profit and community colleges to discern marketing messages targeted to students of color. In response to the lack of existing research on the admissions and enrollment culture of community colleges and for-profit institutions in particular, this study sought to examine more intently what answers could be derived from a website content analysis. Accordingly, I first highlight the missions and practices of for-profit and community colleges. Next, college choice is defined and discussed, with particular attention paid to the importance of college websites. I then discuss the critical race framework that informs the analysis of the study. Fourth, I present the methods and findings of a comparative textual and visual analysis of for-profit and community college websites. The paper concludes with new directions for for-profit and community college research and higher education overall. I use this study to address the lack of research regarding students of color at for-profit and community colleges, while also asserting that the website marketing of these institutions are a window into understanding the racially stratified enrollment culture present in higher education today.

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND
FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES: MISSIONS
AND PRACTICES

Community Colleges

Today’s comprehensive community college is both a principal provider of academic instruction and a major provider of vocational preparation and workforce development (Kasper, 2003). Community colleges offer a variety of services, including academic and career counseling, tutoring, and developmental education, as part of their effort to respond to a wide range of students who differ in terms of college readiness. As many as 60% of incoming students at community colleges require at least one developmental (or remedial) course, and many students drop out before receiving a credential, often because they never progress beyond developmental classes (Scrivener, 2008). Due to their rapid expansion and wide-ranging missions and student needs, community colleges are sometimes poorly understood, and policy makers often struggle to determine how to utilize them to meet educational and labor market goals (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006).

Community college students usually are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis, up to the capacity of the institution (Bailey, Badway & Gumport, 2001). Because of this admissions culture, community colleges are often referred to as “democracy’s college,” the “open door college,” and the “people’s college” (Pusser & Levin, 2009). Community colleges’ open admissions policies have contributed to their burgeoning enrollments as well as to concern about their funding and capacity constraints. Community colleges are of particular importance for marginalized student groups as these institutions are the primary source of postsecondary education opportunity for students of color, low-income students, and students who attended poorly funded high schools (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006).

For-Profit Colleges

The for-profit postsecondary school sector encompasses privately funded, tax-paying institutions that generate profit by providing post-high school degrees or credentials (Deming, Claudia, & Katz, 2012; Dill, 2005; Ruch, 2001). For-profit providers have highly focused missions targeted to specific segments, particular industries, and are limited to specific fields of study (Ruch, 2001). In responding to labor demands of numerous employers, trades and professions, FPCUs develop and offer programs that train students for positions where there is sufficient demand, and for which investment in schooling is likely to be “recoverable” with increased wages they can accrue (Hentschke, Lechuga & Tierney, 2010). The essential financial distinction between non-profit and for-profit universities is not a matter of profitability or profit motive, but one of taxation, as either a source of revenue or form of expenditure. Non-profit colleges, public and private, are exempt from paying taxes while for-profit institutions are tax-paying (Breneman, Pusser, & Turner, 2006; Ruch, 2001; Sperling, 2001).

Although they are often discussed as a recent phenomenon, FPCUs have been a component of the educational enterprise since the 1800s (Kinser, 2006). Since 1994 to present day, FPCUs are considered to be in the Wall-Street era where publicly traded corporations drive the expansion of the for-profit sector (Kinser, 2007). One of the most profound aspects of for-profit institutions is their recent impact on postsecondary higher education enrollment. In 1999, FPCUs enrolled approximately 629,000 students, or a little over four percent of the nation’s then 15.2 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). By 2009, this sector increased to 2.2 million students, or almost 11% of the nation’s 21 million college students (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2011). For-profit colleges have also increased overall college attainment. The share of de-
Degrees produced in the U.S by for-profit colleges and universities has grown from less than 1 percent 40 years ago, to nearly 10 percent in 2007 (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). While for-profit enrollment growth has slowed down in the past two years, they maintain over 40% of their enrollments as students of color.

Overall, FPCUs educate more marginalized students compared to traditional public and private non-profit universities (Bennett, Lucchesi, & Vedder, 2010). When compared with their counterparts attending other postsecondary educational institutions, for-profit college students are more likely to be older, women, students of color, and come from lower-income and less-educated families (Apling, 1993; Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2001; Cellini, 2012; Chung, 2012; Iloh & Tierney, in press; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; Kelly, 2001; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). Only 75% of first-time undergraduates enrolled in for-profit colleges have a high school diploma, compared with 85% of students in community colleges and 95% in public or nonprofit four-year colleges (most of the other undergraduates have a General Educational Development diploma, or GED) (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2012). In the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately 54% of the dependent students at for-profit institutions came from families with incomes below $40,000 (Baum & Payea, 2011). This income status compares to 35% of students at public two-year institutions, about 25% of students at public four-year institutions, and 20% of students at private non-profit institutions (Baum & Payea, 2011). Adult students are the majority age demographic represented in the for-profit sector. Over 56% of students attending for-profit institutions are over the age of 24, compared to only 30% of those at private and public non-profits, illustrating the appeal of for-profit colleges and universities to the adult learner (Silber & Fisher, 2005). The typical student pursuing a degree at a for-profit university fits the following demographic profile: 27-year-old female, ethnic minority (African American, Hispanic, or Asian), U.S Citizen, married with one or two dependents, holding a full- or part-time job while going to school, and having some prior college experience (Ruch, 2001).

While all sectors of higher education—two- and four-year, private and public—are assumed to bestow benefits upon their graduates, for-profit institutions provide the least certain educational and economic advantages, according to existing research (Bound & Lovenheim, 2010; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2002). Empirical study of the for-profit sector is especially critical as they are currently the least understood and most scrutinized sector of higher education (Iloh & Tierney, 2014). Due to scandals concerning recruiting, loan default rates, and poor educational outcomes, FPCUs have been increasingly subject to regulatory pressures at the state and federal level (Government Accountability Office, 2011a; Government Accountability Office, 2011b; Hittman, 1995). The present study was designed to add to the empirical literature on for-profit colleges, specifically by studying their website marketing in comparison to 2-year community colleges.

COMPARING FOR-PROFIT AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

At the broadest level, scholars have tried to ascertain the distinctive value propositions and competition present between for-profit colleges and community colleges. Cellini (2009) presents the first causal evidence that public and for-profit 2-year (and less-than-2-year) colleges do, in fact, compete for students. Using a regression discontinuity design, her results reveal that when public community colleges receive increased funding and media attention with the passage of a bond measure, students switch from for-profit colleges to community colleges, driving some for-profit colleges out of the market.

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Three broad arguments are common in the discussion of the growth of the for-profit sector in comparison to community colleges: (a) for-profits are a competitive threat to community colleges and other sectors of higher education; (b) for-profits provide more flexible, convenient, and responsive education than community colleges; and (c) for-profits “train” while community colleges “educate” (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2003). Similarly, Bennett, Lucchesi, and Vedder (2010) argue that three factors work to the advantage of for-profit schools with respect to responding to the demand for higher education services over institutions such as community colleges: a) they generally do not have fixed costs in a tenured faculty, and can add and subtract instructional resources faster and more comprehensively than most traditional institutions; b) they have fewer resources tied up in buildings and equipment because they typically lease their facilities, which allows them to expand or contract space more readily; and c) they do not follow a shared governance model common in most of higher education, where major decisions often have to go through a complex series of committees and negotiations. Further, Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person (2006) find that community colleges are challenged with trying to fulfill multiple institutional goals including sending students to four-year colleges or providing them with vocational skills to support a move directly into the labor market.

While most comparative studies between for-profit and community colleges focus on inputs and student outcomes (e.g., Bennett, Lucchesi, & Vedder, 2010; Cellini & Chaudhary, 2011; Deming, Claudia, & Katz, 2012; Mullin, 2010), fewer studies have compared the admissions and college choice cultures at for-profit and community colleges. In a 2011 GAO report, undercover tests at 15 for-profit colleges that four colleges encouraged fraudulent practices and that all 15 made deceptive or otherwise questionable statements to undercover applicants. In response to this study, Norris/Norris, Inc. sent 15 experienced mystery shoppers to 15 community colleges in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa and Michigan to evaluate their admissions practices (2010). They found that all 15 community colleges failed to routinely disclose graduation rates, two institutions inflated salaries, and most institutions discouraged students from applying, citing unavailable classes (Norris/Norris, Inc.). In another recent study that compared the admissions practices of both for-profit and community colleges, Iloh and Tierney (2013) found that the for-profit colleges in their sample were more engaging and accessible than community college representatives, but less forthcoming with regard to pertinent institutional information via telephone and websites. The five community colleges in their sample provided limited information via the telephone but were more thorough with regard to the information on their websites. The authors highlight how a students’ decision may say more about what information the institution provides and how they deliver it, rather than factors and preferences particular to a student that influence choice (Iloh & Tierney, 2013).

Overall the current research on for-profit postsecondary education is concerned with the social costs and benefits associated with the proliferation of the for-profit higher education sector, especially when juxtaposed with public community colleges (Iloh & Tierney, in press). This is particularly important due to the debt students incur to pursue an education at a for-profit college. For-profit institutions have tuition and fees significantly higher than those of community colleges, requiring over 90% of their students to take out loans, compared to just over 10% at community colleges (Mullin, 2010). Most of the publications that focus on proprietary higher education are based on anecdotal evidence, with a small number of studies basing their reports on quantitative and qualitative
research methods such as including survey analysis, interviews, and analysis of data sets from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (Lechuga, Tierney, & Hentschke, 2003). The few qualitative studies on for-profit colleges, in particular, often involve interviews and focus groups with institutional leaders, faculty, or students (e.g., Howard-Vital, 2006; Iloh & Tierney, in press-a; Kelly, 2001). This study was designed to add to the literature by investigating the nature of messages conveyed to prospective students of color in websites; an understanding that can inform scholarship and practice regarding students of color in postsecondary education as well as for-profit and community colleges.

**COLLEGE CHOICE**

Students considering the pursuit of postsecondary education theoretically have a range of options from which to choose. They can choose a baccalaureate program at a four-year college or university, a certificate or an associate’s degree program at a two-year college, or a vocational program at a two-year or less than two-year institution (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Despite the list of options, there are many constraints that mediate these choices (Barnes-Teamer, 2003). Factors include what they want to study, relative to what other institutions offer, admissions practices, their financial resources, the availability of financial aid, and family or work responsibilities that require them to live in a particular location or take classes on certain days or times, to name a few (Barnes-Teamer, 2003).

The “college choice” process is complex, especially when met with the needs and circumstances of the individual student. The most commonly used conception of college choice was developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and is defined as a process or stage(s) students go through to determine which college to attend. Models of college decision making generally comprise three critical stages: (a) predisposition, in which the person makes a decision to attend college, (b) search, wherein a person begins to seek information about colleges and narrows his alternatives, and (c) choice, during which the student considers alternatives and decides which college to attend. As students develop firm aspirations to attend college, they begin to focus on where they would like to attend.

The present study relates to the search stage of the college choice process, where a student examines the attributes and characteristics of colleges in which they are interested. According to Chapman (1986), relevant college attributes might include cost, academic quality, future career prospects and opportunities (upon graduation), quality of life while a student is at the college, and related considerations that might be of interest to students in the ultimate college choice decision. The search phase concludes with the application decision, which is when a student decides on the set of colleges to which formal applications for admission will be submitted (Chapman, 1986). During the search stage, students utilize a variety of strategies and avenues to obtain information that will ultimately inform their college decision-making.

The search stage is not uniform for all students and tends to vary in intensity over time (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). More recently Holland (2013) identified two search processes that students engaged in when exploring their college options: systematic and haphazard. Systematic searchers were exposed to college campuses earlier in their lives, were able to articulate a clear set of criteria, and when making decisions, weighed schools against their criteria (Holland, 2013). Haphazard searchers on the other hand, had very little exposure to colleges and harbored misconceptions about college life. These students often started with few criteria and because they started late in the process, were not able to refine their preferences, and when making decisions, were highly influenced by college
marketing strategies (Holland, 2013). Much of this has implications for enrollment at proprietary colleges as they spend more on marketing than all other sectors of higher education.

**College Websites and College Choice**

The decision to enroll in higher education is a major commitment requiring high-quality information to facilitate the process (Stein, Wanstreet, Saunders, & Lutz, 2009). An institution’s website is now second only to campus visits as the most important source for researching colleges (Schneider, 2004). Web marketing that meets or exceeds a potential students’ expectations regarding the institution and the anticipated educational experience adds important information useful in the decision-making process (Razzouk, Seitz, Lamude, & Kapekci, 2005). Between 1997 and 2001 recruitment of students by colleges and universities through the use of websites increased from 40 percent to 100 percent. In their three-year study of home pages of more than 1,300 higher education institutions, Kittle and Ciba (2001) found that most institutions began using the web to initiate more contact with prospective students (Stein, Wanstreet, Saunders, & Lutz, 2009). It is clear that college websites are playing an increasingly important role for colleges and universities as well as the college choice decision of students.

**A CRITICAL RACE APPROACH TO COLLEGE WEBSITES**

Critical race theory (CRT) is an evolving methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct that attempts to disrupt racism and dominant racial paradigms in education (Solórzano, 1998). CRT theorists in education seek to explain the persistent inequities that people of color in education experience (Ladson-Billings, 1998), which implies that although scholars have used race to analyze social inequity; “the intellectual salience of this theorizing has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.44). Although a variety of intellectual traditions and disciplines (e.g., critical legal studies, radical feminism, Marxism, conventional civil rights thought, and nationalism) inform CRT, there is not a single set of tenets to which all critical race theorists subscribe (Ianinska, Wright, & Rocco, 2013). Neither CRT nor critical theory is, in reality, a single theory. Like critical theory, CRT is a collection of related premises nested within an interpretive framework that can be used to explain the continued inequities that people of color experience (Closson, 2010).

A critical perspective might see phenomena (e.g., marketing) as depicting a number of things about society, such as who does the laundry, who prepares the breakfast while someone sits at the table, and who drives and who rides around in the passenger seat of the car (Kennedy, 2000). Such marketing plays an important role in weaving cultural messages about race into the consciousness of consumers (Kennedy, 2000). These messages often have a profound impact on people of color. Historian John Henrik Cark, noting the “importance of imagery and symbols” in the black community, stated, “Because what we see about ourselves often influences what we do about ourselves, the role of images and messages and how they control our minds are now more important than ever.” In the present study, a CRT approach would involve the systematic examination of the politics of racial representation through visual and textual communication in for-profit and community college websites.

**METHODS**

**Sample**

The institutional sample consisted of ten community colleges and ten for-profit colleges within a metropolitan city in California. To make certain that the institutions selected were similar and all accredited, IPEDS 2011
data were utilized (see Tables 1 and 2). This was done to ensure that the study accurately simulated the types of institutions a student within the search phase would potentially examine. After specific criteria were developed regarding the institutional sample, names of possible institutions were selected randomly. I did not use preconceived notions of institutions that were known as excellent or poor to guide selection. Institutions were narrowed based on a set of predetermined institutional characteristics and randomly pulled names of institutions were used as the sample for website content analysis.

Procedures and Data Analysis

For purposes of this exploratory study, a qualitative and descriptive content analysis of web pages from 10 for-profit colleges and 10 community colleges was used to determine the frequency and nature of messages possibly relayed to prospective students of color. Content analysis is an established social science methodology concerned broadly with "the description of the content of communication" (Baran, 2002, p. 410). As media of communication, websites and web pages lend themselves prima facie to content analysis (Weare & Lin, 2000). A template for the analysis of these websites was adopted from a Stein, Wanstreet, Saunders and Lutz (2009) study that examined the quality of college website messages dedicated to adult learners. For this study, each homepage of each website was scanned for references to race, people of color, and differential treatment along racial lines. This included analysis of any relevant text, images, and advertisements that were an indication of appeal to students of color. Table 3 shows the examples of the data units used in this study. Boyatzis' (1998) approach for interpreting qualitative data through thematic analysis and code development was used. After assembling the frequency and descriptions of website messages, data were coded, recoded, and organized into relevant themes.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study is its inability to generalize findings across for-profit and community colleges. This study only drew from community colleges and for-profit colleges in one state and effort was made to ensure the sampled institutions were similar. Thus the study is limited by not being able to reflect the heterogeneous nature of for-profit and community colleges across multiple geographic contexts.

This study is also predicated on the assumption that college websites serve as marketing platforms, even though marketing may not be as salient in the community college sector. While many for-profit and com-

### Table 3. Data Units

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<th>Unit Type</th>
<th>Unit Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sampling unit</strong></td>
<td>Home page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning unit</strong></td>
<td>Statements, Photographs, Headlines, Links, Slogans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recording unit</strong></td>
<td>Marketing messages identified on the coding template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis unit</strong></td>
<td>Frequency and content of marketing messages tailored to students of color</td>
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*Note. Adapted from Stein, Wanstreet, Saunders, and Lutz (2009).*
Community colleges compete for students, the money and effort spent in marketing at for-profit colleges is significantly greater than community colleges. Due to the necessity to deliver returns, for-profit institutions allocate more money to student recruitment. Estimates suggest that the average for-profit college or university spends about 15% of its revenues on sales and marketing (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). This rate is similar to what is spent by firms in other direct-to-consumer markets (Gallagher & Poroy, 2005). Thus while there may be multiple reasons for a given message on a community college website, more intentionality might be assumed by for-profit colleges that tend to invest significant funds into marketing campaigns.

The last limitation pertains to the manner in which data is illustrated. In order to avoid revealing institutional identity of sampled colleges, only website images that did not include a reference or indicator of the institution were shown in the findings section. This subsequently limits the amount of data that can be presented visually, with more reliance on text descriptions. Despite these limitations, this study is positioned to contribute to the scarce empirical research on students of color within the context of for-profit and community colleges.

**FINDINGS**

The goal of this study was to understand the marketing messages of for-profit and community colleges. Accordingly, website homepages were the unit of analysis and particular focus was paid to how images and text conveyed messages or signals to students of color. In the sections that follow, I highlight two themes that informed how marketing was utilized by institutional websites. Two areas that emerged as shaping the marketing profile of each institution were: a) mission-informed student narratives and b) differences in representations of institutional stakeholders. The first theme captures the

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*Note.* Adapted from Stein, Wanstreet, Saunders, and Lutz (2009).
ways in which the missions of each institutional type were reflected in messages as well as representations and portrayals of students of color. The second theme addresses how race informed representations of institutional stakeholder roles (e.g., student, administrator, and staff).

**Mission-informed Student Representations and Narratives**

This theme documents the ways in which racial messages worked to convey the missions of the institutions respectively. The for-profit colleges often used images and text to illustrate the ways in which they embrace and support students seeking career opportunities. The overwhelming emphasis of all ten for-profit college websites was vocational training and career development, which was often reflected by homepage text that highlighted a rotation of the following text: “jump-starting your career”, leaving “dead-end jobs” and “fulfilling career goals.” Figure 1 illustrates a common narrative on a for-profit college website, where a student is voicing a need to return to school for improved life opportunities. While graduation is referenced in Figure 1, most images similar to this one on other for-profit college homepages stressed students going directly into a career or job while graduation was less emphasized. Much of the text or captions also communicated the fast-paced nature of the academic programs. Nine of the ten for-profit colleges highlighted accelerated degree options, as illustrated by text that approximated how many months were necessary to complete their degree or certificate program (in all relevant cases, homepages highlighted certificate and degree programs that ranged from six months-to one year). Because many students who enroll in for-profit colleges also tend to have other obligations, such as work and family, text that highlights a shorter program may be especially appealing.

Further, in nine out of ten for-profit institutions in the sample, students of color were shown in some type of uniform typically found in a job setting. Moreover, all but one of these occupational images pertained to nursing or some form of medical assistance. On the three occasions that White students were also shown on homepages, they were less likely to be shown in helping occupations, but rather those that were more entrepreneurial in nature. For example, on one for-profit college website, a White male was shown wearing professional attire in a captioned business program whereas both Lati-na and Black women on the same page were shown in nursing uniforms (see Figure 2). The other images were of a White male para-legal student and a White woman in a nursing uniform. Accordingly, gender is an important consideration in these analyses as the majority of student images were of women, particularly those of color, in helping occupations.

![Figure 1. For-profit college homepage](image1)

**Figure 1. For-profit college homepage.**

Critical race theory often utilizes the "social construction" thesis, which holds that race is a product of social thought and relations that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This notion reinforces the ways in which dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labor
market (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This is particularly salient to the for-profit institutional sample, as all websites were from institutions located in California, a state that has a documented shortage of nurses and medical-related workers.

Many of the community college students of color showcased on websites were at graduation or in some capacity involved in the campus community. On seven of the ten community college homepages, students of color were shown preparing for or attending graduation. Community colleges not only emphasized graduation but also intellectual development. For example, on one community college homepage there was a link to a video of a young Latina woman discussing her aspirations to learn and later transfer to a four-year college. And even though community colleges serve multiple functions including job training, all images of students of color suggested a focus on matriculation, student involvement, and intellectual growth only. This was evidenced through specific images of students immersed in student organizations, studying in class, or walking across the stage. In all cases where students of color appeared on home pages, no student was shown in a discernable vocation or field of study.

**Race, Stakeholder Roles, and Representation**

A second major theme of the study relates to race and representations of various stakeholders. This theme highlights the manner in which website images and text work to indicate racial distinctions between higher education providers and buyers. This finding was especially germane to for-profit college websites. Six out of ten homepages of for-profit colleges juxtaposed images of people of color as students with white administrators or service personnel. Many of these White personnel were described as representatives students should “call for more information” about the institution and often these images were placed above or below text boxes in which students could enter a phone number so that they could be contacted.

A critical race reading of these images might suggest a portrayal of people of color as the potential consumers of higher education and White individuals (i.e., administrators and staff) as the suppliers and facilitators of postsecondary education. While this study does not wish to infer institutional motives, such as intentional segmented and niche marketing based on race, the assignment of roles along racial lines can be discerned as either an unintended or intended marketing message on many for-profit college websites. One of the tenets of critical race theory, whiteness as property, is particularly relevant to depictions of Whites as institutional leaders at for-profit colleges. Whiteness as property is a historic system of ownership that reinforces and perpetuates a system to which White individuals benefit (Hiraldo, 2010). This tenet identifies how racism is not merely an ideology of prejudice and power but results in material discrepancies between White and racially minoritized people (Bondi, 2012; Brown et al., 2003; Lipsitz, 1995). Further, when one views whiteness as property it is also possible to see its necessary opposite, the absence of access, or the absence of opportunity for ownership, in this case for people of color (Bell, 2000). As it pertains to this study, the image of people of color as students and Whites as administrators or staff on for-profit websites reinforces a distinction between who represents the institution versus who purchases and participates.

Out of the ten community college websites, seven had no pictures of any institutional leaders and staff on the homepage. The three that did either had an image of a faculty member lecturing or an institutional leader with students at graduation, which in all cases were White individuals. These few examples may indicate a designation between the
“educators” and “learners” along racial lines, however such juxtapositions were far less frequent in the community college sample than the for-profit sample. All images on community college homepages that included people of color pertained to some aspect of traditional student life while most text related to student opportunities and logistical information about the institution, (e.g., enrollment, course offerings, and the semester calendar). Much of the messages reflected on community college websites seemed to indicate some sense of a social and academic community, which was much different than the for-profit college text that had multiple images and text that appeared more for the benefit of prospective students (e.g., messages about calling or being contacted for more information on all for-profit websites). Figure 3 illustrates a common type of image seen on community college websites where students embedded in a group environment. It is also worth noting in terms of analysis of images, students of color on for-profit college websites always looked directly into the camera. Students on community college websites, with the exception of one student testimonial video, were always engaged in specific activities and looking away from the camera.

Figure 3. Community college homepage.

DISCUSSION

In this study, research efforts were directed to a racial reading of college website messages. The content of college websites studied here varied across institutional type and many of the websites within each sector were more similar than different. In each of the twenty websites studied, certain characteristics occurred more frequently by sector. Differences between the two institutions illustrate an emphasis on graduation at community colleges and career development (or readiness) at for-profit colleges. For-profit colleges may be more attractive to a prospective student concerned with employment, whereas multiple academic options may attract prospective community college students (Iloh & Tierney, in press). Further, for-profit colleges had more clear racial distinctions of certain stakeholder roles than community colleges, as people of color were only shown as students whereas any institutional leader or staff shown were White.

A CRT analysis recognizes the salience of oppression and draws attention to the perpetuation of such racial constructions reflected in college websites. Not only did CRT shape decisions about who to study, how to study them, and what questions to examine, it also demanded a more holistic interpretation of the results. Through a CRT analysis, a portrait of the students of color as consumers and representations of institutional mission emerged, while simultaneously illustrating how whiteness is positioned, a feature that may be overlooked by other frameworks. In the community college sector, marketing messages to students of color were less detectable and discernable through a CRT framework because many images and text emphasized students of color within a broader and diverse campus community and less as an isolated group of consideration. A focus on intersectionality of identity will be especially important to ascertain deeper nuances in the nature of for-profit marketing messages, as the majority of students represented on for-profit college websites were women.

While some elements of critical race theory were helpful for making sense of the messages that could be targeted to students of color, the framework has shortcomings for understanding college choice through analysis of college websites. Conceptions of college choice often assume that all the information necessary for students and families to make a college choice decision is known at the time of the decision (Turner, 2004). Information
asymmetry is one of the ways in which students can make decisions about which college to attend, even when important information has not been provided by the institution. Critical race theory, while useful towards understanding the nuanced racial messages within website homepages, may not sufficiently address problems of missing information that may allow certain types of college marketing to be especially impactful. For example, in the case of students choosing between a for-profit and community college, a student may make a decision to enroll based on how much information is presented (Iloh & Tierney, 2013), rather than simply because of the influence of identity-based marketing appeals.

For future research directions, it will be advantageous to qualitatively explore the prospective students’ perceptions of the websites of community colleges and for-profit colleges. Further, current students of color enrolled at either institution could be asked to reflect on what impact, if any, college websites had on their decisions to enroll. It may also be useful to duplicate this study in other postsecondary institutions such as non-profit public and private 4-year institutions, especially if institutional competition varies geographically.

Other frameworks, such as social norming, may also provide important lenses to interpret how ideals about race and place are disseminated via college websites. Social norms are fundamental in understanding human behavior, as norms are what the majority of people in a group do or how they behave (behavioral norms), and what the majority believes about how they and others should act (attitudinal norms) (Perkins, 2006). The social norms framework deciphers principles and values that regulate social thought and behavior in mass society and is mostly used in order to solve, correct, or modify social behavior of groups (Leach, 1986). In advancing this study, a social norms approach can be used to understand the ways in which the enrollment of students of color at for-profit and community colleges become normalized or reinforced by institutional websites.

CONCLUSION

This inquiry prompts us to consider the “why” behind the college enrollment of students of color in higher education and not just the “where.” The study also provides due cause for continued critical exploration of the college-going culture of students of color, particularly at for-profit and community colleges. Many opportunities exist as our changing postsecondary education landscape presents researchers with an opportunity to explore and reexamine the nature of students of color in higher education. This study considered the impact of college marketing and highlighted how two specific institutional contexts might provide different racial narratives that inform enrollment. Ultimately the findings of this study: a) illustrate how intended and unintended messages might be conveyed to prospective students of color, which may persuade or dissuade them from enrolling and b) highlight potentially problematic race narratives.

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Involvement Theory and Differences Among Black Undergraduates at 4-year Colleges
Marjorie Dorimé-Williams

Abstract—College student involvement is generally recognized as supporting student growth and development and contributes to positive gains and educational outcomes. While research in this area has expanded to focus on Black students, very little research has focused on socioeconomic status (SES) of Black collegians. Using data from the Educational Longitudinal Study 2002 (ELS: 2002), this study examines how SES shapes involvement and educational expectations of Black undergraduate students at four-year institutions. Combining student involvement and Critical Race Theory frameworks, I argue that educators must move beyond false conceptions about race and class in order to better support all Black students in postsecondary education.

Key Terms—Black College Students, Socioeconomic Status, Involvement, Educational Expectations

Postsecondary enrollments now exceed 21 million students; 14% of these are African Americans/Blacks1 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Black enrollments have increased significantly over time, although there continue to be racial and ethnic disparities in terms of Black student persistence and graduation. Six-year college graduation rates reveal that 70% of Asian American/Pacific Islanders (APIs), 67% of Whites, 47% of Hispanics, and 46% of Blacks complete a bachelor’s degree in that time period (Baum & Payea, 2004). While race certainly shapes students’ experiences in American colleges and universities, prior research has shown that several other factors influence the collegiate experience.

For example, Astin’s (1984:1985) work on involvement in postsecondary education examines how various forms of student involvement (e.g., student-faculty interactions, Greek life, sports teams, campus clubs) can positively influence student persistence. In addition to improving student persistence rates, involvement is associated with higher academic performance. For example, a study using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshman (NLSF) found that involvement in political organizations improved the academic performance of Black males, females, and Latinos. Involvement in arts also had a positive influence on academics for Black students (Baker, 2008). While student involvement can vary in frequency and intensity and takes on many diverse forms, research supports the general conclusion that student involvement has significant positive effects on student outcomes2, including those of Black students (Astin, 1985; Flowers, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Formalized support systems and programs, promoting academic and social integration, and encouraging student involvement on campus are only a few examples of ways that educators seek to improve student persistence for Black students. Take the...
Ronald E. McNair federal TRIO program for instance. The purpose of the McNair program is to prepare first-generation and low-income undergraduate students for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. It is required that participants be from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). One of the goals of this program is to increase the number of underrepresented students, particularly Blacks, Latinos, and American Indian/Alaska Natives pursuing graduate studies. Other forms of student support services can provide academic tutoring; advice and assistance in selecting courses; assistance in completing financial aid applications; and safe spaces for students to build community.

However, too often support for Black college students is targeted toward those who are economically disadvantaged or low-income. There are several reasons for this, one of which is race and class have been used interchangeably in the prevailing discourse about Blacks in the United States (US); this often results in the term “low-income” being near-synonymous with “Black.” The problem with this notion is that although Blacks are disproportionately overrepresented among those who come from low-income backgrounds, there are still many Blacks who are not low-income. According to national data, almost half (45%) of Black families are among the middle-income quintile or higher (U.S. Census, 2012). These data make clear that socioeconomic status (SES) cannot be a proxy for race. Many people of color in this country fare well economically and many Whites live at or below the poverty threshold (Ackerman, 1991; Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2010; Rouse, 2004; Wapole, 2008). Much more information is needed to increase our understanding of how differences between Black students on the basis of gender or SES shape their involvement in college and, subsequently, their outcomes. An issue that was raised in the Michigan Journal of Race & Law is that in light of a critical race theory tradition, “there is not any one monolithic experience of being Black,” and therefore using only income as a measure for need without looking at an individual’s background limits our analysis of their experiences (University of Michigan Law School, 2008, p. 30). Critical race theory (CRT) can provide a unique perspective on the experiences of Black students in postsecondary education as well as other practical strategies that can be used to improve educational outcomes. Therefore, I adopt CRT in this study as a lens for closely examining Black students’ differences in campus involvement.

The purpose of this study was to critically examine how SES differences among Black students shape their campus involvement experiences and educational expectations. Two research questions guided this study: (a) Does SES influence the involvement of Black students on campus? (b) What forms of campus involvement positively influence Black students’ educational expectations? Before describing the study, I review the literature and theoretical frame in the next section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I found it useful to organize the relevant literature into two major sections—studies on SES and Black college students, then studies on Black students’ involvement in college. The literature review follows this sequence.

SES Among Black Students

While the educational experiences of low-income Black students has been well docu-
presented in the educational literature (Arzy, Davies, & Harbour, 2006; Engberg & Allen, 2011; Griffin & Harper, 2011), relatively little is known about the academic experiences of middle- and upper-class Black students despite their growing presence on campus (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). College completion rates of Black and White middle- and upper-class students with college-educated parents show a great disparity for a population that is expected to have higher rates of success and achievement (Espenshade & Radford, 2009). For example, by 2004, a quarter of all Black families were considered to be middle class based on income, occupation, or education. More and more Black families are entering the ranks of the middle and upper class (Attewell, Domina, Lavin, & Levey, 2004).

Limited research has examined racial differences in the socioeconomic benefits of income and earnings on students. For example, it was found that an increase in neighborhood median income is associated with a significant increase in test scores for White youth but not Black youth (Diel-Amen & Turley, 2007). In addition, Gosa and Alexander (2007) found that Black students from higher-income households and those with more highly educated parents perform better in school than Black students who lack these advantages. Interestingly, Blacks from high-SES families fare well but not nearly as well as Whites in similar family circumstances. Another example of the disparity between Black and White middle- and -upper-class students is highlighted by the fact that in in a district with most children coming from households with at least one college educated parent, a median income of $71,293, and the district spending $9,234 on each student, Black students scored 100 points less on their SATs than their White peers and were four times more likely to fail a class (Steptoe, 2004).

The Black “social class advantage” also is removed for college attendance and completion. For example, Gosa and Alexander (2007) also uncovered sizeable disparities in college completion rates between Blacks and Whites with college-educated parents; only 21% of Blacks in their sample completed college within ten years of high school graduation compared to 47% of Whites. And while SES plays an important role in promoting positive educational outcomes, there are differences in how this influences students in different racial groups. Literature shows that despite being from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, Black students still struggle to achieve academic success comparable to their White peers. In addition to SES, other factors can influence educational outcomes for Black students. One example is college involvement, which is the focus of the next section.

**Black Students Campus Involvement**

According to theoretical work by Astin (1985), student involvement “refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience,” (p. 36). Involvement is essential to promoting college students’ learning and development. A highly involved student will commit substantial time and energy to studying, spending time on campus, and being actively engaged in student organizations. Consistent with a broad definition, involvement can take on many forms. For instance, student involvement ranges from participation in a fraternity or sorority, undergraduate research programs, and athletics to study abroad and campus clubs. He explained that involvement experiences may vary in quality and frequency or the intensity of a student’s involvement in said activity. These forms of involvement also differ in their academic and non-academic focus.

Student involvement also has been found to have a positive impact on Black students’ in- and out-of-class experiences. In his survey of 1,800 students Allen (1992) found that involvement, engaging with faculty members, and positive experiences with peers who were different had a positive in-
fluence on Black students’ academic outcomes. However, Black students who were at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) had lower grades than their White peers, controlling for SES and high school GPA. Previous research provides evidence that Black college students who are involved in frequent and meaningful ways in campus clubs, organizations, and other campus activities tend to earn higher grades, feel more satisfied with their college experience, and report greater perceived learning gains than their same-race peers who are less involved, if at all (Allen, 1992; Strayhorn, 2010). Research also suggests that Black students benefit from campus involvement regardless of their SES background.

Black student involvement in college has remained low due to students feeling that most organizations are exclusive and insensitive to their needs (Davis et al., 2004; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Multicultural organizations, however, tend to affirm racial/ethnic students’ presence and promote a sense of mattering which encourages involvement elsewhere (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Previous scholars have acknowledged racial differences in college students’ involvement by directing attention to students’ involvement in ethnic organizations such as Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs), Black student associations, and campus gospel choirs (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Strayhorn, 2011; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). For instance, Harper and Kimbrough (2006) stressed the importance of Black male collegians’ involvement in BGLOs. Similarly, Strayhorn (2011) interviewed 21 students participating in gospel choirs and found that involvement in the gospel choir affirmed students’ racial identity, facilitated their sense of belonging at a PWI, and nurtured their resilience to persist despite setbacks.

Although prior research has shown that Black students’ involvement on campus significantly influences their outcomes (Flowers, 2004; Strayhorn, 2010), less has been done to differentiate Black students from one another. As an exception, for example, Flowers used a national sample of almost 200 four-year institutions, approximately 8,000 Black students, and controlled for a comprehensive range of variables including background characteristics, institutional characteristics, and college experiences. He found that the effects of involvement are more pronounced for some college experiences than others for Black students. For example, student involvement experiences have a direct impact on student developmental gains in understanding arts and humanities, personal and social development, understanding science and technology, thinking and writing skills, and vocational preparation. Additionally, he found that academic-related involvement is more likely to have a positive impact on vocational development than non-academic involvement. While findings such as these may offer some insight into Black students involvement, particularly at PWIs, other factors such as SES, gender, and previous academic achievement, that can influence student success were not addressed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Astin’s Input-Environment-Output (IEO) Model

The conceptual framework that guided this study was Astin’s (1991) college impact model. This model examines the relationship between students’ background characteristics (inputs), their campus environment and experiences, and their subsequent outcomes (outputs). The model is longitudinal in nature, allowing for the assessment of the ways that institutionally specific interactions (e.g., participation in campus organizations, relationships with faculty) shape students’ experiences overtime and lead to educational and personal outcomes.

The IEO model, was designed as a guiding framework for examining the effects of the college environment and college experiences
on students’ educational outcomes after considering pre-collegiate characteristics and experiences. It provides justification for separating the influence of pre-collegiate characteristics and experiences from the collegiate environment on desired educational outcomes (Astin, 1993). Using this framework, the present study will explore the effects of SES on Black students’ campus involvement and educational expectations. The present study was also informed by Critical Race Theory, which is discussed in the next section.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) serves as a framework for examining and addressing the relationships between race, racism, and power. According to CRT scholars, there are five basic tenets under CRT: (a) racism is a pervasive, normal, and permanent part of U.S. society; (b) counter-storytelling or counter-narratives by people of color are needed to challenge and change myths and assumptions of the dominant White culture; (c) critique of liberalism which challenges claims of objectivity, neutrality, and color-blindness and the notion that social change must be incremental; (d) Whiteness as property, which highlights how the attributes of property have been used to bestow on Whites certain rights and benefits; and (e) interest convergence, which argues that Whites are primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation and social change and that these rights are granted to minorities only when they align with the self-interest of Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Research using CRT to examine experiences of Black students in education highlights the fact that regardless of SES, race has a significant impact on student outcomes. By employing CRT to frame the discussion about differences among Black students in higher education, it is possible to critically examine the ways that professionals in higher education engage Black students. In light of CRT, we need to move beyond using proxies for race and instead focus on individuals’ narratives and experiences in postsecondary education, including their challenges with racism.

**METHODS**

This study was conducted using data from a nationally representative sample of students who responded to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) Education Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002), initially begun in the spring of 2002. ELS:2002 is designed to monitor the transition of young students from tenth grade through postsecondary education and into the workforce. This is a longitudinal dataset that follows a nationally representative cohort of students beginning with their sophomore year of high school (the base year survey), with follow-ups in 2004 (12th grade), 2006 (sophomore year of college), and in 2012. Data from the 2012 follow-up were not available, at the time of this writing.

**Sample**

ELS:2002 used a two-stage, stratified sampling selection process. Over 15,000 students and their parents responded to the base year survey of the study. The student population includes a nationally representative sample of White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian high school students at both public and private schools. The sample in this analysis was restricted to only Black students at four-year public and private not for-profit postsecondary institutions who participated in the survey, since the purpose of this study is to measure SES differences between such students. Based on these criteria, the study sample included 1,402 participants. The sample is almost evenly divided between male (50.6%) and female participants (49.4%). The majority of the sample is 20 or 21 years old (88%). The mean high school GPA for the sample is between 2.01 and 2.50. Finally, many of the
students in the sample (68%) are first-generation college students, defined as neither parent has completed a bachelor’s degree.

**Data Collection and Instrumentation**

Base-year data were collected in the spring of 2002. Data collection for students primarily took place during in-school survey sessions conducted by a field survey administrator (Ingels et al., 2007). Data collection for the 2006 follow-up was adjusted to include survey modes and procedures that were independent of the in-school protocol of the first follow-up survey. Modes of data collection included web self-administration, in-person, and telephone computer-assisted interviewer administration.

The ELS:2002 student survey instruments can be classified in three broad categories: (a) background information, (b) process information, which includes information about possible influences on the student in the home, school, and community environment, and (c) outcome information that focuses on the outcomes of the transition process, educational attainment and labor market status, of the transition process. The follow-up student survey had eight content areas: (a) contact information for longitudinal design purposes, (b) school experiences and activities, (c) how students spend their time, (d) plans and expectations for the future, (e) postsecondary planning steps and choice criteria, (f) plans for work after high school, (7) working for pay, and (g) community, family, and friends (Ingels et al., 2005). The postsecondary follow-up survey also included items on: (a) the type of institution attended, (b) students’ choice of major, (c) frequency of involvement in various activities on campus, and (d) whether students have dropped out or transferred from their first institution of attendance.

The main variables of interest in this study include SES, involvement, and educational expectation. SES was measured by SES quartile in 2002 when respondents were high school sophomores. This variable is provided by ELS:2002 and simply places students into approximately equal quartiles based on five equally weighted, standardized components: father’s education, mother’s education, family income, father’s occupation, and mother’s occupation. The low SES quartile contains 34% of the sample. Thirty percent of the sample is in the second, or low-middle, quartile, 22% in the third, or high-middle, quartile, and 14% in the high SES quartile.

Involvement includes variables that inquire about students’ participation in various academic and non-academic opportunities such as talking with faculty members, meeting with advisors, and participating in varsity and non-varsity sports. Each measures student involvement on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), and 3 (often). Factor analysis was used to create composite academic involvement and non-academic involvement variables. The alpha reliability coefficient for the five academic involvement items was $\alpha = 0.68$. The alpha reliability coefficient for the two non-academic involvement items was $\alpha = 0.61$.

Finally, a single item was used to assess students’ educational expectations. Response options ranged from a GED to a doctoral degree or equivalent. Responses were recoded into two groups: (a) expectation to “earn a bachelor’s degree or less” and (b) expectation to “earn a master’s degree or higher.”

Several steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the measures in this dataset. First, there was an extensive development and review process for each ques-
tionnaire that included field-testing and revision with experts on survey design and psychometrics. In addition, ELS:2002 was developed to provide consistency with the earlier psychometrically-sound education longitudinal studies sponsored by the NCES. Where possible, ELS:2002 drew items from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, the High School and Beyond (HSB) longitudinal study, and the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). This continuity provides support for the validity of the items and instruments used in this study. Field test instruments used for ELS:2002 were evaluated in a number of ways to test for reliability. Evaluation of item nonresponse, examination of test-retest reliabilities, and calculation of scale reliabilities were used for the questionnaires (Ingels et al., 2007). Additional test including factor analyses and alpha reliabilities were calculated in the present study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to obtain means and standard deviations of all key variables in this study. Next, correlation analysis was conducted to explore the magnitude and direction of the relationship between variables. Crosstabs, Chi-square tests, and independent samples t-tests were used to investigate associations between variables or differences among groups, where possible. Finally, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted on educational expectations to identify relations with SES and involvement.

Limitations

There are several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, a limitation of this study is related to the dataset chosen for analysis. The public-use version of ELS:2002 was used for the present study, however there are several variables such as institutional selectivity, SAT and ACT scores, grant and loan acceptance, and academic major that are not available in the public-use file. Limited access to such variables places limits on the analysis that could be conducted in order to answer the proposed research questions. For example, there may be differences in Black students involvement based on institutional selectivity, but this could not be considered in the current analysis.

This study is also limited by the variables that are defined, operationalized, and measured by ELS:2002. Therefore, it is possible that the variables available in this dataset may not be sufficient to explain and account for SES differences in the relationship between Black college students SES their involvement in the desired manner. While it is important to make note of these limitations before discussing findings and interpretations of results, they do not negate the usefulness of this study in understanding the ways that SES for Black collegians can influence involvement and educational expectations.

RESULTS

In addition to SES, involvement, and educational expectations, there are several other variables included in this analysis. Sex, parents’ highest level of education, high school GPA, and hours spent per week on extracurricular activities in high school are used as controls in this study. Descriptive statistics of all variables in this analysis are provided in Table 2.

Correlation analysis shows several significant relationships between educational expectations, academic and non-academic involvement, and the other variables in the study. Correlation shows several significant relationships between variables. For example, SES quartile is significantly correlated with educational expectations. Similar relationships exist between variables measuring academic and nonacademic involvement and SES. Table 3 presents a summary of these
findings.

Several statistically significant findings between SES and academic and non-academic involvement were found in this analysis. For example, four of the seven involvement activities differed by SES background in terms of Black students’ frequency of involvement. The frequency with which Black students engaged in the following activities varied significantly by SES: Talking with faculty about academics outside of class ($\chi^2(6) = 12.74, p < 0.05$), meeting with an advisor about academic plans ($\chi^2(6) = 16.37, p < 0.05$), participating in non-varsity sports ($\chi^2(6) = 14.36, p < 0.05$), and participating in other extracurricular activities ($\chi^2(6) = 42.14, p < .001$). Specifically, students from the low and low-middle SES quartiles most frequently participated in individual academic involvement activities. However, when examined as a whole, high SES Black students had the greatest mean scores for frequently participating in forms of academic involvement.

To test for differences in Black students’ frequency of academic involvement by SES, analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted. Results suggest a statistically significant difference between the groups as determined by results, $F(3, 791) = 4.06, p < 0.01$. Additional analysis on the composite academic and non-academic involvement scores shows that there are statistically significant differences between students in different quartiles and their mean involvement scores. A post-hoc Tukey test revealed that academic involvement scores of students in the low SES quartile ($M = 2.06, SD = 0.49, p < 0.05$) were significantly lower than scores of students in the high SES quartile ($M = 2.24, SD = .44$), indicating that high SES Black students were more frequently involved in academic activities than same-race lower SES.

Table 2

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Meet with advisor about academic plans</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2.20</td>
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<td>Work on coursework at school library</td>
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<td>Participate in intramural or non-varsity sports</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Participate in varsity or intercollegiate sports</td>
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<td>Participate in other extracurricular activities</td>
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Table 3

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<td>2. Academic Involvement</td>
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<td>4. Sex</td>
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<td>5. Patents</td>
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<td>6. High School GPA</td>
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<td>0.380</td>
<td>-0.066</td>
<td>-0.169</td>
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<td>7. Participation on extracurricular activities</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.234</td>
<td>-1.227</td>
<td>-1.047</td>
<td>-1.77*</td>
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<td>8. SES Quartile</td>
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<td>-0.915</td>
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<td>9. Talk with faculty</td>
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<td>10. Meet with advisor</td>
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<td>11. Work at school library</td>
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<td>0.040</td>
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<td>12. Use web to access library</td>
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<td>0.648</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
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<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.340*</td>
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<td>13. Non-varsity sports</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.280</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>2.74*</td>
<td>-0.080</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.159*</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.092*</td>
<td>0.139*</td>
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<td>14. Varsity sports</td>
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<td>-0.087</td>
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<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.150</td>
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<td>0.439*</td>
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<td>15. Other extracurricular activities</td>
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<td>0.433</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>-0.059</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>1.646</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>0.379*</td>
<td>0.251*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
peers. There were no significant differences however between the academic involvement scores of low, low-middle, and high-middle participants.

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the educational expectations for Black students and their academic and non-academic involvement. While the first part of this analysis shows that there are significant differences between Black students’ involvement based on SES quartile, it does not indicate whether or not these differences influence educational outcomes. The first model examines SES quartile and academic involvement and the second examines SES quartile and nonacademic involvement. The final model examines both academic and non-academic involvement, SES, and educational expectations.

Sex, parents’ education, high school GPA, and hours per week spent on extracurricular activities in high school were entered in the first step as controls. SES quartile was entered in the next block of the regression. For the dependent variable, academic involvement, the full model with all of the variables only accounts for approximately four percent of the variance ($R^2 = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$). High school GPA was the only significant predictor in the regression model ($B = .06, p < .001$). SES quartile was not a significant predictor of Black students’ academic involvement.

These same variables account for 13% of the variance in non-academic involvement ($R^2 = .13$, adjusted $R^2 = .12$). The second model including non-academic involvement is statistically significant ($F(5, 697) = 20.57, p < .001$). Sex ($B = -.31, p < .001$) and hours spent on extracurricular activities in high school ($B = .02, p < .001$) are the only significant predictors of non-academic involvement for this model. Again, SES quartile is not a significant predictor of educational expectations.

Lastly, using graduate educational expectations as the dependent variable, background characteristics were entered into the model first, followed by SES quartile, and last both academic and non-academic involvement. The final regression model accounted for 13% of the variance in educational expectations ($R^2 = 0.13$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.12$). The full combination of these predictors are statistically significantly related to educational expectations, $F(7, 650) = 14.28, p < 0.001$. In this regression model, sex ($B = .09, p < .05$), high school GPA ($B = .07, p < .001$), and academic involvement ($B = .23, p < .001$) were statistically significant predictors of educational expectations, indicating that Black college students’ who performed well in high school, were frequently involved academically, and were female were more likely to have higher educational expectations than their peers. Once again, SES was not a significant predictor of educational expectations, which indicates Black students from low, low-middle, high-middle, and high SES backgrounds are influenced by more than just their social class when developing their educational expectations.

**DISCUSSION**

The results from this analysis present several interesting areas for discussion. The literature on Black student involvement has primarily focused on comparing Black students to White students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), or looking at Black student participation or lack thereof in specific activities on campus (Flowers, 2004; Strayhorn, 2011; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). This study offers a unique perspective by conducting an analysis of Black student involvement solely, paying special attention to the role of SES in their educational expectations.

First, there are significant differences by SES quartile in the frequency of involvement of Black students in college for several involvement activities. In addition, low SES participants reported being involved “often” in several forms of academic involvement at a higher percentage than their same-race
higher income peers on several measures. Considering Astin’s theory on involvement, and the differences that exist based on the quality and quantity of involvement, this finding has significant implications for Black students from all SES backgrounds. Analysis would suggest that counter to ideas that only low-income Black students need to be engaged by student affairs practitioners, professionals in higher education need to do more to encourage Black students from other SES background to get involved. Particularly for Black students at PWIs, the effects of racism and discrimination may discourage students from becoming actively involved academically and non-academically on campus. Because CRT tells us that racism is a normal part of society, educators must actively work to create environments that are supportive for all Black students, not just some.

Another important finding was that there were no statistically significant differences in academic and non-academic involvement scores of low, low-middle, and high-middle SES Black college student participants. Again, this finding confirms the need to shift how Black students are often depicted in higher education. First, low, low-middle, and high-middle SES students are involved in college at similar rates in academic and non-academic program. The belief that Black students who are defined as “low-income” need special attention in postsecondary education often means the exclusion of other higher income Black students who could benefit from similar support and encouragement.

While some Black students do come from poor and less affluent backgrounds, their rates of participation in academic and non-academic forms of involvement are not significantly different than some of their more affluent peers. This finding suggest that the prevailing idea that most Black students are low-income and that support programs or interventions designed to assist Black students can accomplish this goal by only targeting low-income Black students is false. Therefore, outreach programs designed to encourage involvement should expand services to all Black students, especially those who are low-middle and high-middle SES. Failing to address how race and racism shape students’ collegiate experiences creates a system that only addresses part of the problem.

In this context, counter-narratives or storytelling would be useful tools to illustrate how Black students, regardless of SES, are shaped by their race when on campus. Previous research on Black student involvement begins to address some of these issues when discussing how students feel isolated from many groups and organizations at PWIs (Davis et al., 2004; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

Results from regression analysis on involvement find that high school GPA is the only significant predictor of academic involvement. As Astin (1991) highlights in his model, multiple background characteristics shape students prior to enrollment in higher education. This result would suggest that perhaps high school GPA, which could be a marker for academic preparation, matters more for Black students involvement than SES. Knowing this, educators should continue to communicate with teachers, advisors, counselors, and parents of children in high school. Information should be shared about the importance of Black students being academically prepared and the need to expand academic support program to Black students who are not low-income. By beginning this trend in the K-12 system, educators can change expectations about who needs and gets support. Substantial college and university resources are devoted to “low-income” Black students based on the belief that these students are less involved and need more encouragement. However, if we consider this assumption and the findings of this study through a CRT perspective, SES is not and should not be a substitute for race.

The message that SES matters more than
Marjorie Dorimé-Williams

race has several implications. First, it shows how interest convergence is being used to shift resources from all Black students to those Black students who are low-income. It also makes clear the concept of neutrality, or color-blindness; the belief that by not addressing race, we can solve racial disparities is both ahistoric and short-sighted. This can be seen in the language that surrounds many programs designed to support or improve Black student performance and involvement in postsecondary education. Terms like “low-income” or “disadvantaged” are believed to be accurate portrayals of Black students who need support and encouragement to be involved in college. However, the findings from this study would indicate that this isn’t true. Instead, educators should focus on expanding opportunities for involvement for all Black students.

Finally, for educational expectations, only high school GPA and academic involvement were significant predictors of graduate school expectations for Black college students. Again, students’ backgrounds are a powerful tool in understanding how their experiences can shape outcomes. However, it is just as important to understand how intersecting identities also influence student experiences and outcomes. What we understand from CRT is that there is no one answer or solution to the issues that students encounter throughout their educational career, but the salience of race is one that should be a constant part of our dialogue when addressing many of the problems Black students encounter in higher education. Using SES as a proxy for race fails to address the other factors, including race, that influence the experience of Black students. Understanding how race limits opportunities for Black students, such as meeting with faculty outside of class or meeting with an advisor, while advantaging others is critical to improving outcomes and expectations.

In order to improve postsecondary outcomes for Black students, we need to think critically about the ways in which they are portrayed, discussed, and served by educators and scholars. All Black students are not poor; in fact, the growth of a Black middle and upper-class means more Black students are coming into college who are second and third generation students from affluent backgrounds. Without addressing how racism, colorblindness, and current educational policies are limiting educators ability to support students, it will be difficult to make progress on improving persistence and graduation rates. Understanding how SES shapes campus involvement and in turn educational outcomes is key to tackling the disparities between Black students and their other racial and ethnic peers. Using CRT and maintaining an awareness of how institutional, political, and social structures can hinder more than they help certain populations is an issue that student affairs professionals and scholars need to address moving forward.

REFERENCES


A Contemporary Examination of Gender Differences in Student Engagement at HBCUs: Implications for Research and Practice


Abstract— Seeking to replicate the results of Harper et al.’s (2004), this article examined gender differences in student engagement among Black students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). While this study yielded some findings that were similar to Harper et al.’s study, the majority of the findings were inconsistent with Harper et al.’s study. This article discusses factors that may account for these differences and concludes with implications for institutional practice and future research.

Key Terms— HBCUs, Black Men, Student Engagement

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have been praised for their ability to increase access and success for Black students as well as other racial groups (e.g., Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans) seeking postsecondary education (Gasman, 2009, 2012; Hernandez, 2009; Lee, 2012, Palmer & Maramba, in press). These institutions have been noted for their ability to admit students who are academically underprepared and graduate them with essential skills to compete in society (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer & Wood, 2012). Many researchers have explained that a critical feature of HBCUs that help to facilitate student retention and persistence is the supportive, nurturing, family-like environment that these institutions foster (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Berger & Milem, 2000; Fries-Britt & Turner; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006). The support and confidence that students gain from HBCUs has increased their likelihood of enrolling in graduate or professional school compared to their same race counterparts who attend college elsewhere (Allen, 1985; Allen & Jewel, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Although HBCUs were founded before 1964 (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom & Bowman, 2010), they remain relevant to higher education today. In the fall of 2009, they enrolled over 320,000 students and comprised 3% of the higher education institutions in the U.S (Gasman et al., 2010; Richards & Awokoya, 2012). Research has shown that these institutions produce 20% of undergraduate degrees, 11% of master’s degrees, and 20% of all first professional degrees

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The authors would like to acknowledge that the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data in this study were used by permission of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.
Gender Differences in Student Engagement at HBCUs

earned by Black students (Palmer & Wood, 2012). Notwithstanding their continued significance, they have garnered recent attention from news periodicals (e.g., Pope, 2009; Roach, 2001) and researchers (e.g., Harper & Gasman, 2008; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Palmer, Davis & Hilton, 2009) for their low retention and persistence rates of Black male students. Issues of low retention and persistence among Black men are not endemic to HBCUs (Harper, 2006, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008; Wood, 2011, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011). For example, at predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), administrators, staff, and student affairs practitioners are focused on ways to increase the success of Black male students (Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Harper, 2009; Palmer & Maramba, 2012). Indeed while research indicates that females comprise more than half of postsecondary enrollment across all racial/ethnic groups, this gender gap is reportedly most pronounced between Black men and women, and it continues to widen (Dancy & Brown, 2008; Harper, 2006, 2010).

Interestingly, past research (e.g., Fleming 1984; Gurin & Epps, 1975) on Black men at HBCUs has shown that they fared better than their female counterparts. However, most recent research has found the opposite to be true (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Palmer et al., 2009; Palmer & Wood, 2012). Notwithstanding, a recent report by Richards and Awokoya (2012), social scientists with the United Negro College Fund, indicated that given the population of students HBCUs serve, they continue to do a better job at graduating Black students than their non-HBCU counterparts.

Given retention and persistence rates of Black men at HBCUs, the purpose of this article is to provide a contemporary examination of campus engagement for Black men on these campuses. More specifically, this study sought to determine whether there was a significant relationship between gender and several measures of engagement (with relevant controls) for student enrollment in HBCUs. Essentially, this study sought to determine whether male students tend to be more or less engaged than their female counterparts at HBCUs.

This article focuses on campus engagement for two critical reasons: (a) first, research (e.g., Harper, 2005; Kuh, 2009) has linked campus engagement to academic success and social development for all college students; and (b) using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Harper, Carini, Bridges, and Hayek (2004) found that Black men were becoming less engaged on the campuses at HBCUs. Given the results of Harper et al.’s (2004) research, this article seeks to provide a current understanding of campus engagement for Black students in general and Black men specifically at HBCUs. To situate this study in the extant literature, the subsequent section of this article will review literature Black men at HBCUs.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

According to Kimbrough and Harper (2006), “The challenges facing men at HBCUs may be more distributing in some ways, given the belief that these institutions ostensibly provide a safe haven of sorts for African American student growth and development” (p. 189). Indeed when considering the past research on Black men at HBCUs, the verity of Kimbrough and Harper’s statement become apparent. Prior research on Black men at HBCUs suggests that they fared better than their female counterparts. For example, a study conducted by Gurin and Epps (1975) with 10 HBCUs and over 5,000 Black students revealed that Black males were more likely than their female counterparts to have considerable higher education and career goals, to express interest in enrolling in graduate or professional school, and were more attractive to careers in business, engineering, and the sciences.

Findings from Fleming’s (1984) study on Black and White students at HBCUs and
PWIs yielded comparable findings to Gurin and Epps’ (1975) study. Specifically, Fleming explained that Black men dominated the campuses of HBCUs similar to how White men dominated the campuses of PWIs. To this end, Fleming characterized college as a “man’s world”. She noted that despite some disenchantment with the classroom atmosphere, HBCUs helped to facilitate the cognitive growth and social development of Black men.

Other researchers have attested to how an HBCU milieu helped to facilitate social and academic development for Black men. Specifically, in a quantitative study that examined Black students’ academic performance, racial attitudes, and college satisfaction at state supported PWI and HBCUs, Allen (1986) found that Black men at HBCUs had higher educational and career goals, had more positive relationships with faculty, and were more involved on campus than their female counterparts. Similarly, Nettles’ (1988) survey of college student academic and social experience revealed that Black men at HBCUs were more socially integrated, earned better grades, and perceived their college to be more supportive of their academic success.

Indeed while the research discussed thus far have suggested that Black men incurred positive benefits as a result of attending HBCUs, Lundy-Wagner and Gasman (2011) have called attention to gender differences in enrollment, experiences, and completion of baccalaureate degree between Black males and their female counterparts at these institutions. In fact, they argue that for some years now, the number of Black females on the campuses of HBCUs have outnumbered Black males; a change, they attributed, in part to “curriculum and social forces acting on HBCUs and Black males” (p. 954). Given this, Lundy and Gasman suggested that more research, using a wide range of methodological perspectives, needs to be employed to have a more critical understanding of the experiences of both Black men and women attending HBCUs.

**Trends in Campus Engagement Among Black Males at HBCUs**

In addition to research focused on the ways that HBCUs help to influence the social and academic development of Black males compared to their female counterparts, research has focused on the burgeoning gap in involvement on campus between genders. Engagement has been linked to a wide range of educational and social outcomes, including cognitive development (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005), moral and ethical development (Kuh et al., 2005), retention and persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999); academic and social integration (Harper, 2005; Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2011; Tinto, 1993), and satisfaction with college experience (Cooper, Healy & Simpson, 1994). Indeed, research from Fleming (1984) found that generally Black men were more engaged on the campuses of HBCUs than their same race peers at PWIs. In fact, research (e.g., Fleming, 1984; Gurin & Epps, 1975) has shown that Black men were more engaged than their female counterparts at HBCUs. Notwithstanding these findings, a study from Harper et al. (2004) revealed an interesting change among Black men and women on campus engagement at HBCUs. Specifically, using data from NSSE, with 1,167 Black students across 12 HBCUs, Harper et al. found that gaps in involvement between Black men and women had narrowed at HBCUs. In fact, on several measures of academic and social engagement (e.g., active and collaborative learning, supportive campus climates, and overall satisfaction), they found minimal differences between the experiences of Black men and women at HBCUs. The results from Harper et al.’s study indicated that campus engagement for Black men had abated over the years.

In delineating findings from a focus group conducted with Black male leaders at
an HBCU, Kimbrough and Harper (2006) engaged the participants about reasons for the disengagement of Black men on their campuses. Participants offered five salient factors that contributed to Black male disengagement. First, they suggested that Black men viewed sports and other forms of athleticism as more socially acceptable than leadership or purposeful engagement. Second, they explained that men typically encountered problems working collectively with others, which is a key factor in successful involvement in student organizations. Third, the participants indicated that many Black men are socialized to devalue purposeful engagement, even before coming to college. Fourth, participants noted a dearth of Black male role models and mentors who affirmed the importance of purposeful engagement. Fifth, participants stated that many Black men have difficulty earning a 2.5 grade point average (GPA)—the minimum grade average needed for membership in a historically Black fraternity.

Moreover, in a qualitative study that Palmer and Young (2009) conducted on critical factors supporting the academic success of Black men at an HBCU, they found that participants’ engagement on campus engagement served as a critical linchpin to their success; however, consistent with research (e.g., Kimbrough & Harper, 2006), participants indicated that most of their male peers were disengaged. Given that engagement on campus serves as a linchpin to retention and persistence coupled with the changing patterns of engagement for Black men and women at HBCUs, this article uses data from NSSE to provide a contemporary examination of gender differences in campus engagement for Black students at HBCUs. Findings from Harper et al. (2004) served as a theoretical and methodological guide for this study. The subsequent section of this article will discuss the study’s methodology.

**METHODS**

This study used NSSE data to examine gender differences in student engagement at HBCUs. NSSE is a large-scale survey employed by colleges as an analytical tool to understand student engagement, learning, and development in college. More than 1,500 institutions of higher education have participated in NSSE since its inception in 2000. From these collections, data from this study were derived from HBCUs that participated in NSSE between the years 2009 and 2012. In 2009, the survey was administered annually each spring using Web-based and paper modes to random samples of first-year and senior students. In 2010, NSSE shifted to a

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**Table 1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Academic Challenge</th>
<th>Active and Collaborative Learning</th>
<th>Student-Faculty Interactions</th>
<th>Enriching Educational Experiences</th>
<th>Supportive Campus: Student Success</th>
<th>Supportive Campus: Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mean 12.82</td>
<td>18.92</td>
<td>15.83</td>
<td>33.56</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>15.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 2.62</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mean 12.85</td>
<td>18.79</td>
<td>15.52</td>
<td>33.09</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>15.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 2.78</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean 12.84</td>
<td>18.82</td>
<td>15.60</td>
<td>33.20</td>
<td>8.11</td>
<td>15.47</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 2.75</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.79</td>
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</table>
census administration of all first-year students and seniors at participating institutions. This study employs data from 8,717 students in 551 colleges that participated in NSSE. Of these respondents 23.4% were male and 76.6% were female.

Measures
Following in line with Harper et al.’s (2004) study, the primary predictor employed in this analysis was gender, coded 1 for male and coded 2 for female. In essence, this study sought to determine (after holding extraneous variables constant) where gender served as a significant predictor of NSSE’s benchmarks of effective educational practice.

Outcome Variables. NSSE’s benchmarks of effective educational practice are based on questions from the NSSE survey that capture important aspects of the student experience. These benchmarks include: a) level of academic challenge—reflecting students’ engagement in intellectually challenging learning activities that are associated with greater levels of achievement; b) active and collaborative learning - entailing student’s involvement in placing effort in pursuit of academic matters (particularly during class) and collaborating with other students in carrying out educational tasks; c) student-faculty interaction—indicating students interactions and discussions with faculty members both inside and outside of classroom; d) enriching educational experiences - involving participation in supplemental learning activities which exposes students to diversity and activities which advance student’s learning experiences; and e) supportive campus environments—reflecting students satisfaction with campus social environments and students feelings of connection to the campus and its affiliates.

These five benchmarks are derived from 42 questions and have illustrated validity and reliability over numerous studies. To ensure the utility of employing these measures with HBCU students, the researchers’ investigated the construct validity of these five benchmarks. Each of the five factors were examined using exploratory factor analysis. The researchers’ employed a prior hypothesis assuming unidimensionality of each measure, based on prior NSSE validation. To determine the number of factors to rotate, constructs were examined using scree tests and the interpretability of the factor solution. In cases where more than one factor was identified, factors were rotated using a Varimax rotation procedure. Scale reliability scores were then computed using Cronbach alpha. The scales for active and collaborative learning and student-faculty interaction illustrated unidimensional constructs with acceptable reliability, α=.74 and α=.78 respectively. Of the five benchmarks examined three, academic challenge, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment rotated on more than one factor.

Academic challenge rotated on three factors, though only one factor was determinable. Of the eleven items examined, four items were retained (these items corresponded with NSSE’s higher order thinking subscale) (α=.86). Enriching educational experiences also rotated on three factors; however, when treated as separate constructs, none of the factors illustrated sufficient reliability. As such, the full scale for enriching educational experiences was retained (α =.70). Finally, supportive campus environment rotated on two factors, both of which were determinable. The first scale corresponded with NSSE’s support for student success subscale (α=.75); while the second scale was reflective of NSSE’s interpersonal environment subscale (α=.74). As such, both scales were retained.

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1 Initially, there were 56 HBCUs in the sample but one was eliminated. This college had 8 NSSE participants. Multilevel modeling requires at least 10 students per group for accurate estimation (see Umbach & Porter, 2002).

1 Initially, there were 56 HBCUs in the sample but one was eliminated. This college had 8 NSSE participants. Multilevel modeling requires at least 10 students per group for accurate estimation (see Umbach & Porter, 2002).
These items reflected the first three and last three items in the scale; these subscales were examined separately in subsequent models. Mean scores for all outcome variables by gender are reported in Table 1.

**Controls.** Four control variables were employed in this research, including class (year in school), enrollment intensity, primary major category, and residence. These variables were reflective of the same control variables employed in Harper et al.’s (2004) study. Class was a variable reflecting student’s year classification in college. This variable ranged on a five point scale as follows: freshmen/1st year, sophomore/2nd year, junior/3rd year, senior/4th year, and unclassified. Enrollment intensity reflected students’ time status in college, indicating whether they were enrolled full-time or less than full-time. Primary major category reported on students’ primary majors as divided into the following ten major fields: arts and humanities, biological sciences, business, education, engineering, physical sciences, professional (other), social sciences, other, and undecided. Residence was a variable indicating where the respondent lived during college. The response categories for this variable included: dormitory or campus housing, off-campus residence within walking distance, off-campus residence within driving distance, fraternity or sorority housing, and none of the above. Table 2 reports the percent frequencies for each of the aforementioned control variables.

**Analytic Technique.** The researchers’ engaged in exploratory data analysis to examine descriptive characteristics (e.g., means, percentages, standard deviations) of the data,

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Variable Percent Breakdown by Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrollment Intensity</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Category</td>
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outliers, and inter-correlations among variables. The predictor variable (gender) and the four controls were examined to determine the extent to which missingness was evident among the data. Strayhorn (2009) has noted that missing values are a common concern in analyses of secondary data. He suggested that missing values result in unreliable estimates and standard errors, thereby inhibiting the generalizability of the data. Listwise deletion of missing values is traditionally employed when five percent or less of the cases are missing. Fortunately, analysis of missing values indicated that all variables had less than five percent of values that were missing, with major category having the highest degree of missingness with 2.3%. As such, listwise deletion was employed.

As noted earlier, this study sought to determine whether there was a significant relationship between gender and several measures of engagement (with relevant controls) for student enrollment in HBCUs. The effect (if any) of gender on engagement measures was investigated using multilevel modeling. Multilevel modeling is traditionally suggested when data are nested in hierarchical structures (e.g., students within colleges, faculty within departments). Primarily, this is due to the notion that the nested structure has greater dependence among cases (Hox, 2002). In other words, students in the same college will have scores more similar to one another as opposed to students in other colleges. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) is used to investigate the degree of dependence in the data. The intraclass correlation measures, on a 0 to 1 scale, the extent to which the outcome varies by Level 2 units (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003). While, the ICC’s were relatively small, less than the .05% standard rule of thumb for justifying a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Within $\sigma^2$ Reduction*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Challenge</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active and Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interactions</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching Educational Experiences</td>
<td>.70***</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Campus: Student Success</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Campus: Environment</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * is the percent within group variation reduction from the null model.
null model, even an ICC of .01% can lead to an enhanced likelihood of Type 1 error rates above 5% if modeled using a least squares regression (Musca, Kamiejski, Nugier, Méot, Er-Rafiy & Brauer, 2011). Thus, multilevel models produce more accurate estimates (Porter & Swing, 2006). All variables in the models generated were treated as fixed effects, though intercepts were modeled as random. Six total models were investigated separately, each model examining NSSE’s benchmarks of effective educational practice. Given the large sample size employed in this study, all models were tested at .01.

RESULTS

Null models were computed to determine the extent to which the data illustrated dependency. Findings from the null models indicated that multilevel models were needed as the intercepts varied significantly across colleges (see Table 3). These models indicated a need for multi-level models to account for variation between colleges. Subsequent models were computed to examine whether male students were more or less likely than their female counterparts to benefit from NSSE’s benchmarks of effective educational practice. Given the large sample size employed in this study, all models were tested at .01.

The first two analyses indicated that for academic challenge ($B=.105$, $p=n.s.$) and active and collaborative learning ($B=.249$, $p=n.s.$), gender was not a significant predictor of these forms of effective practice. In other words, after controlling for potentially extraneous factors, male students were not more or less likely than their female counterparts to benefit from these benchmarks of effective educational practice. However, gender was a significant predictor of all the remaining outcomes. Gender was a significant predictor of student-faculty interactions ($B=.353$, $p=.001$), with male students being significantly more likely than their female counterparts to benefit from these interactions. Moreover, the addition of the predictor variable (with controls) accounted for a 6.8% decrease in the within-group variation from the null model.

Male students were also found to benefit from enriching educational experiences. These men had significant more enriching experiences ($B=.695$, $p<.001$) than their female counterparts, resulting in an 8.8% decrease in within-group variance from the null model. Gender was also found to be significantly predictive of both forms of supporting campuses. Male students were significantly more likely than female students to benefit from supportive campuses in the areas of student success ($B=.247$, $p<.001$) and environment ($B=.530$, $p<.001$). The student success model with the predictor and controls resulted in a 2% reduction in the within-college variance, while environment represented a 3% reduction.

DISCUSSION

Overall, findings from this study have shown that men at HBCUs are significantly more likely than women to benefit from student-faculty interactions, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campuses. Interestingly, results from this study did not illustrate a significant difference between men and women in academic challenge. This finding stands in contrast to Harper et al.’s (2004) study, which found that women reported higher levels of academic challenge than men. Academic challenge underscores the amount of hours students spend in activities that prepares them for class (e.g., studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work) “and [the] degree to which higher order thinking are required in courses” (p. 277). Whereas Harper and colleagues noted that women in their sample spent more time preparing for class and worked harder than men to meet faculty expectations, this study found
that this trend could be changing. In fact, the findings from this study largely diverge from those of Harper and colleagues, suggesting either a more positive trend in Black male engagement or (if conceptualized differently) a relative decline in engagement among Black women.

One critical factor that might have played a role in the results of this current study is its sample size. For example, while Harper et al.’s study used data from 1,167 Black undergraduate students across 12 HBCUs, this study used data from 8,717 Black undergraduate students across 55 HBCUs. Perhaps, the larger sample size of students and colleges employed in this study may be more representative and fully reflective of trends evident in HBCUs. Moreover, the number of colleges employed in this study allowed for a revised analytic approach. This study used the same methodological framework in replicating Harper and colleagues except that the regression-based procedure employed in this study (multi-level modeling) was able to control for the nested structure of the data, allowing for enhanced estimates and standard errors. In other words, this study accounted for the fact that the respondents were clustered within colleges. Harper’s et al. study would not have been able to employ this approach with 12 colleges, as 50 colleges are generally required at Level 2 for this analytic technique (Umbach & Porter, 2002).

Another factor that could have influenced the findings of this current study about Black male engagement at HBCUs is the implementation of Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) on the campuses of HBCUs. Indeed, many HBCUs have established these initiatives on their campuses to help increase academic success for this population (Wood & Palmer, 2012; Palmer, Maramba & Dancy, 2013). According to an analysis of these programs on the campuses of Howard University; Morgan State University, and Philander Smith College, they share core commonalities (Wood & Palmer, 2012). The theoretical underpinnings of these programs are developed with research on academic and social integration, student engagement, and creating a welcoming and affirming campus environment. In addition, most programs have a focus on collectivity, as illustrated through program slogans, mottos, and themes. This sense of collectivity communicates to the participants that successes and failures are mutually shared. Further, the majority of programs include a mentoring component, which facilitated faculty to student, student to student, and student to youth mentoring relationships. Finally, many of the BMIs have programming designed to facilitate students’ critical reflection of their personal, academic, and professional goals as well as their philosophical outlook on life. A critical part of these reflections included journaling as well as small and large group discussions (Wood & Palmer, 2012). Given that research has shown that BMIs help to facilitate the retention and persistence of Black men in higher education generally (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2005) and at HBCUs specifically (Palmer et al., 2013; Wood & Palmer, 2012), these programs may have played a critical role in helping Black men at HBCUs become more invested in their educational experience; thus helping to contribute to the change that this study noted about academic challenge.

In addition, the fact that this data were derived from HBCUs that participated in NSSE between the years of 2009 and 2012 may have influenced this study’s findings related to academic challenge. Although this study did not reveal the age of the participants, the data were collected during the age of millennial students. According to research (e.g., Howe & Strauss, 2007), millennial students are high achieving and academic focused than previous generations. Though some research (e.g., Bonner, Marbley & Howard Hamilton, 2011) has been critical of the millennial framework (see Howe & Strauss, 2007), and question its applicability
Gender Differences in Student Engagement at HBCUs

to minority students, research indicates that Black millennial students are more driven and academically oriented compared to the past generation despite the low retention and persistence among Black male collegians (Strayhorn, 2011). Indeed this may account for the change that this current study found about Black male engagement at HBCUs. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that on campus engagement among Black males has increased, it is interesting that this change has not manifested in increased graduation rates for this population.

Similar to Harper et al.’s research, this study also did not find a significant difference in active and collaborative learning between male and female students. Moreover, Harper et al. found that male students were more likely to benefit from interactions with faculty than female students, this study’s findings on student-faculty interactions also found a male benefit in this area. It should be noted that this study also examined enriching educational experiences; however, this scale was not present in NSSE’s collection system when Harper et al.’s study was conducted. Thus, no parallels between the present and prior study can be expounded upon in this area.

Finally, while Harper et al. did not find a significant difference in supportive campus climates, this study found that male students on both measures of supportive campuses (e.g., student success, environment) had higher scores than their female counterparts. This finding is interesting, as some research has suggested that some Black male students feel that the environments of HBCUs are too conservative. Specifically, in a qualitative study that Harper and Gasman (2008) conducted with 76 Black men from 12 HBCUs, they found that this conservative environment prevented the extent to which students could express their sexuality, sexual orientation, self-presentation and expression, and created a subordinate status of student beneath faculty and administrators. In fact, Harper and Gasman asserted that this conservatism climate has played a role in some participants leaving or transferring to other institutions. Similarly, in a qualitative study that Palmer and Maramba (2012) conducted with four student affairs practitioners at an HBCU, while they noted faculty were supportive of Black male students, they noted that they could be more supportive in terms of being role models, fostering critical relationships with Black men outside the classroom, and using the classroom as a critical space for learning by not merely lecturing to students, but actively engaging them in the classroom. Kimbrough and Harper (2006) found similar themes as Palmer and Maramba.

In addition to studies providing a nuanced perspective about the supportive environment for Black men at HBCUs, another factor that makes this current study’s finding about Black males’ perceptions of the HBCU environment interesting is the high attrition among this population. In fact, Palmer et al. (2009) explained that Black men at HBCUs were more likely to depart prematurely from HBCUs because of poor help seeking behavior, lack of financial aid, and the inability to prevent problems in their home or community from completing their coursework in college. Adding to this complexity is that this current study found that Black men at HBCUs were more likely than women to interact with faculty. Research indicates that faculty-student interaction is a critical linchpin to student retention and persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), but yet, Black men are less likely to persist to graduation than women.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

One of the critical findings of this study revealed that Black male engagement rates are changing at HBCUs. This finding is encouraging, but yet, vexing because it stands in contrast to more recent literature on the
experiences of Black men at HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Palmer et al., 2009; Pope, 2009; Roach, 2001). Indeed given the inconsistencies of findings from this current study on Black male and female engagement at HBCUs from the extant literature, additional research is needed that examines student engagement among Black students at HBCUs. In fact, Lundy-Wagner and Gasman (2011) urged researchers to be more intentional about investigating both Black male and female students at HBCUs using diverse methodological perspectives. This research is strongly warranted because, as indicated, we do not know if an increase in Black male engagement comes at the expense of their female counterparts on campus. Research that provides greater clarity on Black students’ experiences at HBCUs should be qualitative or perhaps mixed methods, and serve to gain a critical understanding of Black student engagement at HBCUs. As demonstrated by this article, quantitative research is certainly beneficial, but qualitative research would help HBCU stakeholders have a better understanding of the nuances in how Black male and female students’ invest their time in educational purposeful activities at HBCUs.

Another interesting finding from this current study involved the fact that Black men at HBCUs were more likely than their females to interact with faculty and to perceive the campus as supportive. Indeed, while the finding is positive news because it provides HBCUs with salient information to help increase Black male retention and persistence, some research has provided a slightly different understanding regarding how Black males interact with faculty in and outside the classroom and perceived the campus climate of HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer & Maramba, 2012). Specifically, in a focus group with Black male leaders who attended a public HBCU in Georgia, Kimbrough and Harper (2006) noted that participants felt that females were more nurtured in class and received preferential treatment from the overwhelmingly male professoriate because of their appearance. Further, some of the participants in their study noted a lack of mentors and role models on their campus and indicated that the few caring mentors and role models were sought by all students, which created a burden on those faculty and staff. Given this discord, additional research is needed to provide a critical understanding of Black males’ relationships with faculty at HBCUs and their perceptions of the campus climate. A strong body of research has shown that HBCUs provide a supportive and family-like environment for all students (Strayhorn, 2010) and faculty and administrators are a critical component of this support (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). While some research has provided a nuanced perspective of Black males’ perception of the campus climate and their relationships with faculty, further research is needed in these areas (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer & Maramba, 2012).

Finally, this study has found that Black men are more likely to derive benefit from educational enriching environments than their female counterparts. This finding is a positive indicator that HBCUs should continue to implement BMIs and other initiatives on their campuses to facilitate and augment the educational enriching environment already provided by HBCUs. In their books, Cuyjet (2006) and Palmer and Wood (2012) provided a list of BMIs on the campuses of PWIs and HBCUs. They also provide detailed context about these programs and discuss assessment measures as well as the educational and holistic development that participants gain from these programs. One program, in particular, that has been beneficial to Black men at an HBCU is the Male Initiative on Leadership and Excellence (MILE) (Palmer et al., 2013). This program engaged participants in a variety of educational pur-
poseful and team building activities. The MILE also provided a safe space for men to discuss issues and concerns relevant to Black men in postsecondary education. Aside from the fact that this program helped to increase Black men retention and persistence (Palmer et al., in press), the MILE also enabled the participants to expand their social network and helped them to realize that they could be successful in the classroom if they applied themselves, utilized the academic and social support services on campus, and leaned on their social networks (e.g., faculty, like-minded peers, and administrators) for motivation to fuel their determination to succeed.

**CONCLUSION**

Student engagement on campus has been linked to a multitude of positive student outcomes, including academic and social integration, retention and persistence, and social and cognitive development. While seminal research on Black men and women at HBCUs showed that males were more engaged on campus than their female counterparts, a study by Harper et al. conducted in 2004 showed that women had become more engaged at HBCUs than men. Subsequent studies on Black students at HBCUs supported the disengagement among men at these institutions.

Nevertheless, one of the critical findings of this study indicated that on campus engagement among Black men at HBCUs has increased. Indeed, this finding is both encouraging and perplexing because the completion rates among Black men at HBCUs remain woefully low. Consequently, there is a critical need for researchers to not only investigate the issue of Black student engagement at HBCUs further, but also be more intentional about investigating other critical aspects (e.g., student-faculty interaction) inextricable to student success.

**REFERENCES**


Perhaps the Field of Education Isn’t So Nice After All: An Examination of Critical Race Research in Higher Education

Lori D. Patton, Chayla M. Haynes, Jessica C. Harris, Samantha M. Ivery

Abstract—One of the most provocative perspectives to emerge in higher education literature is critical race theory (CRT). As a theoretical and analytical framework, CRT has garnered the attention of scholars who wish to see a more substantive and thoughtful examination of issues related to racism, oppression and white supremacy. In this essay we examine Dr. Gloria Ladson Billings (1998) article, “Just What Is Critical Race Theory and What’s It Doing in a Nice Field like Education?” We highlight key arguments in the article and review how CRT has been used to examine research in postsecondary contexts. We close by offering cautions, insights and recommendations for using CRT, particularly in the study of Black undergraduate students.

Key Terms—Critical Race Theory, Higher Education, Ladson-Billings

One of the most provocative perspectives to emerge in higher education literature is critical race theory (CRT). As a theoretical and analytic framework, CRT has garnered the attention of scholars who wish to see a more substantive and thoughtful examination of issues related to racism, oppression and white supremacy. While studies have documented the experiences of Black people in higher education, CRT can be an extremely useful tool in expanding these findings, as well as, laying the foundation for scholarship that provides a more nuanced perspective on the experiences of Black students in college. For instance, CRT is particularly useful in exploring the experiences of Black students and their raced identities within larger systems of oppression and injustice (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Culp, 1991; Johnson, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2008; Scott, 1994; Stinson, 2008). More importantly, CRT has the capacity to be a valuable framework for disrupting the “racelessness” that is embedded in much of the higher education scholarship (Patton, McEwen, Rendón & Howard-Hamilton, 2007).

While individuals such as W.E.B. DuBois, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Sojourner Truth embodied the promise and praxis of CRT, the framework itself has origins in legal studies and dates back to the 1970s (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). Indeed, the CRT movement was led by legal scholars like Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado

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and Alan Freeman who were frustrated with the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S., and the pervasiveness of subtler forms of racism in the American justice system (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Matsuda et al. 1993). Over time, CRT became a palatable framework for not only acknowledging and disrupting racism in the law, but also its manifestation in other social systems such as education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are credited with writing the first article that used CRT to examine racial injustices in schooling. They argued that such injustices were “a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p. 47). Since that time, much of the literature in education that draws on CRT focuses primarily on K-12 schooling, leaving postsecondary education largely unexplored. To date, very few scholars have used CRT to examine higher education issues and even fewer have used this lens to focus on Black students’ experiences (see Harper, 2009; Patton, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

Examinations of race in education research are not limited to those that employ a CRT lens. But, the fact that higher education scholarship is limited in its use of CRT should not be perceived as a purposeful attempt by researchers to avoid engaging race, though in some instances it may very well be the case. The lack of effort to explicitly grapple with issues of racism and white supremacy in a courageous manner is not terribly surprising. In other words, failure to address the role of racism in higher education and the impact of racism on college students’ experiences is not a new phenomenon. Instead, it is a persistent trend that is symptomatic of a society that would rather tiptoe around the issue of race rather than directly address it. Higher education is but a microcosm of the larger society and thus reflects its consistent dismissal of race, for post-racial ideologies. In higher education, racism and racial realities are cloaked in diversity rhetoric and ill-conceived notions of colorblindness that construct higher education institutions as “nice” places that are accessible and welcoming to all people (Ladson-Billings, 1998). We take exception to this narrative.

In this essay, we examine Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) article “Just What Is Critical Race Theory and What’s It Doing in a Nice Field like Education?” We highlight key arguments in the article and provide examples of how CRT has been applied in education, and postsecondary contexts specifically. We close the article by offering cautions, insights and recommendations for using CRT, particularly in the study of Black undergraduate students.

LADSON-BILLINGS ASKS A THOUGHT PROVOKING QUESTION

In 1998, the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education dedicated their eleventh volume to CRT. Within this volume, Dr. Ladson-Billings wrote her now foundational article, “Just what is critical race theory and what’s it doing in a nice field like education?” In the introduction, she remarked how pleased she was to see that a journal would dedicate an entire issue to CRT in education, affirming the importance of studying race and racism in American education. Ladson-Billings (1998) asserted that racism is prevalent in US society, and in fact, is even more fixed and entrenched than ever before—and that conceptual categories of race place whiteness as normative, and all other races in points of opposition to this construction. She notes, “It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction” (p. 9). Thus, she explored the role CRT has in facilitating dialogues surrounding social justice, democracy, and the position education has in creating and deconstructing structural forces that impede advancements for people of color.
“Just What is Critical Race Theory?”

Ladson-Billings begins her article by tackling the question, “Just what is critical race theory?” CRT grew out of critical legal studies (CLS), which analyzes the role of legal doctrines’ legitimization of class structures in US society. However, CRT builds from CLS’s inability to conceptualize transformative recommendations for destabilizing oppressive structures as well as its failure to include race and racism as a factor in this critique. With these shortcomings in mind, “CRT became a logical outgrowth of the discontent of legal scholars of color” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Starting in the 1970s, CRT began to take shape when legal scholars grew increasingly concerned with the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

In this seminal article, Ladson-Billings honed in on four fundamental tenets of critical race theory. First, CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to American society, “and, because it is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, it appears both normal and natural in this culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). To detangle this “fabric” CRT attempts to expose the divergent faces of racism. Second, CRT places emphasis on the experiential knowledge of people of color in hopes that the stories they tell will add context to objective, positivist views. The third tenet elucidated by Ladson-Billings is CRT’s insistence on a critique of liberalism. Liberal perspectives often lead to incremental changes that rarely advance comprehensive legal and structural changes for people of color. Lastly, and closely tied to the prior tenet, CRT exposes the benefits that Whites almost always incur when incremental advances for racially marginalized groups are made. Looking to Bell’s (1980) interest-convergence principle, this tenet suggests that advances for people of color will only happen when it serves the dominant group (oftentimes even more than it serves the subordinated group).

While Ladson-Billings outlined four critical tenets of CRT, she noted that there is not a fixed set of tenets to which CRT scholars subscribe. Instead, scholars who approach their work from a CRT framework are unified by two overarching aims: elucidating the construction and maintenance of white supremacy in the US (Crenshaw et al., 1995) and altering the connection between law and the power of race. According to Ladson-Billings, these goals are often addressed through the use of narratives or counterstorytelling. Engaging in the process of counterstorytelling or “naming one’s reality”, focuses on the stories of racially marginalized individuals and groups in order to illuminate their voices and realities while simultaneously shattering dominant stories in which whiteness sits at the center. Ladson-Billings posited three reasons to substantiate the crucial role of counterstorytelling to CRT. Counterstories disrupt the dominant social construction of reality that is rooted in whiteness, serve as a medium for “psychic self-preservation” (p. 13), and counter a one-sided view of the world.

Race and Citizenship

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that in order to understand how CRT and education intersect, it is important to first understand the connections between citizenship, property and race. Indeed, the United States is a nation built on the notion of property rights (Bell, 1987; Harris, 1993) and White men have historically been the holders of property. For these White men, property ownership conferred citizenship as well as the right to make decisions about the nation and solidified an inextricable link between whiteness, property and power. Referencing the scholarship of Cheryl Harris (1993), Ladson-Billings explained that Whites benefited greatly from constructing African Americans as property, while also constructing their own whiteness as the ultimate, most valuable property. Taking a contemporary approach, she purported that the value of whiteness, and the devaluing of Blackness, is still alive.
and well in US society. She explained, “Whites know they possess a property that people of color do not and that to possess it confers aspects of citizenship not available to others” (p. 15).

Next, Ladson-Billings outlined Harris’ (1993) “property functions of whiteness” to illuminate how the American dream is made by and for White citizens. These four functions include rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status as property, and the absolute right to exclude (Harris, 1993). People of color do not possess these, or any other rights, resulting in “differential notions of citizenship…grounded in differential experiences of rights” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.16). Taking into account these inequitable circumstances, it is unsurprising that many students of color remain disengaged in an educational system that teaches them that they are to receive differential (substandard) resources, undeserving of fair treatment (less than), and do not belong (i.e., not “real” citizens).

Ladson-Billings (1998) argued, “citizenship for people of color remains elusive” (p. 16). While older legal cases such as Dred Scott and Plessy v. Ferguson overtly conferred Whites property rights, contemporary cases that purport Civil Rights and social justice continue to confer rights to White citizens, though they may do so in a more covert way (e.g., Brown v. Board of Education). She argued that any effort intended to confer rights to non-Whites, typically confer more rights and values to Whites, allowing them to remain in control of US property and subsequently, US citizenship.

“And What’s it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?”

After exploring critical race theory, race and citizenship, Ladson-Billings described how these two ideas link to a nice field like education. First, we must understand and acknowledge that education is not an entity unto itself, but instead is state controlled and heavily influenced by the law. Education has been a primary battleground of Civil Rights legislation in which ideals have shifted over time from “equal opportunity” and sameness to affirmative action and labeling marginalized students as “protected classes.” Despite the altered language, there remains extreme racial stratification and inequity within the educational system, particularly in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. Ladson-Billings uses CRT as a framework to explore these inequities more deeply while exposing the pervasive structures of whiteness entrenched within education.

In terms of the curriculum, “Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). There are two components that guide how curriculum maintains the “master script”, the lack of people of color’s voices and narratives and the rigor of the curriculum. For example, perspectives offered by people such as Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King Jr., are typically approached in a colorblind fashion so that their historical presence and impact are watered-down, distorted, or altogether omitted. In terms of rigor, White students are encouraged to enter honors and advanced placement courses while students of color may be dissuaded from this same curriculum (Ladson-Billings). She asserted that curriculum is used as a mechanism to confer property rights of use and enjoyment on white students.

CRT also critiques current instructional practices that place students of color in a deficit-based position. Employed with failure in mind, instructional strategies are often one-dimensional and intended to work for all students. More specifically, strategies that are presumed to be successful for white students are presumed to be acceptable for all students. However, when such strategies fail, students of color are labeled as the problem,
rather than the ill-constructed strategies (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Counter-pedagogical movements that recognize the reality of race in the classroom are crucial to combating these deficit instructional practices. Taken together, inadequate curriculum and instruction leads to students’ (apparent) failure on traditional assessments. “Traditional” assessments have been created by Whites to validate the scientific claim that Black students are subordinate, or not as smart. These tests account for what students of color do not know, rather than what students do know.

Applying a CRT analysis to school funding exposes the privilege that property confers to those that possess it (i.e., Whites). Most US states fund their schools with property taxes. Therefore, the more affluent White neighborhoods, with higher property taxes, have better funded schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings assured readers that money does matter when it comes to academic achievement. Surely no one can refute that money matters when students in poor neighborhoods “languish in heated, overcrowded schools with bathrooms that spew raw sewage while middle-income White students attend school in spacious, technology rich, inviting buildings” (p. 21). Finally, CRT exposes the interest convergence rife in school desegregation. Ladson-Billings cites Lomotey and Staley’s (1990) research on Buffalo’s “model desegregation” program. What made it a “model” was not that African Americans continued to be marginalized within Buffalo Public Schools, but that it gave advantages, such as free extended childcare, to White students and their families. Therefore, CRT helps to expose the benefits that Whites gain when civil rights legislation in education is advanced.

Proceed with Caution

While Ladson-Billings convincingly demonstrated the value of CRT, she offered words of caution for utilizing the framework within education. Like so many other educational movements (e.g., social justice, multiculturalism, diversity), “sometimes an idea takes a while to take root, but once it does, most likely its creators lose control of the idea” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21). These movements, due to the loss of control, have become watered down, mere shadows of the critical initiatives they once were and could have been. Though Ladson-Billings purported CRT would most likely not take hold in the mainstream, she still insisted we must not lose control. She warns against CRT becoming “the ‘darling’ of the radical left” (p. 26) that creates superficial conversations and research that fails to make any tangible advances for students of color. In other words, scholars must be cognoscente of utilizing CRT as a tool to expose and deconstruct race and racism in educational contexts. Additionally, researchers and practitioners should incorporate CRT in spaces beyond scholarly musings and rhetoric. She encouraged that CRT be connected to practice and used in classrooms to understand, deconstruct, and reconstruct the educational experiences of students of color and their families.

As a final caveat, Ladson-Billing urged educational researchers to take time to study CRT, its origins, tenets, and pillars. An understanding of CRT’s past will allow for its utilization in re-envisioning the future of education. Ladson-Billings’ last words of caution are important and still relevant fifteen years later. CRT certainly has a presence in educational discourse, but whether or not educators have seriously considered her cautions remains to be seen. Educators and researchers must be reflective about the extent to which they have appropriated CRT without “intense study and careful rethinking of race and education” (p. 22).

CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

Ladson-Billings (1998) provides a foundational backdrop for considering how educational research has developed over time. In this section, we provide an overview of emergent research that has helped to shape
CRT’s voice in the educational arena, particularly in higher education. Our review of the literature revealed that CRT has been applied widely in education research. Since 1998 (and prior), educational researchers have utilized CRT not only to understand the connection between racism, white supremacy and education, but also as a means of examining in depth, some of the most complex and vexing problems in the educational system. To date, CRT has been utilized over 4,200 times in dissertation research and an additional 924 times in scholarly publications (see Academic Search Complete, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, PsycINFO, and ProQuest databases). Most often, scholarly and empirical research involving CRT has been situated in the K-12 realm and focused on topics associated with academic achievement (see Gillborn, 2008; Harper, 2009; Malagon & Alvarrez, 2010; Solórzano, 2004; Stinson, 2008), pedagogy and curriculum (see Baer & Glasgow, 2010; Gonzales; 2012; Lynn, 2006; Patton, McEwen, Rendon, Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Roberts, 2010; Twine & Gallagher, 2008; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005; Yosso, 2002), parental involvement (see Brown, Souto-Manning & Laman, 2010; Donnor, 2012), student experiences both in and out of the classroom (see Hernandez, Mobley, Coryell, Yu & Martinez, 2013; Housee, 2010; Marx & Larson, 2012), educational reform and policies (see Harper, Patton, & Wooden 2009; Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008) and attitudes and perceptions of faculty/teachers with regard to their racially minoritized students (see Caton, 2012; Comeaux, 2010: Moore, Henfield & Owens, 2008; Tuitt, 2012).

The research questions used to guide this array of research varied across the K-12 and postsecondary education strands of CRT scholarship, despite the commonality of themes. In taking on this research, scholars were most often concerned with educational a) structures, b) processes, c) traditions, and/or d) conditions, both in and outside of the classroom, that perpetuate racial hierarchies between racially minoritized students and White students in terms of academic success. In other cases, the racialized experiences of teachers and faculty or critiques of educational policy were also highlighted.

As noted in the previous section, those who engage in CRT research should do so responsibly. They should adhere to Ladson-Billing’s (1998) recommendations for using CRT to both “expose” the operation of racism and suggest “radical solutions” for educational practice and praxis. CRT has been applied more readily in the K-12 education strand, yet postsecondary applications, while fewer in number, have nonetheless extended CRT’s reach. In our analysis of the literature we chose to categorize CRT scholarship related to higher education into the following three thematic areas: research and educational policy, racialized experiences on campus, and graduate education and the professoriate.

**Higher Education and Policy**

Gillborn (2005) argued “that education policy is an act of white supremacy” (p. 498). We found his sentiments to be particularly relevant as we explored scholarship that focused on understanding the consequences of higher education policies through a CRT lens. Both Taylor (1999) and Gafford Muhammad (2009) wrote about interest convergence, desegregation policies and the extant impact of such policies on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). In Taylor’s CRT analysis of desegregation in Tennessee, he argued that the courts were against a dual system of education, not because predominantly White institutions (PWIs) were too White, but because HBCUs were too Black; hence suggesting that PWIs (whiteness) in the state were the norm and desegregation was the strategy to create normalcy at HBCUs. He noted that little attention was given to the Black students who would be affected by the policies. Instead,
more attention was directed toward what implications existed for White students. Taylor summarizes his analysis stating, “What in fact happens, however, is that White students have their choices widened to include Black colleges, where as Black students continue to face a hostile environment at White colleges. In short White choice trumps that of Blacks” (p. 197).

Gafford Muhammad’s examination of higher education desegregation in Mississippi revealed similar findings in that White students remained the primary beneficiaries once the case was settled. She explained:

*The settlement requires the public HBCUs of Mississippi to garner and maintain 10% White enrollments in order for the HBCUs to earn endowment funding under the settlement. Settlement provisions include financial aid for White students to attract them to HBCUs, whereas there are no comparable provisions for the recruitment and financial support of Black students at TWIs. In effect, a significant outcome of the settlement is to improve the education opportunities of White students during an age of increased competition for admissions to TWIs.* (p. 329)

She concluded her analysis by returning to Bell’s interest convergence principle to explain that desegregation, while intended to bring about equality in educational opportunities for Black people, is always inextricably linked to rewards for their White counterparts. In their overall evaluations of desegregation legislation, Taylor and Muhammad demonstrated the value of CRT in shedding light on the deeply embedded racism that permeates both the legal and educational system, ensuring the perpetuation of inequities in higher education for Black students.

Other scholars have also examined policies through a CRT lens to provide a more nuanced perspective on racism and higher education. For example, using counterstorytelling as a strategy, Solórzano and Yosso (2002), exposed the misconceptions regarding affirmative action and noted that a true understanding of the policy must be situated within an accurate historical account of racism as well as knowledge of contemporary manifestations of racism that devalue people of color and serve White interests. Iverson (2007) explored institutional diversity policies through a CRT lens and found that such policies, while intended to promote diversity and equity, were actually contradictory to these goals. Iverson explained, “a university’s diversity action plan may construct a world for racial minorities that disqualifies them from participation, even as it strives to include them as full participants” (p. 592). Moreover, she asserted that the discourses of diversity policies are oppressive and embedded with notions of race neutrality. Finally, Harper, Patton and Wooden (2009) conducted a critical race historical analysis to expose how policies have shifted over time to maintain the subordination of Black students in higher education. Their analysis reveals that as policies are established to address injustices that disproportionately affect Black students, these same policies or newly created ones ensure the stagnation of substantive progress.

**Racialized Experiences on Campus**

A second strand of higher education scholarship grounded in CRT focuses on the racialized experiences of minoritized college students, specifically related to hostile campus climates, microaggressions, and marginalization. Delgado Bernal (2002) stated, “Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (p. 106). Her statement is reflective of the findings from Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano’s (2009) study in which they utilized CRT to deconstruct the racialized microaggressions experienced by Latina/o students at three select institutions. These authors contended that microaggressions are persistent, indirect and threatening racial assaults that leave people of color feeling
rejected and on the margins of campus (Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). Concerned with the types, effects, and responses to racial microaggressions among Latina/o college students, Yosso, et al. (2009) found that these students experienced three main types of microaggressions: “interpersonal, racial jokes, and institutional” (p. 667). Despite the variation in types, their prevalence left Latina/o students feeling unsafe and as if their presence on campus was illegitimate (Yosso et al.). Harper (2009) also wrote about students’ educational experiences, focusing specifically on Black men in college. He used CRT to craft a counternarrative otherwise go unnoticed or avoided” (p. 405).

While CRT has not been extensively used to examine the undergraduate experiences of women of color, Ladson-Billings (2009) wrote a cogent analysis of the racialization of Black women in the US by grounding her arguments in recent collegiate athletic scandals that involved Black women. In her 2009 article, “Who you calling nappy-headed? A critical race theory look at the construction of Black women”, Ladson-Billings critiqued two national incidents in collegiate athletics. The first was Don Imus’ reference to the Rutgers University women’s basketball team as “nappy headed hoes”. The second was the Duke University lacrosse case in which players were accused of raping a Black female stripper. Both situations were used as exemplars to illustrate the subjugation of Black women. Her analysis demonstrated how Black women are devalued within higher education, noting the implications of their subordination in society. Ladson-Billings pointed out that the manner in which these incidents played out in the media only served to promote negative characterizations of Black women, limiting them to manifestations of popular culture’s “Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel” (pp. 88-89), and underscoring an unwritten and racist criterion for beauty, sexuality, motherhood, and education of Black children. Ladson-Billings posited that such constructions lead to erroneous beliefs by White people and
others that Black women are unfit to be teachers, and mothers. This narrow view of Black women spans within and beyond the academy demonstrating Ladson-Billings’ point that race and racism continues to heavily define one’s life chances.

**Graduate Education and the Professoriate**

Critical race scholarship on graduate student experiences is another area that is steadily growing (see Daniel, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2011; Tate, 1994). In a critique of the often “oppressive and dehumanizing” (Gayas cited by Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011) conditions associated with graduate schooling, Gildersleeve et al. used CRT to examine the lived experiences of Latina/o and Black doctoral students who daily navigate endemic forms of racism in graduate programs. The researchers posited that graduate students of color experience their education through an ‘Am I going crazy?!’, social narrative, which exposes the marginalizing atmosphere of doctoral education. Findings from their study illustrated how racially minoritized doctoral students manage encounters with students, colleagues, and classmates that cause them to question their own confidence and place in the academy. Their interactions with the environment and culture of graduate education promoted feelings of “tentativeness, insecurity, and doubt” (Gildersleeve et al., 2011, p. 100). As a result, Black and Latina/o doctoral students scrutinized their behavior and resisted, in order to persist, in ways that far outweighed what was required of their White counterparts.

Findings from the Gildersleeve et al. study (2011) are consistent with those from the Daniels (2007) study on barriers to professionalization for racially minoritized students pursuing graduate degrees in social work. Daniels argued that social work faculty should critique the institutionalized structures, educational traditions, and academic experiences of students that promote inequities and “undermine the professional development of minority students” (p. 26). Moreover, Daniels (2007) challenged faculty colleagues to be more concerned about the way in which racially minoritized students experience professionalization, considering the “theoretical, methodological, and concrete work” of their profession (p. 26). CRT allowed this researcher, and others like her, to uncover how race and racism contributed to the perpetuation of “stratified social structures”, which left Latina/o and Black graduate students in this social work program experiencing feelings of “isolation, invisibility, and unsupported” both in and out of the classroom (pp. 30-39).

At times, the CRT scholarship on graduate education intersects with the complexities of faculty work. For example, Tuitt (2012) used CRT both as a framework and a methodology to center race and racism in the exploration of pedagogical interactions between Black graduate students and their Black faculty. Analysis of the counternarratives that emerged from the study participants suggested that

> Black graduate students enter classrooms taught by professors who are Black with perceptions that these Black faculty (a) are innocent until proven guilty, (b) will serve as role models who hold them to higher standards, and (c) will view Black students and be viewed by these same students as representatives of their race. (Tuitt, 2012, p. 192)

In terms of CRT scholarship focusing on faculty, Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) described an “apartheid of knowledge” that exists in the academy. Specifically, they raised concern over the ways in which knowledge gets legitimized and how the apartheid of knowledge ensures that the scholarship produced by faculty of color is deemed illegitimate. They argued that faculty of color are often segregated in the academy by rank, status, and department. Moreover, they are subjected to double standards in the evaluation of their work; standards rarely present when their White counterparts are evaluated. The authors crafted a majoritarian story and a counternarrative to demonstrate
“how the dominant Eurocentric epistemology is embedded in the formalized” (p. 176) structures that determine tenure and promotion.

With the intent of exposing the “hegemonic and overlapping nature of race, racism, and power,” Patton and Catching (2009, p. 717) constructed a composite counternarrative, using the data collected from their study participants. The authors noted that their critical race analysis of the data enabled them to produce and present the findings in a way that validated the documented experiences of many African American faculty who have familiarity with the phenomenon of “teaching while Black”. Through the counternarrative, readers are exposed to how faculty of color are racially profiled in the academy because they are perceived to be out of place or in spaces where they do not belong. Moreover, the study’s emergent themes revealed how White faculty, both consciously and unconsciously, commit and perpetuate interest convergence and microaggressions through their regular interactions with racially minoritized faculty colleagues. Patton and Catching (2009) prompted leaders of student affairs programs to actively evaluate how the conditions of their department contribute to the retention and success of faculty of color. Specifically, departmental leadership must become concerned with providing effective mentoring, instituting necessary support infrastructures, not contributing to tokenism by requiring these faculty to teach the diversity courses, and creating meaningful feedback loops (Patton & Catching, 2009). When addressed comprehensively, such mechanisms not only contribute to the retention of faculty of color, but arguably could also improve their likelihood of promotion (Croom & Patton, 2011).

Croom and Patton (2011) also examined the terrains of the professoriate focusing specifically on the rigors of attaining full professor status. They used CRT and critical race feminism to examine the complexities surrounding who is tapped for full professorship and why so few African American women are present at this rank. Upon highlighting the disturbing trends that African American faculty face, such as hypervisibility, exponential service commitments, disrespect from students in the classroom, and limited opportunities for mentoring and collaboration, the authors shared that the bulk of existing literature focuses on faculty at lower ranks. As a result, much remains to be learned about full professor status, the benefits accrued at this rank and the deeply entrenched racism, hegemonic masculinity, and white supremacy that prevents African American women and other faculty of color from becoming full professors. Using Harris’ (1993) whiteness as property thesis, the authors revealed how full professorship is protected by gatekeepers who via their whiteness exclude others while they thrive from the benefits and enjoyment of this status. Croom and Patton conclude by issuing a call for a critical race research agenda that further examines full professor status, politics surrounding promotion and tenure, and the use of intersectionality for understanding differential effects of these academic processes and their political implications.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE STUDY OF BLACK STUDENTS

Given the collective findings from the studies noted in our literature review, it is safe to conclude that perhaps education isn’t so nice after all. The review of educational research revealed several interesting trends associated with how scholars have used CRT to frame education scholarship. First, much of the research is qualitative in nature, allowing the voices and experiential knowledge of people of color to remain central to the research findings. These voices were often illuminated through CRT strategies such as counterstorytelling and counternarratives. Another theme that resonates within the
higher education scholarship is the desire to disrupt the notion of whiteness and White people as the litmus test by which all things and people are judged. Through this research, it is clear that scholars were committed to demonstrating the embeddedness of white normativity and its disproportional negative impact on people of color. The literature we highlighted also touches upon the very personal nature and impact of racism on people of color and their ability to be resilient in the face of racial adversity. Moreover, the findings from these studies serve as a reminder of CRT’s most prominent tenet, that is, racism is a normal, permanent fixture.

The existing studies have significant implications as it pertains broadly to future research and specifically to the study of Black college students. Researchers who choose to use CRT as a framework will need to consider how their work will contribute to expanding and bolstering the power of CRT. While many studies that employ a CRT framework are qualitative, researchers may wish to consider the value of CRT in quantitative and mixed-method studies. Doing so would require both careful and considerate attention to issues of objectivity and neutrality, perceived values in quantitative research that conflict with CRT. Regardless of the research methodology, we argue that the use of CRT can never be neutral and should be purposefully political. Thus we caution researchers and scholars to be bold in their methodological approaches to CRT while also remaining committed to its core tenets. Another area to consider in future research is the examination of law and policy. Many forms of CRT in education scholarship do not explicitly acknowledge the legal or policy underpinnings that likely shape and influence the topic under study. It will be critical for education scholars to rely more heavily on CRT’s legal foundation in order to ensure a more comprehensive application of its tenets.

Where Black students are concerned, future educational research should examine the diversity among this population rather than as a monolithic group. Given CRT’s focus on intersectionality, it will be important for researchers to consider the confluence of race, gender, social class, religion, and sexuality, as well as how such identities are influenced by systems rooted in white supremacy. It will also be critical to consider how educational research, grounded in CRT can be used to explore with more depth, topics that are rarely studied, such as African American undergraduate women and their collegiate experiences; African American gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students; African American transgender college students; issues of college choice and opportunity for African American college students; generational differences in how African American students experience college; conflicts between domestic, Carribbean and international Black students; and issues surrounding Black authenticity for bi-racial/multiracial African American students. Our list is by no means exhaustive, but is intended to encourage readers to delve more into research that not only addresses these topics, but does so through a critical race lens to reveal what we still need to know and understand about the experiences of Black students in college.

In conclusion, utilizing CRT in educational research can expand how we frame discussions about inequity as an outgrowth of systemic oppression. CRT allows scholars and practitioners to connect research with an activist agenda, allowing a window through which persistent educational inequities can be logically connected to larger social systems of oppression and power. CRT also offers a framework to situate the problems of racial inequity and a language to express how racism impacts educational opportunity and outcomes at all levels. CRT is a significant body of knowledge for researchers to consider and use (as appropriate) when addressing issues of equity broadly and race specifically in education.
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Review Essay

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As a doctoral student, I am a part of a research team that investigates issues of diversity and equity. One aspect of the team’s work considers how sexuality and masculinity shape the academic and social experiences of a diverse cadre of male collegians, including Black gay males. Through our research investigations, I have come across a number of texts that consider these issues, one of which is Dude, You’re a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School by C. J. Pascoe. In this review, I will highlight Pascoe’s main objectives and review the book’s content (i.e., preface, six chapters, appendix), before concluding with a brief commentary.

In Dude, You’re a Fag, Pascoe brings together 18 months of ethnographic research, 50 student interviews, dozens more informal interviews with students, teachers and administrators, and loads of observational data to “to explain how teenagers, teachers, and the institutional logics of schools construct adolescent masculinity through idioms of sexuality” (p. 4). Specifically, Pascoe draws upon queer and feminist theory, as well as sociological research on masculinities, to demonstrate the ways in which high schools serve as major socializing institutions for modern youth’s understanding of their gender and sexuality.

In the revised edition released in 2012, Pascoe pens a preface in which she articulates the relevancy of her findings in the social media sphere, noting that “fag discourse and compulsive heterosexuality [have] made their way online” (p. ix). After a brief discussion of cyber-bullying that has led to the unfortunate deaths (or suicides) of many young males who were, or perceived to be, gay, Pascoe reminds us that “framing these events solely as bullying, cyberbullying, or simple homophobia elides the centrality of definitions of masculinity to these tragedies” (p.xi). In essence, she offers a new space from which we can consider how society assists in construction of masculinity, specifically demonstrating how schools’ policies and pedagogies reinforce boys’ and girls’ understanding of masculinity. The preface then gives way to the substantive chapters of the book.

Serving as the foundational chapter, Chapter One titled, “Making Masculinity: Adolescence, Identity, and High School,” opens with the first of many skits from River High School that Pascoe uses to help readers understand how high school socializes men and women to understand and enact masculinity, which Pascoe defines as “a configuration of practices and discourses that different youths (boys and girls) may embody in different ways and to different degrees... [which is] understood...as a form of dominance usually expressed through sexualized discourses” (p. 5); in the skit, using female classmates to act as their girlfriends and cheerleaders, Brent and Greg, two popular, senior, White water polo players perform “Revenge of the Nerds” in which they dance,
fight “gangstas,” and rescue the girls to compete for the title of best male senior (Mr. Cougar). Ultimately, the notion of masculinity is attached to the male body. Reflecting on the skit, Pascoe moves to review the sociological literature on masculinity by highlighting works of Kimmel, Connell, and Messner. Then, feminist and queer theories are used to provide insights into the dangers of defining masculinity as what men and boys do. In depth coverage of her research methodology characterizes the end of the chapter.

In Chapter Two, titled, “Becoming Mr. Cougar: Institutionalizing Heterosexuality and Masculinity at River High,” the concept of “Mr. Cougar” serves as a metaphor for masculinity. At River High, the Mr. Cougar competition is an annual tradition to determine who will be named the top senior male. Through her analysis of the competition, Pascoe demonstrates with skits and accompanying competitive activities how boys and girls at River High understand masculinity to be associated with heterosexuality, male bravery, power, and domination over women. With the primary purpose of marking the high school as organizer of sexual practices, identities, and meanings, Pascoe posits that River High School’s institutional policies and traditions produces a heterosexualizing process that influences the development of masculine identities. Accepting that schools are sexualized and gendered institutions, readers are then encouraged to investigate “the way sexuality is constructed at the level of the institution through disciplinary practices, student-teacher relationships, and school events” (p. 27), specifically noting official and unofficial curriculum and pedagogy.

Chapter Three titled, “Dude, You’re a Fag: Adolescent Male Homophobia,” examines the centrality of sexuality to definitions of masculinity, specifically considering how boys affirm their heterosexuality for themselves and others. Pascoe is extensively interested in the “fag discourse”, which is Pascoe’s terminology for a compilation of boys’ naming of others as fag, yelling variations of fag, and imitations of their understanding of fag (pp. 59-60) Pascoe then spends considerable time discussing heterosexual boy’s ability to be named and unnamed a fag as well as how use and understanding of the term “fag” is racialized, before turning to an example of a space “where the fag disappears” (p. 78)—drum performances. With an extended explication of students’ performance of Carousel, Pascoe documents her surprise in students’ resistance to employing the fag discourse even when their drama production provided ample opportunities (e.g., boys in makeup or dressed as sailors singing “blow high, blow low”). Pascoe concludes the chapter with the reframing of homophobia as boy’s use of the fag discourse. Here Pascoe challenges modern convention that the use of epithets to reference homosexuality and gay is due solely to homophobia; she instead suggests that when considering boys’ daily interactions, it is possible to conclude that boys’ attempts to avoid being labeled fag are included in their construction and enactment of their masculinity and thus encourage them to label others as fag.

The intersection of masculinity and dominance is taken up in Chapter Four titled, “Compulsive Heterosexuality: Masculinity and Dominance.” After a brief consideration of gender practices and the meanings of masculinity embedded in them, Pascoe posits that masculinity is largely assumed synonymous with heterosexuality and focused on one’s mastery and dominance over girls’ bodies. The introduction of compulsive heterosexuality, which is the name Pascoe gives to eroticization of male dominance and female submission, and the ways that it influences boys’ behaviors (e.g., touching, sex talk) and girls’ responses to such behaviors, is discussed next. Compulsive heterosexuality causes some boys to intentionally subscribe to hegemonic notions of masculinity, specifically inviting them to play up their heterosexuality by demonstrating their abil-
ity to “get girls,” touch them inappropriately, and one-up their male peers in sex talk. Pascoe concludes Chapter Four noting that not all boys regularly employed compulsive heterosexuality, instead labeling themselves as different from other male peers.

Chapter Five (“Look at My Masculinity: Girls Who Act Like Boys”) is Pascoe’s attempt to uncouple masculinity from the male body. Using four case studies involving instances of female masculinity – tomboy pasts, Basketball Girls, Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) Girls, and Jessie Chau, Homecoming Queen – this chapter “examines what it means to define masculinity as a set of practices associated with women as well as men.” (p. 116). Using the notion of gender maneuvering (Schippers, 2002), Pascoe challenges dominant sociological thinking on masculinity with consideration of masculinized girls and their social positioning in comparison to feminized boys. Consequently, explicit attention is given to the ways in which non-normative gender and sexual identity color female students’ experiences in ways unrealized for feminized boys.

In sixth and final chapter titled, “Conclusion: Thinking about Schooling, Gender, and Sexuality,” Pascoe insists that River High is a “filmic representation of the archetypal American high school” that provides a solid site for investigation of “contemporary constructions of masculinity, sexuality, and inequality” (p. 156). An overview of the text is offered again and the theoretical significance of Pascoe’s project is underscored. In this closing chapter, she draws connections between theory, homophobia, sexuality, and inequality. For instance, she considers the role of play, a concept queer theorists identify as critical to social change. By introducing play, Pascoe suggests that the production of Carousel provided River High boys an opportunity to engage with masculine and feminine identities and gender practices. Consequently allowing them to challenge their own constructions of masculinity, even if only during the show. She ends the chapter with a call to activism and recommendations for the creation of anti-homophobic programs and structural support for gay and non-normatively gendered students.

Given the ethnographic approach of her work, Pascoe offers her personal reflections in the Appendix entitled, “What if a Guy Hits on You? Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, and Age in Fieldwork with Adolescents.” Here, a thoughtful consideration of methodological challenges is offered; Pascoe notes the need to (a) negotiate her age and gender when working with high school-age youth, (b) create a least-gendered identity, and (c) negotiate sexuality with the male participants. The Appendix concludes with Pascoe’s insights into a feminist challenge when conducting adolescent research. This is a powerful resource for future ethnographers interested in conducting research with adolescents. Consider Pascoe’s reflection on her own identity negotiation as a result of her study:

When I simply conducted interviews, as opposed to gathering data through observations, less identity negotiation was required of me. My identity was more or less firm… However, as I spent much of the boys’ daily lives with them, they challenged my own assumptions about my identity, and I had to meet those challenges with my own identity strategies. …Being mobilized as an identity resource was quite jarring. When boys positioned me as a potential sexual partner, none of them seemed concerned about my thoughts or desires about my own sexual availability. (p. 192)

In Dude, You’re a Fag, Pascoe beautifully employs skits, vignettes, and quotes from students of River High to unveil the ways in which teenage boys and girls come to understand masculinity through the socializing aspects of their schooling experience. Specifically, her use of events, spaces, and student descriptions and thoughts enables the reader to independently check Pascoe’s assumptions
and assertions as the text progresses. Additionally, her literature review and use of feminist theory to problematize the ways in which masculinity is discussed was appropriate and helpful for those new to masculinities literature, especially from a sociological perspective. Specifically, Anderson and Hyscock (2010) assert that feminism seeks to understand societal differences between men and women with particular emphasis on elucidating one of four arenas: gender difference, gender inequality, gender oppression, or structural oppression. Through her troubling of masculinity being framed as wholly interested in the actions of men and boys, Pascoe demonstrates how this thinking continues to oppress women.

Pascoe’s most promising contribution to masculinity studies may rest in Chapter Five where she investigated female masculinity. Specifically, while sociological research has largely allowed the notion that masculinity constitutes the actions of men and is inherently tied to the male body to remain an unexamined tenet of masculinity studies, Dude, You’re a Fag offers a counter-understanding. With her careful consideration of the masculine girls, Pascoe offers an opportunity to consider the ways in which masculinity may also be associated with the female body or at least a set of practices that can be associated with men or women rather than a specific gendered-body.

While this text does many things well, I believe Pascoe missed several opportunities to investigate how teenagers construct masculinity through their understanding and articulation of sexuality, which was the book’s main purpose. First, by articulating gender maneuvering as “acting like a boy,” she invites the attribution of girl’s ability to be perceived as masculine with their potential labeling as homosexual. I think Pascoe misses the opportunity to truly trouble the notion of masculinity and its association with the male body.

Second, it appears that Pascoe offers an uncomplicated consideration of Black males and their racialized masculinity. Initially she notes that Black male participants are less likely than their white male peers to engage in the fag discourse, but Pascoe does not consider other ways in which Black boys may still subscribe to scripts that reflect hegemonic masculine beliefs, yielding acts by Black boys that may align with Pascoe’s description of “fag discourse” for White boys. Also, Pascoe notes that Black boys readily focus on fashion, unlike their white male peers; while this may be true this does not make them less heterosexual, sexist, or homophobic, as Pascoe seems to assert.

Third, Pascoe may have overreached in her analysis of male-female interactions; specifically, she may have too quickly employed feminist perspectives on patriarchy, particularly when analyzing the instances when boys and girls engage across gender. In nearly all male-female interactions Pascoe asserted patriarchy as the overarching cause, suggesting that all interactions by boys with girls were their attempts to dominate girls. While true for some instances, Pascoe could have strengthened her argument by employing students’ perspectives and reflections on those interactions, allowing the reader to hear how girls and boys articulated their motivations and understandings for such encounters.

Fourth, and finally, Pascoe’s theoretical implications and practical steps leave much to be desired. For instance, she suggests that by placing affirming posters in classrooms, schools’ homophobic and sexist environments can be modified. At another instance, she encourages school administrators to sponsor assemblies and speakers—like those for Black History Month—to demonstrate to students that homophobia and sexism are unacceptable. While practically helpful and perhaps necessarily reiterated, Pascoe offers no new or exciting recommendations.

Despite these shortcomings, C. J. Pascoe offers a helpful and insightful text for those
interested in investigations of masculinity. Findings offer directions for future investigations, especially related to female masculinity, as well as more nuanced understandings of how racialized masculinity becomes expressed by boys of color in school settings. In conclusion, Pascoe’s *Dude, You’re a Fag* is a worthwhile read and I recommend it particularly for those students, scholars, and practitioners interested in considering the ways in which institutional (school) policies, curriculum, and pedagogy influence and potential

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