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NETWORK SUPPORT VARIATION FOR BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED
STATES: A MOBILITY STUDY OF IMMIGRANT AND NON-IMMIGRANT
BLACK WOMEN

by

Lesa Annette Johnson

A DISSERTATION

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Under the Supervision of Professor Helen A. Moore

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NETWORK SUPPORT VARIATION FOR BLACK WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES: A MOBILITY STUDY OF IMMIGRANT AND NON-IMMIGRANT BLACK WOMEN

Lesla Annette Johnson, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: Helen A. Moore

Connections between socioeconomic status, social capital, and social support have been quite prominent in sociological research. However, such research still largely ignores the experiences of recently arrived African immigrants, particularly those who arrive as refugees. Black immigrants who arrived in the United States since 1965 have included an increasing number of refugees from war-torn, sub-Saharan African countries, such as the recently independent South Sudan. The numbers of women in these refugee roles has steadily increased since 1990. Black refugee women, many with children, bring diverse forms of social capital that influence their social networks and economic mobility, distinguishing them from native-born black women with multiple generations of family in the U.S. Very little of the qualitative research on this particular “new immigrant” population has been expressly geared toward understanding economic mobility and social network practices. This study addresses the mechanisms of social support and socioeconomic mobility patterns for immigrant and native-born black women in one Midwestern state and one southern state. Using participant observation, informal and semi-formal interviews, and focus groups, this study identifies network support experiences of black women from their different perspectives, as participants explain

network differences by their placement in a matrix of intersecting oppressions relating to race, class, immigration status, gender, family status, and geographical location. Findings show differences in emotional and appraisal support by class, ethnicity, and location, as well as differences in network structure for material support by location and ethnicity. Results show how appraisal support serves as a bridge between material and emotional support on one side, and informational support for economic mobility on the other side. Key factors in bridging such support are the management of stigmatic reflected appraisals and the establishment of trust.

DEDICATION

Although this work is about black women, I cannot move forward without humbly acknowledging the love and support of one very important black man in my life. My father was a proud and honorable man. In my youth, daddy treated me as if I was the single most intelligent human being on the face of this earth. When my daddy looked at me, I thought I was beautiful, noteworthy, and capable of accomplishing anything. “You can be anything you wanna be. You are wildly intelligent,” he often said to me, on the way to piano lessons and choir rehearsals, on the way back home from band and orchestra practices. “You can be anything you wanna be,” as we baked together, traded newspaper sections, or discussed world events during family dinner. I was about 12 at the time.

“Maybe I’ll be a pianist or an oboist,” I would say. “You can do better than that,” he’d say. “You can be the maestro!” “I wanna be an English teacher,” I’d say. “That’s good. But you could be the principal. Or a college professor! You could have a P --H-- D!” My father never dreamed small for me, nor did he ever let me forget that I was special. “You are wildly intelligent.” This was my father’s mantra for me, before prom (yes, my father still thought about intelligence before prom), the debutante ball, my high school graduation speech and as he dropped me off at college. He trained, spoiled, and coddled me incessantly, until later in life, when life began to fall apart for both of us. Our family suffered one devastation after the next, and downward mobility became inevitable. My father found the old mantra difficult to repeat, and I found it difficult to remember that he had ever believed such a thing.

This document and the accompanying doctoral degree mark the accomplishment of a dream that my father conjured up in my childhood. In this, my 50th year on earth, I am reminded of his words and what I believed for so long was nothing more than a pipe dream. As I fiercely hold on to dreams of success for my own son, my father's words have taken on new meaning. I proudly pass them along to Justin Curtis Johnson: "You are wildly intelligent! You can be anything you want to be!" So sayeth Alonzia A. Johnson, dreamer of dreamers. May he continue to rest in peace alongside my mother, the love of his life, Florentene Hurdle Johnson, and my older sister, Linda Dianne Johnson. I pray that the three of them look down with pride (and a long awaited sigh of relief).

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I happily recognize that the work associated with this document would not have been remotely possible without help and guidance of three wonderful professors who have carefully instructed me over the past few years. Drs. Helen Moore, Lory Janelle Dance, and Christina Falci have been the solid foundation which holds me up and keeps me from rocking off of my shaky, unstable foundation of insecurity. They instruct me on theory, qualitative and quantitative methods, stratification and inequality, social network analysis, sociological social psychology, and the sociology of mental health. In addition, they are never so sterile as to refuse to listen to me when fear, stigma and other manifestations of “imposter syndrome” get the better of me. They have sheltered me from the outside world in ways that far outweigh the typical teacher-student relationship. They have advocated for me so fiercely, and in so many instances, that other graduate students remark on my dream team dissertation committee. I have proudly dubbed them, along with psychology professor, Dr. Cynthia Willis Esqueda, as my “Warrior Women.” As my chief advisor and head of this tremendous group of women, Helen Moore has literally tricked me in to achieving a doctoral degree. There are so many times when I wanted to stop this. I have no idea how she got me to finish. Her leadership means the world to me. I am a lot to handle at times, so it really does take a group effort to handle me. She leads a group of women who do so with precision and ease. I am extremely grateful, and look forward to continued growth in all of our relationships as I set about the next steps in my career.

Other professors have played key roles in my growth. Drs. Miguel Ceballos and Cynthia Willis-Esqueda have contributed tremendously to my professional development.

Instruction on immigration, race and ethnicity, and psychological social psychology are keys to the future in teaching and research that I dream of. Dr. Yvonne Newsome has been such a joy. Her straight talks on professional development and academic environments have added a key ingredient to the already quite thorough guidance that my Warrior Women have provided for me. Dr. Ann Mari May has shown me that my former corporate administrative skills could indeed be put to very good use in academia. Her generosity in sending me abroad to facilitate a conference for the International Association for Feminist Economics, in addition to her instruction in feminist economics, provided quite a bit of forethought for this project by allowing me to read about and witness firsthand how upper-class academic networks and social capital work for women of various nationalities. And in regards to the use of administrative skills, Dr. Julia McQuillian just invented a job especially for me! Noting my previous work in negotiation, Julia just up-and-decided one day after an MLK breakfast that UNL's Sociology Department needed a special liaison to the Jackie Gaughan Multicultural Center. Within sixty minutes, along with the incomparable and amazing Lori Ratzlaff, the position was created and approved. I was given access to the space on campus where I felt most comfortable, new direction for research and advocacy, and new relationships with the most glorious undergraduate students that UNL has ever seen (other than those in my own classrooms). To call these young people "minority" is a farce, and I would not have made it without their laughter, their honesty, their tears and frustrations, and their dedication to being the best students they could be for communities back home. These black, Latino/a, and Vietnamese students changed my world at UNL.

On another level, key informants have made this work possible. I regret that mentioning any of their names would derail more important protections of confidentiality for my participants. However, these men and women of various ages, backgrounds and nationalities took me into their homes, introduced me to their own families and friends, and then gave me key background information to help navigate relationships with research participants. In really difficult times, they even clothed me, fed me, and gave me a shoulder to cry on. I have already thanked each of them individually, but proudly acknowledge that the completion of this work on social support is largely due to the social support that they provided to me.

The participants in this study are wonderful women. They are each special and inspiring in their own way. The women in this study made participant observation feel like hanging out with new friends. They made interviews feel like long talks with old friends. And they made focus groups feel like ladies' luncheons and girls' nights out. Their strength empowers me. Their honesty and vulnerability moderate my anger at an unkind world. Their hope for the future propels me forward. I am forever indebted to each of them. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Methods and Research Questions.....	6
Foundations	7
CHAPTER 2	11
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality	13
Social Networks in the Matrix of Domination	16
Social Capital, Social Networks, and Status Attainment.....	19
Network Ties to Mobility	23
Black American Women, Networks, and Economics.....	27
Social Support	32
Sources of social support.....	35
Emotional support and romantic unions	35
Religious affiliation for emotional and material support.....	37
Black African Females, Immigration, and Economic Assimilation in the United States	37
Immigration from Africa to the United States	41
CHAPTER 3	47
METHODS.....	47
Reflexivity and Situated Knowledges.....	49
Participants	51
Human Subjects Protection	53
Data Collection - Participant Interviews	55
Social Network Indicators	56
Coding of Themes	57
Data Collection – Focus Groups	59
Interviewer Issues and Resources.....	60
CHAPTER 4	63
NETWORK SUPPORT, ECONOMIC MOBILITY, AND NATIVE-BORN BLACK WOMEN	63
Native-Born Single Mothers: The Struggle for Economic and Residential Stability	64
Network multiplexity	66

Appraisal Support among Native-Born Black Women.....	69
Reflected appraisals and how to “be”	69
Reflected appraisals and stigma	71
Appraisals in the “black church”	76
Support from social service workers	80
Reflected appraisal, being different, and standing their ground.....	81
Direction on How to Move Forward – Negotiating, Planning, and Network Diversity.....	84
Reflected Appraisals, the Upper-Class, and Network Gatekeepers	86
Social Support, Roles, and Types of Relationship	89
Relationships with coworkers and bosses	89
Relationships with family and kin	92
Emotional and appraisal support in romantic relationships.....	95
Surviving or Thriving	100
CHAPTER 5	102
NETWORK SUPPORT AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY OF BLACK IMMIGRANT WOMAN: DIFFERENT BEGINNINGS, STANDPOINTS, and (SOME) DIFFERENT RESULTS	102
Material Support and Collectivist Perspectives	102
Transnational Material Support.....	107
Ethnic Group Population and Differences in Community Support.....	111
Church networks and support	113
Mainline church experiences	114
Appraisal Mixed with Material Support.....	117
Education as key to appraisal support.....	119
Emotional Support from Church.....	122
Transnational Kin Support	125
Romantic Relationships and Forms of Social Support	126
CHAPTER 6	135
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	135
Appraisal Support for Educational Achievement.....	147
Providing Support, Negative Interaction, and the Issue of “Drain”.....	148
Romantic Relationships and Social Support	150
Surviving, Thriving, and Trust.....	153
Limitations of the Study.....	157

Goals for Future Research.....	159
References.....	162

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Black women in the United States achieve less education, experience higher unemployment rates associated with labor market structures, more single parenthood, and more neighborhood crime associated with residential segregation, and generally more financial hardships than white women (Wilson 1987; Belle 1990; Gibbs and Fuery 1994; Reid 2002). Recent studies on earnings attainment, however, do not explore differences by immigration status and country of origin to compare variations among black ethnic groups in socioeconomic status attainment (Corra and Kimuna 2009). They also do not explore regional and community differences in the host country which could affect social mobility. Examining heterogeneity among black women enhances our understanding of divergent pathways to socioeconomic achievement based upon different pathways of attaining citizenship (i.e., citizenship by birth, refugee status, etc.), historical entry to the country (i.e., voluntary versus involuntary), and varied residential and settlement experiences among groups by region, community, family structure, and language, among others (Kollehlon and Eule 2003). Theories on intersectionality generally propose that there is a matrix of domination or oppression which affects members of society based upon several intersecting social statuses (Collins 1998, 2000; Yuval-Davis 2006; Weber 2010). Black feminist scholarship, in particular, asserts that racial, ethnic, class, and gender differences can play key and diverse roles in the educational and earnings attainment of black women in the United States (Collins 1998, 2000).

Research on the connections between socioeconomic status, social capital, and social support largely ignores the experiences of recently arrived African immigrants. Immigrants who arrived in the United States after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act have included an increased number of refugees from African countries affected by war and natural disaster, and an increased number of educated individuals from other parts of Africa, representing what many call a “brain drain” that results in a loss of human capital for national and international economic advancement of the African nations. Compared to native-born and to other immigrant groups, African immigrants have one of the highest educational and occupational attainments in the United States, and yet gain much lower returns in earnings for their education than other groups (Kollehlon and Eule 2003). Still, large groups of refugees from war-torn sub-Saharan African countries such as the Republic of Congo, Somalia, and the Sudan bring diverse forms of social capital that influence their social networks and economic mobility (Sakamoto et al. 2010). For example, since 2000, more than 24,000 Sudanese refugees have arrived in the United States (U.S. Dept. of State 2013). Their experiences have been largely addressed in anthropological research (Edward 2007; Grabska 2010; Holtzman 2008; Shandy 2002, 2003; Warriner 2008; Willis and Fernald 2004), but none which linked Sudanese experiences to any large data set for aggregate investigation leading toward generalization. In addition, very little of the qualitative research on this particular “new immigrant” population has been expressly geared toward understanding economic mobility and social network practices.

Native-born black women in the United States experience a range of institutional and interpersonal discriminations which hinder their attempts at economic mobility (Kim 2002; Karsten 2006; Roscigno 2007; Wilson 1987). In addition, the wage gap between white and black women has continued to widen, despite expansion of the U.S. labor market in the 1990s (Kim 2002; Dozier 2010). Of the work that was completed on the wage gap, ethnic status was not specified. We need to understand whether these discriminatory experiences and economic gaps are equally detrimental for immigrant black women of various statuses (refugee, asylee, etc.), and how public policy should be devised which addresses these issues. Though black women in the United States encompass several historical, ethnic, social class, and immigration statuses, our representation in mainstream social science research is still mostly one-dimensional. A scant few social scientists have begun to explore class and ethnic differences of black Americans with regard to social support and mental health. However, much more is left to be explored regarding historical, ethnic, social class, and immigration statuses of black women in mainstream research.

The current study reflects a comprehensive, triangulated data gathering approach that can be used to develop better measures for future large-scale data set development. This study contributes qualitative interview and focus group data that will prove beneficial to researchers in economics, social psychology, and sociology who work to develop more meaningful and culturally competent measures for illuminating the economic experiences and social networks of diverse black women in the U.S. How are social network supports which lead to economic mobility different for black women of

immigrant and non-immigrant groups? This is the central question guiding the investigation.

Purpose of the Study

This study addresses the mechanisms of social support and socioeconomic mobility patterns for immigrant and native-born black women in the United States. Lenses of black feminist thought and intersectionality provide the overarching framework for the study (Collins 2000; Weber 2010). These lenses are used to further illuminate the oppressive statuses of black women in the U.S., as well as the ways that intersecting oppressions reduce opportunities for black women to receive social support which could aid in economic mobility. As intersectionality does seek to illuminate the multiple dimensions of individual lives, it is in its nature a complex and interdisciplinary subject of study (McCall 2005; Brewer, Conrad and King 2002). As such, the intersectional lens of this study will include probes from social stratification, economics, and social psychology, so that the situations of immigrant and non-immigrant black women can be investigated in a more comprehensive manner.

This study qualitatively identifies network support experiences of black women from their different perspectives, as participants explain network differences by their placement in a matrix of intersecting oppressions relating to race, class, immigration status, gender, family status, and geographical location. As current studies continue to eschew the notion that only informational support links individuals to economic mobility (Granovetter 1983; Lin 1999), in-depth findings from this qualitative study may be used to develop quantitative instruments designed to measure the means for which multiple

dimensions of social support are linked to social capital and mobility. These more culturally appropriate instruments can then be used to analyze findings for a more complete understanding of the effect of social network support on socioeconomic status for a heterogenic black female population in the United States. A central focus of the study is on revealing intersecting oppressions qualitatively through in-depth interviews and through mapping the effects of varying social support networks on economic outcomes across immigrant and non-immigrant black women in the United States.

Many researchers challenge the use of quantitative survey measures that are constructed based upon European American samples and ideals (Skaff et al. 2002; Rogler 1999). Quantitative measures based on the understandings and ideologies of one cultural group may not produce meaningful results when used with other groups for whom the original instrument was not designed (Morgan 2008; Chen 2008; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2010). A combination of qualitative approaches offers a unique opportunity for the development of quantitative instruments that reflect distinctive cultural patterns and reality from the perspective of the groups being studied.

The triangulated approach that is featured in this work improves on the one-dimensional status attainment analyses of black women that continue to frame many behavioral science investigations. An intersectional approach challenges our lack of scientific data on the heterogeneity of black women, and this qualitative analysis expands our limited understandings of current metrics for measuring social support. Additionally, this study may identify important sources of resilience for black women in the United States.

Methods and Research Questions

This qualitative study explores social capital and social support from the viewpoints of first generation South Sudanese African and native-born black American women in two locations within a Midwestern state, and two locations within a Southeastern state. The predominant methodological approach is ethnography. However, in addition to participant observation, informal interviews, and semi-structured interviews, this study utilizes focus group methods and borrows from participatory action research strategies. This mixture of qualitative approaches is employed to explore the intersectional theory that a large number of statuses such as race and ethnicity, gender, class, and immigration status (intersecting oppressions), have varied effects on a black American women's access to social capital and social network support. These intersecting oppressions affect opportunities for economic mobility for black women in the U.S in varying degrees. The voices and guidance of the participants are as important as the findings culled from items based upon their participation. In this qualitative investigation, the focus is on understanding the form of social networks in these women's lives which are (or are not) useful for enacting social capital and economic mobility. Measures of varying forms of social support help us to understand more fully the mechanisms by which black women of different groups may be excluded from mainstream means of economic mobility. Three sub-questions are used in the exploration of social network support:

1. How do social network supports help or hinder social and economic mobility prospects?

2. Are these supports and their effects different according to ethnic/immigrant group?
3. Are these supports different according to geographic region in the United States?

Foundations

I hold a transformative-emancipatory worldview (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Mertens 2008). The transformative-emancipatory paradigm conveys the idea that “the goal of research and evaluation should be a more just and democratic society (Mertens 2008: 137).” As part of the overarching transformative theory, there are four paradigm approaches that include emancipatory, anti-discriminatory, participatory, and Freirian. This transformative-emancipatory paradigm, also found largely in feminist research, places the center of importance on the experiences of marginalized social groups, and investigators seek to link their research results to social action and answers to questions regarding social inequality and social justice (Mertens 2008; Ackerly and True 2010). I arrive at this view after three years of quantitative study in mental health, discrimination and stratification that left me unable to answer the research questions that I, as a working-class black single mother, would ask. I do believe in the necessity of generalization to a larger population that can affect policy change as well as ideology. I am also aware, however, that current data sets, even those that focus on minority populations - such as the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) - fail to reflect the full heterogeneity of the black population in the United States in general, and of black women in particular. Because of this inadequacy, proper and inclusive generalizations cannot be made at this

time. Current data sets are not crafted with items that can answer the questions that would lead to real solutions to the social problems of an ethnically stratified society, especially social problems geared toward economic mobility for minorities in the U.S. For instance, in my analyses using NSAL, the mechanism of social support could not be fully analyzed because items reflecting two of the four types of social support (informational and appraisal support) were not included in the data set (Johnson 2010). In addition, immigration status could not be included in the analyses because the small number of African immigrants in the sample did not provide enough statistical power for comparisons. To be sure, the mere presence of a quantitative data set focusing on native black Americans and black Caribbean Americans is a giant step forward in social science research. Researchers utilizing the NSAL accomplish much with findings from this data set. One of the greater accomplishments however, is the fostering of even more questions, and anticipation of new items included in a data set yet to be developed.

In order to devise an inclusive analysis, researchers must go back to the collaborative stages of research and gain qualitative knowledge from the population that includes stratification and capital attainment processes based on several intersecting oppressive statuses (Collins 1998; 2000; Weber 2010). In addition, qualitative insights should be included in data sets so that investigators can complete analysis with the viewpoints of the participants in mind. Full disclosure of the analyst's theoretical views or standpoints also grounds the range of analyses more fully. As a feminist researcher, I do believe that the investigator's standpoint frames the questioning, conceptualization and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative study (Morgan 2008). Adopting a

reflexive, transformative, triangulated approach enhances behavioral scientists' abilities to study our complex society in all its intersections with more accuracy, and empowers necessary solutions to social problems.

While both of the female groups featured in this study first arrived in the United States as a result of forced migration, the timing of their arrival is vastly different (20th century, war-escaped immigrant refugee groups and 17th century, traditional slave groups). As many other female immigrant groups from the African Diaspora may gradually acculturate to the black American culture, the recent arrival of South Sudanese women provides a beneficial means of comparison which can highlight the heterogeneity of the black female population in the United States.

Many researchers focus on social network support as a mechanism for guarding against negative health conditions associated with low socioeconomic status. Very few researchers have attempted to locate the benefits of social support and network affiliation within the context of economic mobility (Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2005). Turning the proverbial stress process paradigm on its head requires a focus on obtaining economic mobility so that many of the negative health conditions that accompany poverty may be avoided in the first place.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I apply current theoretical approaches to intersectional analysis and social network frameworks for economic mobility, and review some of the sociological, economic, and psychological literature on social support and social networks for economic mobility among native-born black women and first generation South Sudanese refugees. Four basic theoretical premises are used to shape the methods

and analysis for this study: Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, Social Capital Theory, and Status Attainment theory (see diagram below). Linkages between these four theories are explained in-depth. Methodological issues for qualitative study of social networks are addressed and the research methodologies of in-depth interviews, focus groups and field observations for this triangulated study are outlined. In the findings chapters, I identify a wider range of social support mechanisms necessary for economic mobility, the role of social networks in economic mobility, and the contrasts of these across two metropolitan areas and among varying social statuses of native black women and immigrant South Sudanese women.

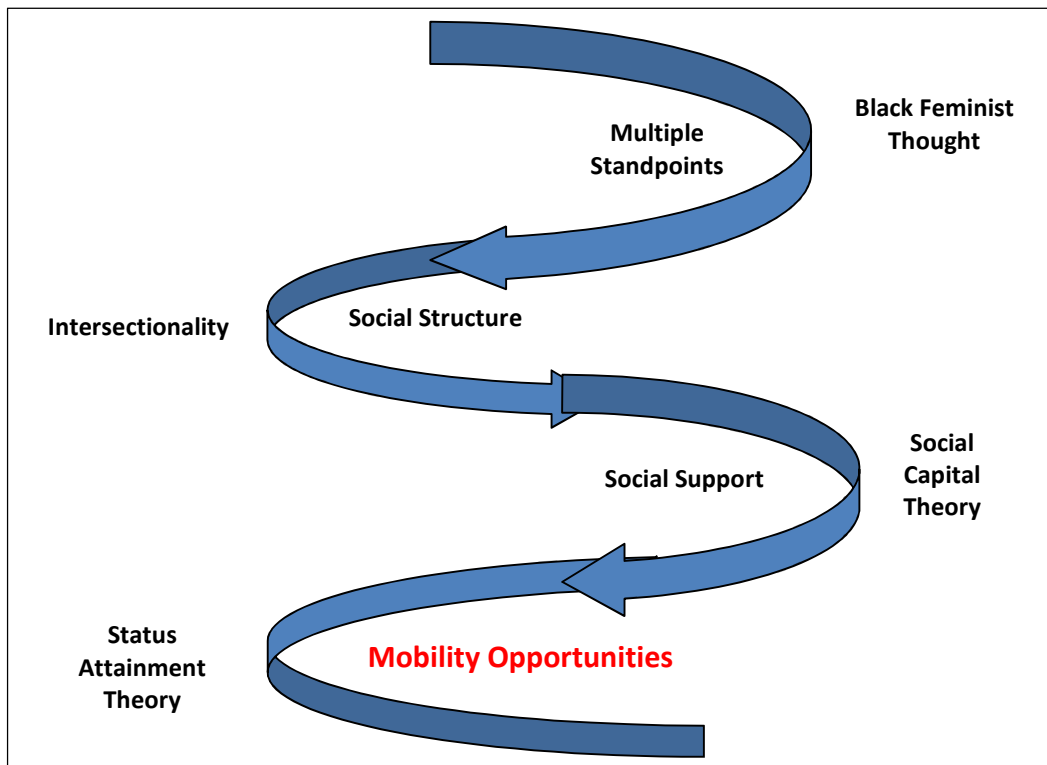


Figure 1: Relationships between Theoretical Premises

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

“...articulation of black women’s experiences in America is a complex task characterized by the intersection of race, gender, and social class with language, history, and culture.

It is oral narrative that is ideally suited to revealing the multilayered texture of black women’s lives.” (Etter-Lewis 1991:43)

The U.S. Census defines “Black or African American” as persons “having origins in any of the Black racial groups in Africa (U.S. Census 2013).” As many black women in the U.S. have origins somewhere in Africa, those most of us cannot name exactly where, we racially characterize ourselves as either black or African American, depending on personal preferences for identification. Though we understand race is a social construction and based loosely on phenotypic features, we also acknowledge that race is “a system of classifying people into groups...promoting the notion that these groups are ranked in terms of superiority and inferiority.” (Hartigan 2010: 2).

Social class is another socially constructed concept, based upon another ranking system, which classifies groups of families or more or less equal standing from other groups above or below them, using financial and human capital markers such as education, income, wealth, and occupational prestige (Gilbert 2015). Any combination of these characteristics, depending on who you communicate with, can yield varying definitions of social class. Typically, sociologists of stratification and inequality refer to six social classes prevalent in the United States: the capitalist class (or the 1%), upper

middle class, middle class, working class, working poor, and the underclass. Historically, black Americans devised different boundaries for these social classes, since we were typically depicted more often on the lower registers. However, evidence of a growing black middle class is also accompanied by evidence of the marginality and fragility of this group's financial standing (Shapiro 2004; Lacy 2007).

Immigrants and refugees in the United States have some similar experiences, but also some very different ones. Entry to the U.S. is different for these two groups as is clear by definitions of the terms immigrant and refugee. Immigration is commonly regarded as the settlement of any people into a country in which they were not born. Migrants choose to move from their country of origin, usually to improve their social mobility possibilities. By contrast (as established by the United High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) at the 1951 Refugee Convention), a refugee is someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR 2014). As such, the groups' lifestyles and assimilation levels are quite different. Additionally, push and pull factors in the American economy and political system result in very different relationships with the two immigrant groups which affect the groups' acculturation processes. These relationships are based on the immigrant/refugee home country's history, history between the sending and receiving countries, and the nature of resources (religious, cultural, educational, employment skills) that immigrants and refugees bring with them.

In the coming pages, I will discuss these terms at length with regard to black women in the United States. I will discuss how each of these statuses relate to one another as they affect black women's network structures. Each of these statuses will also be shown to relate to the availability of social support, as each status structures the standpoints from which black women address possibilities for economic mobility.

Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality

When we consider the progression of thought regarding the economic mobility prospects of black women, we may be able to begin with the idea of black feminist thought, which proposes that there are multiple standpoints from which each black woman presents herself to and interacts with others, be they individuals, groups, or institutions. Still, all black women in the United States, regardless of class or immigration status, "share the common experience of being black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent" (Collins 1991: 22). Black feminist thought urges us to place black women's experiences at the center of analysis, noting that casting these experiences on the periphery of analysis (for instance, with race, class, and/or gender as controls in analysis rather than as key independent variables that affect changes in outcomes) only serves to further objectify black women in the interests of Euro-centric positivistic science. According to Collins, when women of African descent across the diaspora begin defining our own feminism, particularly "in opposition to that advanced by middle class, white women," we may begin to develop an "intercontinental [b]lack women's consciousness that identifies how women of African descent encounter different configurations of common challenges." (Collins 2000:237-238). The challenge and

warning with this realization, however, is that pitting black women against white women in analyses reproduces yet another binary. New knowledge is created instead with the idea of intersecting oppressions, which considers several simultaneously marginalized positions that create challenges to economic mobility. Intersectionality theory offers this possibility.

Many researchers explain the intersection of gender and racial inequity as the inter-relationships between systems of oppression, wherein one group has consistently and historically maintained control over access to valuable resources in a society. The group in control maintains power and inequality by exploiting the labor and lives of those without power, then by using the gains of said exploitation to secure power into the future (Weber 2010; Wright 2011). In contrast, since members of the oppressed groups are allowed entrance to certain work environments by virtue of their labor, women and racial minorities often have intimate knowledge of the structures and environments of oppression, but are not allowed access to the processes which could initiate change in the nature of exploitive relationships. This systematic knowledge without agency makes the oppressed individuals “outsiders-within” (Collins 2000).

Intersectionality becomes evident as individuals claim identity with two or more characteristics which put them in different oppressed or privileged groups, such as race, gender, class, nationality, sexuality or disability, among others. Such intersectionality is perpetuated by forces of inequality that are guided by what Collins calls a “matrix of domination” (Collins 2000). Fundamentally, rather than experiencing oppression as a result of singular mechanisms of social group identity and exclusion, the oppressed often

experience it through simultaneous and interlocking modes of oppression, for instance, as black working class women, rather than as blacks, then as members of the working class, and then as women (Yuval-Davis 2006).

The number of oppressive statuses which are claimed by an individual create varied relationships with institutions and groups, which in turn create varied experiences and situational knowledges of privilege and oppression according to group membership. So that all women will not have the same oppressive statuses, nor will all women of color, all working or underclass women, or all refugee and immigrant women. Because each system of oppression is interrelated, they each help shape the other systems, and an individual can simultaneously experience privilege and disadvantage through combined statuses (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996; Browne and Misra 2003). There is a socio-historical context for each system in which the domination of one mechanism of oppression is reinforced and mutually constructed by the other systems. Therefore, attempts to “essentialize” gender, racial, class, or refugee/immigrant statuses further oppresses the more marginalized members of any oppressed group (hooks 1981; Collins 2000; Haraway 2003; Yuval-Davis 2006; Edward 2007). Similarly, since, as black feminists argue, “racism and classism have created and continue to create divisions among women,” (Edward 2007:58), and because oppressive experiences are often locally situated, analysis of oppressive statuses should be conceptualized within the scope of participants’ historical and current environments, as well as their relationships with institutions in both contexts (Edward 2007). Such an analysis would definitely include the effects of immigration from one nation to another and the conditions which foster

relations with the state and powerful others in home and host nations. Black women who are citizens may, on the one hand, benefit from in-depth knowledge of the inner-workings of institutions as they manage assistance for family care. On the other hand, black refugee women may benefit from the support of informed others who may more readily assist a widow escaping war and famine than a local woman attempting to escape poverty. For either of these groups of women, access to social support through middle class networks, neighborhoods, and working environments may differ. Citizenship or migration status may prove to be either help or hindrance according to the situation (Romero 2008). An intersectional analysis of privileged and oppressive statuses is clearly warranted when exploring the heterogeneity of the black female population in the United States.

Social Networks in the Matrix of Domination

Black feminist thought and intersectionality identify how placement in an ideologically driven stratification system gravely affects black women's access to relationships and information that might lead to economic mobility (Collins 2000; Weber 2010). Social network research directly addresses the means by which individuals are able to solidify interpersonal relations with persons of higher status and greater resources, thereby accessing social capital (middle class norms, information and etiquette) for advancement and economic mobility (Granovetter 1983; Lin 1999; McLeod and Lively 2003). By maintaining homophily in social networks, however, dominant racial/ethnic groups and many middle and upper class groups exclude minority and lower class individuals from membership (either intentionally or unintentionally), thereby preventing

them from obtaining social support which could lead to better job opportunities and other mechanisms for social mobility (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001). By the same token, some lower class social networks, often researched as “kinship groups,” may maintain binding structures of reciprocity and enforceable trust which impede network members’ time and prevent them from devoting energy and resources to building relationships with members of higher status groups (Portes 1998; Dominguez & Watkins 2003).

One key component of intersectionality theory is acknowledgement of historical contextual factors that affect current mechanisms of oppression. An historical factor affecting black women’s placement in the U.S. strata is their historically strong labor force participation in the secondary labor market in the early part of the 20th century (King 1995). Another factor is their improved educational attainment and movement into the primary labor market, resulting in a temporary decrease in the black-white wage gap for women (King 1995; Conrad 2001; Dozier 2010). The wage gap between black and white females then began to widen in the 1980s and through the 1990s (Newsome and Dadoo 2002; Pettit and Ewert 2009). Black women’s tentative placement in the labor market has been a result of several factors, including occupational segregation for those in the primary market (Dozier 2010), and restructuring of the entire labor market which further relegated black women in both secondary and primary markets to jobs with lower pay and limited advancement opportunities than their white counterparts (Branch and Hanley 2014).

Though black women continued to invest in human capital through education, on-the-job training, and migration, human capital attainment was not the major factor for black women's advancement into white-collar work. Instead, as white women gained advancements from civil rights legislation, they created openings in the clerical market, which were filled by black women. Investments in human capital therefore, could not stave off the pay gap between black and white women from the civil rights movement through the 1990s (King 1995). In fact, though black women made up two-thirds of the black American college enrollment for the past decade (Malveaux 2013), only part of the wage gap is explained by black women's continually lower attainment compared to white women (Pettit and Ewer 2009). Since 1980, the wage gap has increased consistently, and researchers explain this widening gap with evidence of various forms of bias and discrimination (Ortiz and Roscigno 2009; Castilla 2008; Correll et al 2007; Petersen and Saporta 2004; Kennelly 1999; Petersen and Morgan 1995), as well as occupational segregation (Thomaskovic-Devy and Stainback 2007). However, economists also point to the precarious employment of black women as a result of wage stagnation, fewer opportunities for full-time employment resulting from corporate restructuring and outsourcing, and the decline of labor market protective mechanisms such as union membership.

Economist Mary C. King (1995) confirms that black women tend to be relegated to certain occupational cells, including clerical work, service positions, public administration, entertainment and recreation (1995: 652). She makes the case through census statistics, that black women have historically been placed at the bottom of an

employment queue. This places white men at the highest point in the line for high paying positions in the labor market, followed by white women, then black men and black women. Though black women had gained economic mobility in the 1970s and 1980s by claiming employment in “medium-paying” jobs, they then lost their footing as the economy shifted, and were “bumped” back down to lower paying positions. Those in lower paying jobs were also “bumped” from their full-time positions to part time work.

The fact that more black women (22%) are employed in the public sector than white women (17%) creates a significant impact on black women’s employment during the latest U.S. recession from 2008-2012. As the federal workforce was cut, many federal agencies enacted payroll freezes, and state and local governments also enacted both pay freezes and cuts (Malveaux 2012). When we add this scenario to Marlene Kim’s (2002) findings that black women earn on average seven (7) percent less than similarly skilled white women, and three (3) percent less than white women in the same occupational category, we see that black women receive lower returns for human capital than their white counterparts. When we further consider that black women comprise 44% of household heads with children 18 years and younger, we also understand that black women’s ability to accumulate wealth and invest in the higher education goals of their own children is sorely diminished (Malveaux 2012). According to Collins (1990) these forms of bias, discrimination, occupational segregation, wage stagnation, and labor market vulnerabilities are indicators of black women’s location in the matrix of domination.

Social Capital, Social Networks, and Status Attainment

Theories of social capital explain how an actor maximizes the utility of his or her own abilities and achievements by socializing with other actors who can influence the final utility or reward for such capital. Social capital is defined different ways by different theorists. For this study, I used Alejandro Portes' definition of social capital, which is membership in networks or organizations that would lead to improved social status (Portes 2010). Social relations can be built or fostered through common ties, such as those with family members, friends, and church or community affiliates. For instance, two people from the same neighborhood or high school may form an alliance which results in each communicating information of job openings or low interest housing loans. However, equally important is the idea that the most salient common ties are the ones which help foster close social relations. In other words, we often associate with those who are most like us, and shy away from those who are not. As such, a more common delineation for the development of social relations is common membership in a particular social class. Social class membership can itself often be indicated through the formerly mentioned characteristics, such as community and neighborhood affiliates or workplace associations.

Within the scope of building social capital through social relations, a norm of reciprocity is established and kept. James Coleman (1988) shows how a relationship grows between two actors; actor A may perform a certain favor for actor B which provides an opportunity for actor B to enhance the reward from his human capital. Actor B will from this point be indebted to actor A until the favor can be reciprocated. A level of trust may build between the two actors as reciprocal acts multiply, and they may likely begin to reap constant rewards based on their relationship with one another and with the

social structure that rewards them for their efforts. The positive impact of social capital on economic mobility was stressed by Coleman (1988). However, other theorists note that the bounded solidarity and obligations found in lower-income kinship groups may be more of a hindrance to economic mobility (Portes 1998).

For those in any social network, the assumption of enforced trust and reciprocity are major issues for analysis (Portes 1998). Membership in working and lower class networks requires that one is aware of the needs of others in the network and is able and prepared to share material resources for the sustenance and survival of group members (Portes 1998). This is very different from requirements for membership in middle and upper class networks in which an individual is also required to invest time and money, but in different ways.

For access to middle class networks, an individual must gain the trust of members by committing to social gatherings and proving that one possesses the forms of capital and information resources to sustain the group's power and maintain social closure from lower classes (Portes 2010). The differences among social class groups is in the type of maintenance and social support required: the material support developed in working class and underclass groups, along with the possible connection to economic mobility, may vary substantially from the informational supports provided to their financially stable group members of middle and upper class groups. For instance, it may be possible that black women of higher class groups participate less in formal or enforced expectations of reciprocity, and more in reciprocal exchange, defined by Linda Molm (2010:121) as “individual acts that benefit another, like giving help or advice, *without negotiation and without knowing whether or when the other will reciprocate*” [italics mine]. In addition,

the roles of network members will often dictate the types of support that are provided. Family and friends will often have closer relationships than co-workers, so that awareness of material and emotional need is more prevalent. By contrast, many workplaces enforce socially constructed definitions of professionalism which may discourage closer personal relationships in favor of optimal productivity. Rules of behavior between two people in any network are dependent upon both the roles and social status of givers and receivers in the exchange (Agnessens et al 2006).

These social class differences in network exchange behavior mark a corresponding inequality in availability of social capital by class (as well as by gender and race) which notes that social groups have different access to social capital because of their positions within the structure of society (Lin 1999). As such, those with better placement in the structure have greater access to social capital, for greater chances of economic mobility than those will beginnings in the lower classes with less influential and less diverse networks (Son and Lin 2012).

A common explanation for workplace inequality has been the human capital theory posited by economists, wherein blacks and women achieve fewer labor market opportunities because of differences in individual human capital acquisitions, such as education. Higher investments in human capital achievement would result in increased productivity capability, and subsequent worth and advancement (Rosigno et al 2007; Sorensen 1996; Becker 1964). Early on, sociologists Blau and Duncan (1967) advanced status attainment theory to describe their findings that, even when controlling for ascribed status, “achieved status remained the most important factor accounting for the ultimate attained status” (Lin 2012). However, these analyses did not account for the

reproduction of inequalities that occur once educational achievements are increased. These analyses leave unexplained the unequal returns to education for black American women.

Network Ties to Mobility

Researchers continue to find that employment is still largely obtained through social contacts (Granovetter 1995; Chapple 2002). In addition, the majority of job contacts are obtained from networks with members of the same race as the job seeker (Quillan and Redd 2008; Mouw 2006). Once contacts are mobilized for information, employers use cues of social class and social capital in hiring decisions (Rivera 2012). When employment is obtained, upward mobility and career advancement is also enhanced through network affiliations within corporations which are delineated by class and race through hierarchical relationships (Roscigno et al 2007; Castilla 2011). Roscigno and associates (2007) presented a more in-depth analysis of micro-level processes that recreate macro-level social inequality. The analysis showed how organizational structures and procedures are devised in a manner which allows workplace supervisors and hiring managers to use their own discretion and discriminatory judgments in workplace interactions, hiring, and promotion decisions. These workplace interactions, fostered by organizational structures, help to solidify social capital by class and within social networks. Many workplace relationships are fostered according to hierarchical placement in the bureaucratic structure of the working environment. Some individuals in lower classes may obtain information for advancement through weak associations with members of higher classes (Chapple 2002), but advantages in social

capital and support are maintained through homophily in upper class social networks, which are also mostly racially homogenous (Reingold 1999; Mous 2002; Quillan and Redd 2008).

Social network theory directly addresses the means by which individuals are able to solidify interpersonal relations with persons of higher status, thereby accessing information for social education (middle class norms and etiquette) or advancement and economic mobility (Granovetter 1973, 1983; McLeod and Lively 2003). The social network approach to interpersonal relations has been associated with economic mobility in the stratification research for some time (Granovetter 1973, 1983; Lin 1999; McLeod and Lively 2003). Reportedly, those who wish to gain mobility in the labor force make use of relationships with acquaintances that may have other ties to the field in which they wish to make entry. Granovetter (1973; 1983) calls these “weak ties” because potential ties to the labor market come from associates, who are not close, but rather friends of friends, co-workers, teachers, or other passing acquaintances.

Theory on the strength of weak ties assumes that actors on the periphery of a dense network, or those who are just outside of a close group of associates, may have access to another network which provides information that is not common in the actor’s first network (Granovetter 1983). As such, the actor may be able to “bridge” ties and gain access to information that is useful for economic mobility. Granovetter’s notion of weak ties states that bridges may not be as beneficial for economic mobility when applied to persons with lower social class standing (Granovetter 1983: 208). This notion of a social class standing for weak tie benefits, in addition to findings that reciprocity requirements

in kinship networks take considerable personal time (Portes 1998), may limit the incentive for forming relationships with persons outside of the closer network, unless those ties are to persons with higher class standing. Actors will seek relationships with persons who can forge stronger ties to those central to the “better” network (those with more decision making ability).

Strong ties, by contrast, would be close friends and family members with which long-term, reciprocal relationships have been established. Such strong ties and close relationships also provide for multiplex ties. Multiplexity is described as an overlapping of roles, or role overlay, in which network ties between two people are characterized by two or more functions or types of support. Researchers in organizational networks note that multiplex ties have both an economic and emotional component (Ferriani et al 2012). As much of the sociological literature details, black single mothers, particularly those in lower classes, attempt to form multiplex ties from existing social support networks (Stack 1974; Dominguez and Watkins 2003). However, multiplexity has recently been shown to occur in several other dyadic, or one-on-one relationships, rather than just those with individuals of low socioeconomic status. For instance, Snijders and associates (2013) found that, among MBA graduate students, activation of appraisal support, in the form of advice regarding preparation for the job market, stemmed from friendship ties where emotional support was already provided. Multiplex ties can be formed between co-workers, for instance, as network members begin to socialize outside of work and become close friends. As co-workers are allowed to see one another in a variety of contexts, trust and bonding are allowed to flourish. Once these multiplex ties are formed, support for professional development is also established (Ibarra 1995). The issue at hand,

however, is that opportunities are few for black working women to form close relationships with higher-standing others, as Ibarra (1995) explains:

...any set of social relationships is embedded in a larger structural context that precludes or makes possible various kinds of social contacts: organizational demography, intergroup relations, and the distribution of valued resources within a social system constrain the development of informal relationships.

In other words, fewer black women in higher ranked positions results in fewer black women to form close, trusting relationships with, and fewer opportunities for multiplex ties in relationships for lower-income black women. Larger racial barriers established in the social psychological fabric of American society constrain many possibilities for crossing racial lines to form close relationships with racial/ethnic others.

By the same token, higher-income, professional black women who are closer to the perimeter of a powerful network may attempt, somewhat unsuccessfully, to forge ties with those still more central than themselves. Those who are somewhat distanced from the core of a high-powered organizational network may have opportunities to form weak ties with other periphery workers which could develop into stronger ties that provide information, encouragement, or role modeling for better work performance. The key for transforming performance into reward remains, however, in ties to the core of the powerful organizational network. For black women in the United States, institutional patterns of residential and occupational segregation which situate them in public sector and low wage employment may reduce economic mobility by reducing opportunities for forming weak ties to more powerful networks. As Ronald Burt explains in his review of

social network structure and it's relation to social capital, "connections are grounded in the history or a market." (Burt 2000: 348). Every potential tie in a network is predicated on the network members' hierarchical placement in the social structure to which they belong. Race, ethnicity, gender, and social class are all indicators of such a hierarchical placement, and would place differential constraints on black women's ability to access social capital, as well as to pass that social capital on to others like themselves.

Black American Women, Networks, and Economics

Native-born black American women in low income communities are typically not able to take advantage of weak ties because their circumstances reduce their ability to foster such relationships. These circumstances may include racial segregation in various social institutions affecting the women's lives. Such institutions would include church (Blanchard 2007), residential area and schools (Massey and Denton 1993), as well as segregation in employment (Roscigno et al 2007; Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback 2007; Stainback et al 2010). Instead, low income women in inner-cities, where many black Americans reside, commonly enact social networks for material support, such as transportation, food, child care and other tangible economic resources (Dominguez and Watkins 2003).

In their comparative ethnographic study of social network support and leverage, Dominguez and Watkins (2003) followed five black American and five Latino low-income mothers in Boston, MA. Their goal was to understand how the women use network affiliations for survival and economic mobility, seeking to address debates on

social capital, poverty, network theory, and immigrant incorporation. Dominguez and Watkins (2003) reference Stack and Burton's (1993) definition of kinscription as "power plays between family members to enlist individuals into a specific household division of labor, even when those duties derail or inhibit the personal goals or ambitions of individuals" (Dominguez and Watkins 2003: 114). Dominguez and Watkins find different mechanisms for social support (emotional and material support) and leveraging support (information for economic mobility).

The researchers find that family network support may work positively for younger women with supportive families, but that fictive kin may yield more effective support for mothers who either have no physically close familial support or who have tension within family units. It is important here to note that the black mothers were physically farther away from their families, and all but one of the Latina women lived with at least one family member. In addition, more of the black mothers exhibited tension within family units.

Some mothers may opt to cease contact with friends who could potentially provide material and emotional support, as some relationships are deemed draining and untrustworthy, heavy with reciprocal demands and interpersonal tensions. Instead, these women may rely more heavily on social service and religious institutions for social support. The reliance on public social services leaves women vulnerable to the time constraints of social service providers, as well as policy changes which may further restrict access to services. However, closer relationships with social service providers may provide access to heterogenic network ties with higher class individuals, thereby

allowing for more economic mobility. Such ties are also sometimes present in employment circles. Dominguez and Watkins (2003) found that the women experienced conflict between expectations for social support reciprocity and social leverage opportunities for building relationships that might result in advancement. Choices to live with family members for material and emotional support sometimes clash with those members' struggles with alcohol or drugs that disrupt households. Decisions to trust agency workers and child care providers are constrained by concerns regarding confidentiality and unqualified workers in low-income environments. Their study reinforced the notion that actions by both middle-class and lower-class groups, and by both dominant and marginalized racial or ethnic groups, largely affect the economic mobility efforts of black women, who are disproportionately represented among lower socioeconomic status groups (U.S. Department of Labor 2011).

Many low-income personal networks tend not to be effective for socioeconomic mobility because of the members' lack of power or social capital in the economic domain, so that job-seeking information in dense lower-class networks is often insular (Portes 1998; Chapple 2002). Those who have relatives in higher status groups may have access to more and better information for economic mobility (Higginbotham and Webber 1992; Heflin and Patillo 2002).

In addition, black American women in employment and organizational environments are often viewed as members without power, even when they hold managerial positions (Collins 1989). Ortiz and Roscigno's research (2009: 355) shows that "black women, by all indications, are more likely to experience higher levels of

discrimination in hiring, promotion and general harassment, and it is most often race based.” As a result, their positions in informal networks are not perceived as central to occupational operations and they may not be granted key information by other network members that could result in further upward mobility and social assimilation (McGuire 2002). This is why having the same network structure as whites may not be as effective for black women. Any information that higher-ranking family members have for employment may be less useful for the economic mobility of black American family members in lower class ranks, or it may not be provided at all, as black American women are not always allowed to take advantage of weak tie information in the few instances when they do receive it. Patricia Hill Collins expresses this notion with the term “interlocking oppressions,” noting that the inner-workings of one oppressive system are dependent upon other systems which work hand-in-hand to sustain discriminatory attitudes, schemas, and behaviors which limit progress for “outsiders-within (Collins 1998; 2000)

By contrast, first generation African immigrants may have a different set of social network experiences, depending on their country of origin and immigration patterns. For example, Sudanese refugees arrive in the United States after an extended period of civil war and unrest, housing instability and displacement, starvation, and ill-health in their homeland (Shandy 2003). Because of the difficulties associated with war, escape and resettlement, Sudanese refugees are often younger and less educated than non-refugee immigrants. Still, immigrant populations are able to form networks of fictive kin which aid in social mobility because of the social capital that many immigrants bring with them into the U.S. through transnational affiliations (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). Collins (1991:

301) defines transnationalism as “a view of the world that sees certain interests as going beyond the borders of individual nation-states.” Depending on the nation of origin and the reasons for migration, a migrant’s family and group members may be spread across two or several different continents. As such, migrants may be able to glean profitable information from several different nation-states. They may also be given more systematic access to powerful others than non-immigrant women, through separate agencies or individuals that can help with job searches, language learning, and other resettlement issues. Research needs to reflect the inclusion of these new African immigrants to provide a more inclusive measure of network support among blacks in the U.S.

Granovetter (1973) first proposed that those with achieved status who needed access to powerful others to help with status attainment could create a bridge between their own networks and the higher status networks. Individuals seeking upward mobility could form links with lower status individuals in the higher status group. However, even weak ties bridging more closed networks would be subject to the judgment of the gatekeeper in the successful network. The task of measuring gate keeping mechanisms which prevent outsiders from acquiring social capital requires investigations of discriminatory practices in employment and of homophily in social networks, or the tendency of network members to only associate with similar others.

Equally as difficult as measuring social capital is the notion of measuring resources for economic mobility without actually measuring economic mobility itself. As economic mobility itself indicates a measurement over time, this is not something that can be accomplished accurately in a cross-sectional study. The purpose of this study is to

reveal those aspects of black women's lives which *have or have not* lead to economic mobility for black women in the past, and those factors in the women's lives presently that *could* lead to economic mobility in the future. My working research hypothesis is that social network factors leading to economic mobility may be different for different groups of black women according to ethnic group, historical entry to the United States, socioeconomic status, and regional location in the United States. The factors presented as relevant to the research question lead us to highlight the theory of intersectionality as a focus in the investigation of economic mobility and social support.

Social Support

Four types of social support are generally described as utilized by those seeking protection from stressors. These types are: instrumental (material) support; emotional support, informational support and appraisal support (House 1981; Berkman and Glass 2000; Malecki and Demaray 2003; Gorman and Sivaganesan 2007). Instrumental support involves the exchange of material goods and services that help in the care for families, such as child care, transportation, small loans, or housing in times of relocation or eviction (Stack 1974; Domingues and Watkins 2003; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). Emotional support includes encouragement, empathy and consolation received from significant others who would attempt to protect one's self esteem through demonstrations of love and care (Thoits 2011).

Informational support usually occurs in the form of conversations and contacts that help in the acquisition of employment or promotions at work. In close-knit, poverty-stricken support groups, the information conveyed through dense networks becomes

redundant, severely limiting the effectiveness of informational support for employment assistance (Macinko and Starfield 2001; Smith 2005). However, if lower SES members have family or network members with middle class status, those higher status members may be held responsible for making sure family members have information which leads to gainful employment, as well as material support in the form of money (Higginbotham and Weber 1992; Heflin and Patillo 2002; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). This responsibility of providing material and informational support is seen as reciprocation for the support received as network members supported the higher status individual to achieve his or her goals.

Appraisal is another form of vital support that is often omitted in the research. Appraisal support is sometimes regarded as esteem support in social psychological literature. It is defined as support that can aid in shaping a personal appraisal, thereby assisting in the maintenance of self-esteem (House 1981; Thoits 2011). Reflected appraisals can be a component of appraisal support, in that the feedback from others helps us to shape behaviors based on the expectations and appraisals from a person or group (Matsueda 1992; Rawshorne and Elliot 1999). Reflected appraisals serve as a mirrored reaction: we hear others speak of us, listen to advice specifically designed for us, or gather perceptions from their interactions with us (Goffman 1959; Anderson 2011). In short, reflected appraisals are basic perceptions of how we think others view us during interactions. In this manner, reflected appraisals can be positive (encouraging and constructive) or negative (demeaning and derogatory), but they will still shape our perceptions of ourselves, and our interactions with others in our networks.

As network members seek to gain economic and social mobility, they should find the need for approval by family and friends to help with self-esteem and a sense of control. Appraisal support, then, takes the form of feedback provided to the individual about her interpretation or evaluation of a situation, and is often provided along with emotional support (Malekci and Demaray 2003; Thoits 2011). Since these perceived views shape our own subsequent behaviors, they also shape the social control exhibited by the opinions and feedback of others. Feedback from reflected appraisal aids in decision-making due to its influence on the individual's self-evaluation (House 1981; Malekci and Demaray 2003). However, the negative interaction, or disapproval of network members should ensure the opposite effect (Ellison et al 2009), especially if members do not agree with the person's means of achievement (Higginbotham and Weber 1992) or consideration of other network affiliations.

Negative interactions include intense conflict, excessive demands, and stinging criticism leveled at members of a group (Lincoln 2008). While most families usually endure some form of conflict, black Americans have been found to be more intensely affected by family conflict than whites (Chichy et al 2012). Researchers tend to use global items assessing support, or they often focus on informational and instrumental support in association with economic mobility (Malekci and Demaray 2003). Findings about the usefulness of only a few types of support in certain situations may not be applicable for participants in different age groups, gender, or cultures which require or are drawn toward different sources for such support (Malekci and Demaray 2003; Falci and McNeely 2009).

Sources of social support

In their recollection of social support studies, House and associates (1988) outlined major classes which account for the structure of a socio-emotional network which affected physical and mental health. These included marriage, contacts with extended family and friends, church membership, and other formal or informal group affiliations. These relational ties may also provide support (positive or negative) for economic empowerment and mobility.

Emotional support and romantic unions

Dominguez and Watkins (2003) investigated the support networks of black and Latina low-income women. Two of the five Latina women found emotional support in relationships with long-term boyfriends. Though some studies say that emotional support is not beneficial (Lincoln et al 2003), the Latina participants in this study found great relief in having partners who were present through difficult times and provided a listening ear. Of the five American black women in their study, however, none reported emotional support from romantic relationships. This absence of perceived support from men is reflected in much of the literature on black women in the U.S., particularly black women in poverty (Wilson 1987; Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1998; Edin and Kefalas 2005). Recently, researchers have found evidence of an interaction between the support that is available to black American mothers according to social class, and the support that mothers are willing to receive, according to class and age.

Using qualitative evidence, Burton and Tucker (2009) find that low income black American mothers exhibit a “temporal uncertainty” about life in general, based on their access to resources. As their labor market status and income wane, low income black American women also have difficulty securing stable housing and therefore may move quite often. They have difficulty securing health care and stable educational environments for themselves and their children. They are often stereotyped as lazy, late, and promiscuous by white employers, and these stereotypical evaluations significantly affect their employment prospects (Kennelly 1999). With mobility prospects often depleted, many black women have difficulty making secure plans for the future (Burton and Tucker 2009). As this uncertainty pervades their lives, low income black women, with or without children, find it difficult to commit to or believe in romantic relationships (Edin and Kefalas 2005). This element of temporal uncertainty must then be added to the evidence of a decline in marital opportunity, due to the availability of black men (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1998), to provide answers for why young black women often forego the possibility of emotional support from romantic unions (Burton and Tucker 2009; Lincoln, Taylor and Jackson 2008; Edin and Kefalas 2003).

In later years, middle-aged and older black women often find it difficult to consider stable romantic unions due, again, to financial, health, and psychological concerns, but in a different manner. Researchers found that older black women declined romantic relationships because they were unwilling to forego the hard-earned financial stability they had finally achieved. Additionally, many older black women were found not wanting to relinquish the autonomy and independence they had been denied in years

past as they had cared for kin and community (Burton and Tucker 2009; Lincoln, Taylor and Jackson 2008; Tucker, Taylor and Mitchell-Kernan 1993). They did not want to spend their later years caring for a potentially infirm partner. With the diminished prospect of emotional support from romantic involvement, many black women elicit emotional support from church affiliations. They find that churches often provide other types of support as well.

Religious affiliation for emotional and material support

The traditional black American church often fosters an environment of emotional and instrumental social support for its members and community. Research shows that religious coping may be especially useful for blacks as a stress-coping mechanism (Krause 2002; Chatters et al 2011). This may stem from cultural values of communalism, kinship, and interdependence that have been found in black spiritual traditions. Black ministers and parishioners have been noted to provide and rely on the black church for emotional and appraisal support in the face of racial discriminatory onslaughts in everyday life (Brown 2003). Increased involvement in religious activities provides for larger network access for emotional support in addition to greater instrumental support in times of financial need (Lee and Sharpe 2007). Instrumental support is often provided in the black church as a means of combating social obstacles placed in the path of black American citizens.

Black African Females, Immigration, and Economic Assimilation in the United States

As researchers continue to reference the “changing face of immigration,” concerns arise regarding the assimilation practices of new immigrants, particularly refugees. Constraints to assimilation exist for different racial and ethnic groups that have arrived at different time periods and under different political dimensions in the U.S. These include institutional discrimination and resistance in regards to educational, language, residential or structural, and income assimilation. Such constraints may multiply when considering the black immigrant female population.

Researchers of immigration discuss several means of assimilation in regards to different racial and ethnic groups over time. These include educational, language, residential or structural, income assimilation and inter-marriage (Alba and Nee 1997; Waters and Eschbach 1995; Waters and Jimenez 2005). Each of the researchers addresses the possibility that immigration does not work the same, or at the same rate, for immigrants from different parts of the world. Some note that, for the most part, new immigrant groups are “on their way to becoming Americans at much the same way that European groups did before them (Waters and Jimenez 2005). However, others note that the economic and racial characteristics of the host nation at the time of immigration have a definite impact on assimilation and economic prospects of immigrants. These assimilation and economic prospects also depend upon the nation from which immigrants come. As such, mechanisms of assimilation which proved fruitful for earlier European groups may not be generalized to groups from non-European nations. Some researchers note that the economic and political factors of migration flows may arise more from historical relationships between the sending and receiving nations. Assimilationist

perspectives which include push-pull mechanisms often do not clearly distinguish those historical relationships which may not be the same for all developed and underdeveloped nation-state pairs (Haller, Portes and Lynch 2011).

Portes and Zhou (1993) express concerns about segmented assimilation for the second generation of immigrants, noting that socioeconomic assimilation depends largely on the human capital that the immigrant possesses upon arrival to the host nation. Persistent racism, residential segregation and isolation affect the attitudes and opportunities of second generation immigrant youth in a manner which causes “downward mobility” (Portes and Zhou 1993). The theory of segmented assimilation is somewhat akin to world systems theory (Wallerstein 1974), in which institutional power in the receiving nation is deployed to penetrate the institutions of the weaker nations for labor resources that will serve the host nation’s needs. This is a reflection of colonialism and capitalism which have been reflected in historical relationships of many capitalist nations (Wallerstein 1974; Portes 1979; Portez and Borocz 1989). Populations are initially recruited to developed nations for employment, and supported through social capital from kin and community, rather than fully supported by employers. Those with high human capital receive a more positive response from organizations in the host nation. Still, all immigrants contributing to the U.S. labor market are subject to the same race based stratification system as native born Americans (Reitz and Sklar 1997). This means that even those immigrants with education equivalent to those in the American middle-class may be subject to racial typification of employers, who relegate racial minorities to more menial or other employment unsuitable for the education level of the

applicant (Portes and Borocz 1989). This is supported by Rivera's (2011) finding that employers are more likely to hire those who are culturally similar to themselves even when the skills of minority applicants are more suitable for the job.

Immigrants and refugees with fewer skills and educational markers are accepted into the country based upon notions that they can fulfill requirements for cheap labor. Researchers find that these individuals receive a negative reception upon arrival (Haller, Portes and Lynch 2011). Additionally, many newcomers with fewer skills are isolated in urban centers with fewer services and opportunities for socioeconomic mobility (Massey 1987). As American society is itself segmented, or split, between white middle class majority and minority racial/ethnic inner-city underclass, those who immigrate usually assimilate according to their placement in the U.S., racial divisions already in place (Portes and Zhou 1993).

As black women in the United States are among the most impoverished in the nation, the institutional constraints to economic mobility for black female immigrants are of particular concern. Many studies on the economic mobility of black females do not consider the heterogeneity of this population. Assuming homogeneity among black women disregards differences in pathways of attaining citizenship (i.e., citizenship by birth, refugee, or immigrant), differences in historical entry to the country (i.e., voluntary versus involuntary), and differences in settlement experiences among groups (community, family, language, employment, etc.). Such an assumption also disregards different ways in which the host society treats black women according to nation of origin.

African immigrants are particularly vulnerable to assimilation constraints, depending upon the economic, educational and political conditions in the countries from which they immigrate (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). African immigrant women, especially refugees, may suffer especially from systemic discrimination as a result of existing mechanisms of racial framing of American minority groups by the dominant American racial group. Current research reveals that more black immigrants reside in the United States than American Indians, Cuban Americans, Chinese, or Japanese (Williams et al 2007). As black immigrants, particularly those directly from Africa, enter the United States with different immigrant statuses, their means of acculturation and desires for assimilation may also differ. As U.S. native-born black Americans are disproportionately represented among the nations' poorest and are among those with the lowest median income, as well as a group often characterized as "unassimilable," a comparison of constraints and resistance to assimilation is warranted between multi-generational native-born and recently immigrated black American women.

Immigration from Africa to the United States

African immigration is among both the oldest and newest in the U.S., from 1619 when Africans were first involuntarily imported to Jamestown, Virginia, to the growing numbers of immigrants since the 1970's, and refugees since the 1990's (Martin 2005). Between 1970 and 1990 the number of Africans in the U.S., as reported by the U.S. Census, rose from 61,463 in 1970, to 193,723 in 1980, and then to 363,819 in 1990 (Arthur 2000). This represents a more than five-fold increase. However, many disregard the racial differences in African immigrants and the inconsistencies in American

reporting systems for racial and ethnic variation. There is no doubting that immigration has increased the diversity of the non-white population of the United States, but racial differences in immigration also affect and are affected by current patterns of racial inequality in the country (Waters and Escabach 1995). Census estimates that black females comprise approximately 10 percent of all female immigration to the United States between 2000 and 2010 (Bhaskar et al 2013). Few researchers have closely examined the differences between immigrant and native black American females with regards to socioeconomic status and assimilation.

Another inconsistency in immigration statistics is the unexamined variation across immigration statuses. Current U.S. Census data does not distinguish among immigrants, non-immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, or undocumented immigrants when reporting foreign-born. The latest population estimates have only just included distinguishing characteristics to show estimates for age, sex, and race (black or non-black) for those under age 65, in addition to Hispanic or non-Hispanic for those under age 20 (Kollehlon and Eule 2003; Bhaskar et al 2013). This omission in reporting heavily skews research on immigration and socioeconomic status, as each of these statuses affects the immigrant's ability to obtain employment, education or other opportunities leading to economic mobility. Inconsistent research findings regarding the economic status and mobility patterns of immigrants in the United States may be associated with this gap in immigrant status information. This particularly concerns African immigrants because the African continent has undergone multiple civil wars, droughts, and other political disturbances, many of which draw assistance and attention from the United States and the United

Nations. Much of this assistance includes the increased admission of African immigrants since the 1970's, and the increased admission of Sub-Saharan African refugees since the 1990's (Martin 2005), including those from the Republic of Congo, Somalia, and the Sudan.

One theory may offer some insight into the selection effect of foreign born blacks over native-born black Americans for economic assimilation and acceptance by the host community. In his empirical work on the economic attainment of native- and foreign born black men, Doodoo (1997) concludes that blacks from English speaking (colonized) origins may be more socio-economically successful than native-born blacks. Reasons for this include pre-migration exposure to cultural values, traditions, and experiences that distinguish foreign-born from native-born blacks, the greater availability of cultural role models in black majority nations, and the absence of a negative historical impact of racial slavery and segregation. Though a plea has been issued for understanding how historical differences affect the adaptive strategies of groups of women of color (Bond 1997), we still have yet to discover whether this theory of English-speaking colonial history holds true for native and foreign born black women.

Though little research has been conducted on the economic attainment of African females in the U.S., current research produces contradictory results. Kollehlon and Eule (2003) found no difference between African and black American females' hourly wages. These results, however, only specified hourly wages with the exclusion of military personnel, and did not distinguish between part-time and full-time employment. The inclusion of hourly wages for both full- and part-time workers may lead to an

underestimation of actual differences among immigrant and non-immigrant groups of black females. This is significant because black Americans are disproportionately represented among the nations' poorest and are among those with the lowest median income (Waters and Eschbach 1995). In addition, there are more black females in poverty than black males or whites (Kaba 2008). In their analysis of census data from 1990 and 2000, Corra and Kimuna (2009) found that, though African females achieved significantly higher earnings than native-born black American females in 1990, the advantage had diminished by 2000.

Sakamoto, Woo and Kim (2010) found that second generation African women not only are employed at higher rates and earn higher wages than black American women, but do at least as well as white women with regard to net earnings. This finding would support other generational assimilation theories and would call for more research on the differences in host acceptance of black immigrant females in comparison to native-born black females. Given the possibility that there may be nuances to racial, ethnic, immigration cohort, social class, and gendered stratification in the U.S. labor market, research exploring these intersections remains pertinent, while still considering the growing heterogeneity of the black female population in America.

Waters and Eschbach (1995) speculate that African immigrants are seen by employers as a more attractive substitute for native black American workers especially given the negative cultural stereotypes that exist for the latter group. For instance, black American women are still typified by white male hiring managers as risky choices for employment, given the high rate of single-motherhood among black American females

(Kennelly 1999). This remains true even given the fact that black American women have rising college education rates, which are higher than those of black American men (Kaba 2008).

Drawing on recent research and developing theory on variability among African immigrant and black American women's economic experiences, I focus my research questions on the structure and processes of social networks that expand or contract economic mobility across two distinct groups of black women in the United States: native born black American women and black women born in South Sudan. How do social network support systems differ for immigrant and non-immigrant black women in different status groups? I explore major differences in the ways that participants perceive their networks as either help or hindrance to their attempts at economic mobility and whether certain status markers, such as class, family structure, ethnic or immigrant group, or geographic location, intersect with one another in ways which affect possibilities for status attainment. Chapter 4 outlines the findings for native-born black women, recounting in their own words the situations and people that have assisted and still assist them in various ways, with both personal and professional matters. They also discuss the class cleavages and oppressive circumstances that hinder their attempts at emotional, material, and overall well-being. Chapter 5 details the struggles and triumphs of South Sudanese women from four different ethnic groups: Nuer, Dinka, Shilouk, and Kuku. These women share their difficulties and successes with social support and economic mobility in regards to local and transnational relationships. Of particular interest is the ways in which their immigrant status and cultural orientations affect acculturation

processes and the availability of support in different locations within the United States. In Chapter 6, the findings from each group of black women are discussed to reveal differences and similarities between the ethnic groups which highlight heterogeneity in the black female population. Intersecting oppressions, the availability of social support and the complexity of relationships are discussed as they relate to the structural and cultural contexts in which they exist.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The basic methodological approach to this research project is ethnographic in nature (Fetterman 2010). Conventional ethnography is the study of one culture sharing group that describes the group through a combination of research methods, including participatory observation, interviews, life histories, and content analysis, as well as others. The main goal of conventional ethnography is to reveal how the group members think of themselves, how they see the world, and how both of these views shape their behavior (Caughey 2006). In order to provide a completed picture of the cultural mechanisms at play within a certain group's behavior, many researchers believe that triangulation of methods is necessary to provide validity and reliability of the research. Methodological triangulation is a matter of using many types of research in one study so that the researcher can compare results of one type of research against another (Dance and Lunneblad 2011). This means of multiple methodology then performs as a system of checks and balances that assures more validity and reliability than can be gleaned from one method alone, thus leading to more objective findings, depending upon the objectivity of the researchers. Some researchers, however, see the assumptions of validity and reliability as too positivistic and finite. Triangulation can instead include multiple research sites, methodologies, data sources, theoretical perspectives and/or researchers (Dance and Lunneblad 2011). The end result of triangulation should still be a system of checks and balances that helps to reiterate the results of the study.

Regardless of which methods are chosen, at least one of the research tools in ethnography needs to be a form of field research. Because ethnography involves the understanding of a culture sharing group from that group's perspective, it is very difficult to gain the group's perspective without sharing time with that group. Though ethnography is more about the group's culture and behaviors in the present, we cannot understand that group's present perspective without gaining some knowledge of their past, therefore ethnography also investigates and reports some of the group's history so that the research and the readers can gain a better contextual understanding of how the group arrived at their current perspective and culture (Bond 1997; Abdelhady 2011).

This study encompasses participant observation, semi-structured formal interviews, impromptu informal interviews, and focus groups in two separate U.S. states, one Midwestern and one Southeastern. Because the study focuses on marginalized groups, and because the nature of the study is based upon rather intimate aspects of the lives of participants, care has been taken in gaining the trust of potential informants. I have therefore spent much time in the field building relationships. Theories of intersectionality inform us that my identity as a black woman do not give confidence to African and black American women who differ from me by social class, immigration status, or other important dimensions (Weber 2010). In other words, I have not been so presumptuous as to assume that other black women would openly confide in me just because I, too, am black. My internships at refugee and immigration organizations, attendance at community churches, and a visible presence in local venues have provided inroads for access to the black women of note.

Reflexivity and Situated Knowledges

As qualitative research is largely interpretive and the researcher must typically sustain long-term involvement with participants, some explicit reflexivity is required from the researcher so that readers may understand any potential biases, values, or past experiences which could shape the interpretation of the data (Creswell 2009). As a never-married, working class (sometimes underclass) black single mother from the southern United States, I have noted quite often (and quite vocally) the absence of students with my background in the graduate classes of my Midwestern university. Oddly, though our faces are not reflected in the classroom, our experiences seem to be constantly explored in sociological literature. These opposing facts have haunted me throughout my graduate career and have often caused me to question the literature, especially the supposedly quantitative and “objective” research findings. Quantitative studies often omit any reflexive explanation from the researchers, who often hold mainstream and middle or upper class statuses, as well as other privileges by the time of interpretation and publication (Collins 2000; Lather 2003; Weber 2010).

I intend to make my position quite plain. My racial identity, as well as my identity with the under- and working-class, is quite salient (Sellers et al 1998). My use of the word black instead of African-American is intentional.¹ My past difficulties with feeding and raising my son and convincing him to become a responsible, proud and intelligent black man are with me for life. My difficulties with and commitment to

¹ From this point forward, the term African American is only used to denote a specific category as is set forth by the U.S. Census, usually expressed as “Black or African American alone,” or in direct citations.

keeping him in school and out of jail are motivators that have continued to move me forward. The idea that I must foster and maintain relationships with middle and upper class persons, white or black, has always been a difficult one to muster, even those within my own extended family. Because of the people in my life, I have risen from underclass receptionist, to secretary, to middle management at a Fortune 100 corporation. I then plummeted back to the underclass, and learned to combine social capital with hard work to rise again. I do not wish however, with this new mobility experience, to undertake a middle-class front by denying my past experiences and separating myself, either physically or ideologically, from those who are now where I have been. Nor do I wish to disappoint those persons, now representing three social classes, who have pushed me to continue when I wanted nothing more than to leave this latest “ivory tower” and just go back to being a secretary. In truth, having bounced up and down from one economic class to another over the last 25 years since my son’s birth, I understand all too well that I could be thrust back into the underclass at any given moment without notice. I therefore am committed to interpretation that is as honest and indicative of these participants’ views as I can possibly muster. After seeing my views misrepresented so often, seeing myself in the literature without seeing my “self,” and after attempting to find answers to questions that were never asked in the secondary data industry, I hope to craft a knowledge base which is not mine alone. The standpoints of black women from the underclass to the middle class should reflect their intelligence and resourcefulness regardless of their income. The knowledge I hope to craft is based on the experiences of women who are like me, but still *not* like me, women whose standpoints are varied - different because *they* are different. Donna Haraway (2003: 25) calls for knowledge

claims and faithful accounts of a “real world” which are based on shared standpoints (not only white middle-class knowledge claims):

The standpoints of the subjugated are not "innocent" positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge. They are knowledgeable of modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts—ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively.

Because I have experienced much of my recent graduate school existence as an “outsider-within” (Collins 2000), I have often been tempted, or explicitly asked, to claim comprehensive knowledge of black women, especially those in poverty, without acknowledging my own power and privilege. I now therefore commit myself to acknowledging, listening to, and reflecting upon the various ways of “being” that black women adhere to in their attempts to gain social support for economic mobility.

Participants

Participants were recruited in a large city and a small town in a Southern State, as well as a large city and a smaller city in a Midwestern State. This is to allow for triangulation of sites in separate regions and labor markets of the country (Fetterman 2010). From here on, the sites will be known as Southern City, Southern Town, Large Midwestern City (LMC), and Moderate Midwestern City (MMC). These areas were chosen for comparison because of their locations in different regions of the country with varying racial and immigrant populations and presumably different labor markets that utilize each group’s members as employees. U.S. Census estimates that Moderate

Midwestern City, the capital of Midwestern state, has seventeen percent of its 250,000+ residents living below the poverty level, and four percent of its population reporting race as “Black or African American alone.” (See Appendix 6). Large Midwestern City reports that seventeen percent of its approximately 400,000+ residents live below the poverty level, and fourteen percent identify as Black or African American (U.S. Census 2013). Large Southern City, the capital of Southern state, reports that twenty-five percent of its roughly 450,000 residents live below the poverty level, and fifty-four percent of the population is Black or African American. Southern Town reports that forty-two percent of its less than 10,000 residents live below the poverty level, and fifty-eight percent of the population is Black or African American. Midwestern State’s Sudanese population is estimated at 2500+, while Southern State is estimated to hold 1,048 residents of Sudanese origin (U.S. Census 2013).

Forty participants were interviewed to allow for a variety of standpoints and socioeconomic statuses from two distinctive groups of black women at each site: South Sudanese and native-born black women. Sampling for the study followed a purposive design with maximal variation sampling (Teddie and Yu 2007; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). The idea behind maximal variation sampling is to purposefully choose individuals “who are expected to hold different perspectives on the central phenomenon” (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011:174). If participants are chosen that reflect varying ethnic and economic placements in society, then we can expect varying network structures and mechanisms of support. Flyers were posted at locations in neighborhoods that have a high number of the populations of interest. Women were asked to participate as I met

them in coffee shops, grocery stores, churches, refugee resettlement agencies and community gatherings, etc. Some of the women had already expressed interest in participating through my work in refugee resettlement and technical college teaching. Whenever possible, recruitment script forms were used to gather contact information so that interviews could be scheduled at a later date (Appendix 2). The goal was to reach ten (10) women, ages 35-65, from each ethnic group in both states (N=40), with at least four of these in each city. This sampling method allowed for multiple viewpoints of the participants (Collins 1998; Creswell 2009) and in-depth qualitative assessment of their social networks and economic mobility.

Human Subjects Protection

The IRB proposal was submitted and approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The current IRB form is an updated but separate project from a former qualitative project involving the economic attainment of South Sudanese women from the Nuer. That project allowed me to gain entry to the Nuer female population and begin to understand the ways in which their cultural norms shaped the way they approached economic attainment as they acculturated to American life. Changes to the current project form were made as the dissertation committee required, or as the sampling process changed due to unforeseen circumstances. The largest change was to the sampling of South Sudanese women.

Sampling and recruitment were extended to other ethnic refugees from South Sudan as a result of my community informant contacts and snowball sampling. Originally, only members of the Nuer ethnic group were to be sampled. However, field

observations and informal conversations revealed that many of the Nuer women congregate with women from other ethnic groups while in the U.S. Women from Dinka, Shilouk, and KuKu were often recommended for this study through snowball sampling. In Southern state specifically, specifying that participants be Nuer caused a considerable lack of trust among the entire South Sudanese group, resulting in hesitancy to participate in the study. Often referencing the current ethnic conflict in South Sudan, primarily between Nuer and Dinka, participants indicated that they would be more comfortable if specific ethnic groups were not singled out for study in the U.S. at this time. A revised Informed Consent form was devised which removed the specification for female members of the Nuer, and instead specified females "born in Southern Sudan." Informed consent was obtained from each individual who agreed to participate in the study (Appendix 3).

Participation for interviews and focus groups included audio taped transcripts. Informed consent forms for both native-born black women and for South Sudanese women was written in the English language. Four reasons exist for this linguistic decision. 1) Many South Sudanese speak ethnic languages that are not expressed in written form; 2) many South Sudanese women in the preferred age range are unable to read because of the effect of wars on the Southern Sudanese educational system (Boaz 2007); 3) many South Sudanese understand and speak Arabic (sometimes mixed with ethnic language), but view it as a language of their oppressors (Boas 2007; Edward 2007), and 4) English is now the official language of the recently independent South Sudan. South Sudanese language translators were available during most interactions

(recruitment, interviews, and focus groups) with South Sudanese women, so that all written consent forms may be translated verbally and the women may speak in the language with which they are most comfortable.

The anonymity of the participants was protected throughout the research process. All personal information obtained during this study that could identify the participants has been kept strictly confidential. All identifiable data (i.e., recruitment scripts, interview notes, field notes, and focus group transcripts) is stored in a locked cabinet in my home and has only been seen by me and my faculty advisor during the study. The informed consent was kept separately from the interview and focus group transcriptions and field notes. The interview transcripts were coded immediately following interviews only to provide pseudonyms, and then coded later for themes. The focus group recordings and field notes were transcribed and coded after each meeting. Interviews were thematically discussed and all personal identifiers stripped from the codes. Recruitment sheets were destroyed after observations of focus group interviews were complete. Any quotations used in the final reporting are identified with pseudonyms only.

Data Collection - Participant Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to explore social capital and social support for South Sudanese women and native-born black American women in Midwestern state and Southern state (Appendix 4). Ethnographic field notes were compiled from participant observation at public community meetings, church services, family gatherings, and other events. I focused on interpersonal

interactions which appeared to foster the development of social network support. The main goal was to identify the nature of relationships that lead to mobility, whether through family ties, friendships, community, church memberships, agencies, or neighborhood contacts. For immigrants, network ties may have also included pre-immigrant or post-immigrant relationships. Network ties of any participant could reside in other states or regions within the U.S. or abroad. Once this information was gathered through individual and focus group interviews, all data was transcribed and coded for recurring themes.

Social Network Indicators

With forty participants across four cities, the study was not designed to build a traditional “map” of social networks. Instead, my goal was to highlight the existence of multiple mechanisms of social support. Focus was geared toward uncovering the network practices of participants by investigating “concrete interaction between actors,” since this is the approach that best describes “strategies and network orientations at the level of individual actors (Hollstein 2011: 410). Instead of individually mapping the networks of each participant (ego), I collected as much data as possible from participants with varying situational constraints, so that their network positions and available social support mechanisms could be revealed from different intersectional placements in the social environment (Hollstein 2011). Following the work of Dominguez and Watkins (2003), I worked toward capturing the depth and breadth of network relationships, rather than their numeric clusters. The major goal of the research was to determine 1) whether the actors had access to resources, 2) the types of resources they had access to (appraisal

feedback, advice, loans, assurance, information, etc.), and 3) whether the participants' access to resources was a function of their relationships with the persons who own the resource (Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2005). To this end, much consideration was given to the types of relationships the women have, and how those relationships were a function of their available resources. This line of questioning led to data which points toward emotional and appraisal support, or the absence of such in the form of negative interaction (Chatters et al 2011), which is equally important as informational and material support in the acquisition of social capital and economic mobility.

When inquiring about the network ties for any specific mechanism of social support, a multiple name-generator method of questioning was used, in which participants were encouraged to name as many possible sources of social support as they could remember (Marin and Hampton 2007; Marsden 2011). In many instances, I prompted participants with examples of possible sources (aunt, cousin, husband, boyfriend, friend from neighborhood, co-worker, social worker, etc), to provide possible answers to the question. This often helped participants to understand that there are no limits to the number of people they could name as sources of support. This method also allows for the reduction of bias in the analysis (Marsden 2011) and retains the validity of results, as limits placed on a participant's sources of support would also limit the realization of a full definition of social support (Marin and Hampton 2007).

Coding of Themes

Thematic coding of the data was performed according to instructions outlined by Auerback and Silverstein (2003). Once interviews were transcribed, files were

maintained as Microsoft Word documents, according to the pseudonym name of the participant or the number of the focus group (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc), and inserted into Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner Lite 1.4 software. Relevant text (text directly related to the research concern) was highlighted and copied into separate files, entitled according to location and key term, for further analysis.

Once separated, the relevant text was analyzed for importance. Short titles or memos were recorded in the margin of the document to denote why that particular passage is important for answering the research questions. Once memos are completed, all of the relevant text was organized into a list of repeating ideas. “A repeating idea is an idea expressed by two or more research participants (Auerback and Silverstein 2003: 54). In the second round of coding, the organized and listed text was perused again for relevance. Relevant text was highlighted, and put into a different document with pseudonym, date, and page numbers, until I had constructed a master list of repeating ideas, with memos reflecting the title of the idea.

A third round of coding solidified the themes revealed by noting which passages were not reflected in the list of repeating ideas (orphaned text), which repeating ideas seemed too broad, which seemed too narrow, and which ideas were misplaced and needed to be included in another set of ideas. A master list of repeating ideas was then constructed. This list of quotes were analyzed to make sure that all of the quotes reflected similar ideas. Once this was done, the repeating ideas were organized into larger groups that reflected a common theme. A theme is “an implicit idea or topic that a group of repeating ideas has in common” (Auerback and Silverstein 2003: 62). The list

of repeating ideas were analyzed until each idea was assigned to a theme. After I had grouped as many repeating ideas as I could, I dealt with orphaned ideas and broad or narrow themes in much the same way as was done with the initial set of repeating ideas.

Data Collection – Focus Groups

Once the interviews were coded for themes, additional participants were recruited from community organizations for focus groups, along with interview participants, to analyze and respond to the earlier responses and the proposed themes. In many instances, members of community non-profit organizations were also members of the social groups that their organizations seek to assist. The objective of this participatory action research with focus groups was two-fold: 1) to further elucidate initial findings on social networks and economic mobility through additional discussion and clarification of themes, and 2) to brainstorm on local initiatives that improve structural conditions of members of the communities involved (Collins 1998; McIntyre 2008). The focus groups also aided in knowledge gathering with the idea that, though the participants' voices and perspectives need to be the focal point of the study, there are instances when individuals are not accustomed to the introspection processes that are required for qualitative work regarding intricate social relations (Saukko 2005). The use of focus groups for additional validation is based upon the idea that social life is culled from opinions, behavior, or motivations that are conditional. This additional measure of triangulation allows the participants to follow their own self-reflexive processes, which can further clarify themes revealed in the initial interview process (Saukko 2005; McIntyre 2008). Ideas for reform and for later large scale quantitative study must emerge from insights within the group. In addition,

language that respondents will understand in any quantitative instrument must originate within these groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Interviewer Issues and Resources

Gaining trust of the qualitative respondents required an extended time in each location. I had completed one semester as an intern at a refugee resettlement and immigration agency in Southern City, followed by a year of service as an AmeriCorps representative with the same agency. Many of my clients resided in Southern Town, as that town had undergone a major residential shift resulting in several vacant apartments, which local resettlement agencies negotiated with the town's leaders to help fill. As I was raised in Southern City, I was able to re-establish relationships with members of my high school class in Southwest Southern City during my 18-month service in Southern City. I joined the high school reunion planning committee and established very close relationships. During that stay, I also attended two black churches, one in Southwest side of the city on Sundays and another in a suburb farther south of the city.

When I returned to Southern City a year later for six months, I initially stayed in a house in a working class neighborhood in the southwest, then moved to another working class neighborhood home in a northeastern suburb. On Sundays, I attended the same church in southwest Southern City that I had attended before, but then began to attend Bible study at a black church in the northeastern suburb on some Wednesday nights. I joined a popular fitness class taught by a black woman in the northeastern suburb and made several friendships there. As I was also chosen as a Preparing Future Faculty Fellow, I arranged for my mentorship to take place with a faculty member at a small

liberal arts college in the same northeastern area of the city. I made sure to establish relationships in each of these spaces, and was able to make friends rather easily.

Upon my return to the Midwestern state, I initially stayed in a house in Large Midwestern City which was closer to a large historically black neighborhood. The host of this house took me on a tour of the large area and introduced me to several local activists, small business owners, and directors of non-profit organizations in the Large Midwestern City. In addition, some members of the South Sudanese community in the Southern state (and in Moderate Midwestern City) gave me the contact numbers of their family members in Large Midwestern City.

Gaining trust of the South Sudanese women did prove to be a challenge in both states. In Moderate Midwestern City, I began my study with the help of a South Sudanese undergraduate student at a university in the Midwestern state. In Southern City, I initially relied on relationships with South Sudanese women that I had helped gain employment during my service with the refugee resettlement agency. Upon my return to Southern City I found that one of those women had since moved to another Midwestern state to be with kin. The other woman, a member of the Dinka, was more than willing to assist me. Her son, an 18-year-old whom I had tutored in a refugee after-school program, introduced me to the Sudanese church in Southern Town and to the Sudanese Community Association, as well as with other Sudanese in the apartment complex where they stayed. Once I had attended a few church services and ingratiated myself with the members, this woman vouched for me and made sure that I was always welcome. Still, reaching Nuer in

Southern state was very difficult, as very few Nuer reside there, and inter-ethnic relations in Southern state are not the same as those in Midwestern state (explained in Chapter 5).

I also served as an adjunct professor at a technical college in Southern City, where I was able to foster relationships with other black American women. At a university in Midwestern state, I served as an instructor of Nationality and Race Relations and as a departmental liaison to a student Multicultural Center. These positions give me contact with other community members who could participate in the study, as well as with black graduate and undergraduate students who were willing to participate themselves, or introduce me to their mothers.

Initial ethnographic field notes were gathered during my internship service in Southern City and Southern Town from May 2012 – July 2013. Interview data collection began in the summer of 2014 and ended in the fall of 2015. Focus group discussions took place in each of the four cities, and were initiated after interviews were completed, coded and analyzed. For the Southern native-born group, the focus group took place within five months of the interviews. For the other three groups, focus groups took place from 6 to 12 months after the first interviews. This is because interviews for the first group were completed within a shorter period of time, and because of my own obligations which took me back to the Midwestern state before interviews and transcription for the South Sudanese group could be completed. Transcription, initial analysis and interpretation took place across the interview process, in order to assess self-reflection and to reframe questions from respondent feedback.

CHAPTER 4

NETWORK SUPPORT, ECONOMIC MOBILITY, AND NATIVE-BORN BLACK WOMEN

In the current chapter, I identify the range of social support mechanisms that native-born black American women perceive as present in their networks. I will also reveal how each of these mechanisms of social support have functioned in the women's lives as they attempt to achieve economic mobility. Roles of network individuals are also revealed, as participants discuss their relationships with people who either provide support or appear to hinder progress. The social status of participants and their network members is also discussed, as placement in an economic stratum is shown to be related to the availability of and perceptions of support. The availability of network ties that have two or more functions, or tie multiplexity, is discussed following a section on economic and family stability for single mothers. I discuss the nature of these multiplex ties and the situations that lead to them. Then I am able to contrast the class positions through an understanding of reflected appraisals and how appraisal support, stemming from emotional support, subsequently shapes or is shaped by the network structure of each participant, taking into account marital status, social class, and location.

Findings in the current chapter will help sociologists to expand our understanding of diverse networks for native-born black women across social class statuses, and explore more deeply the element of appraisal support and its connections to emotional and informational support. The investigation of appraisal support may challenge current mainstream understandings of support, thereby suggesting ways in which our "metric" measures of support should be conceptualized and investigated in future data set developments and network investigations.

Native-Born Single Mothers: The Struggle for Economic and Residential Stability

The native-born black single mothers in this study have achieved economic mobility and stability while stressing the importance of education to their children. Fifty-five percent (11 of 20) of the middle-aged, native-born black women in this study were at one time in their lives single mothers. These women were either divorced or never married. Twenty-five percent (5 of 20) of the participants are currently single mothers (either divorced or never married), with children in the home under the age of 18, or over 18 and in college and receiving support from the mother. Many respondents work hard to maintain stable employment and residences so that their family lives have fewer barriers.

When Niece² graduated from college in Midwestern State, she already had two young daughters. Since one of the girls was often sick, Niece needed employment that was more flexible than many of the jobs appropriate to her degree. She had been “doing people’s hair” at home for extra money during college, and decided to continue with this vocation instead of pursuing a more prestigious career choice. Niece recalls the following:

So, so often people say why are you in the business that you are in? And... I had kids... I needed the flexibility, where if I needed to get off I could. But I also needed the benefits. I did go out, and I did work in the [social service agency]. But they kept me away from my kids. And as I was helping other people take care of their families, mine was struggling.

² As stated in Chapter 3, all names have been changed to protect the participants’ identities. The names used in this study are pseudonyms.

Niece got the formal training and certification to take her talent as a hair stylist from the informal economy to the tax paying, formal economy. Niece still manages her work schedule to accommodate her daughters' educational, extra-curricular, and motherly activities (she now has two grandchildren that she co-parents). She has been working with the same prestigious salon for fourteen years. She just celebrated the university graduation of her oldest daughter, who was immediately employed at a state social service organization.

As a single mother of two children now over 18, Beverly, an accounting manager with an MBA, also maintains a very close relationship with both of her children. She occasionally cares for her son's child, as well as funding and staying involved with her daughter's college education. Sharnell's relationship with her 20-year old son is also very close, as they both work to lose weight so that he can qualify for the police force. When I ask Sharnell about her future goals, they are tied up in her son's goals: "I would like to lose weight. Um, I would like to help my son join the police force. You know but he needs to lose weight in order to do that."

Though Shelly has been married for a few years now, she recalls several instances as a single mother when she had to fight to maintain stability for her family. Her main goal back then was to make sure that her three children could place a value on their education. She recalls several conversations in which she couched the family's financial circumstances within the limitations of her own high school diploma. Her two sons have both had at least two years of college (one is still currently enrolled), and her daughter, a senior in high school, is currently on college tours.

These women individually and collectively provide a framework for understanding how a single mother links her own work to the future of her children. A single mother might provide

unpaid child care for a grandchild, or generate funds for a daughter's continuing education. In each case, mothers without a second parent resource are building stable resources for their families. These mothers at times may find their efforts disrupted by other extended family members, but use strategies of network multiplexity described in the next section to generate family stability.

Network multiplexity

These same single mothers speak of tremendous negative interaction in their extended families as they attempted to maintain stability. In efforts to shield children from the mothers' own abusive partners, drug-addicted family members, and other extreme occurrences, these native-born black women often created patterns of interaction within support networks, so that many network members performed overlapping roles. Several types of social support often came from the same people, so that women could benefit from network multiplexity. They found that, in some cases, certain very trustworthy people who knew about every facet of their lives could direct them toward solutions that would solve several problems at once.

Shelly, a 43-year-old regional office manager for a large trucking firm, relays information about economic advancements that were assisted by both a co-worker and a dating partner, and which resulted in new fruitful relationships.

Ok. When I came back to [Southern City], after I left my first [abusive] husband, I got on with a company through a temporary agency. I stayed there for 5 years...I was living in this one apartment that a co-worker had told me about. In these apartments I met a guy that lived upstairs and I started dating him. Well, his ex-wife worked at the company. And somehow or another we ended up on the same team, on the same floor--. And she wasn't very happy. . . I started looking

for another job. So he told me about a job where it... it was a place where he was a truck driver and his company was based out of this place. And he told me that he heard that the manager was hiring and if I was interested you know, he would um, talk to him and see if I could, you know if he could get me an interview... I went in for the interview for the position and I got the position. That's where I met my best friend, Karen [the Human Resources Director]. That's where I met my husband.

Shelley recounts all the ways that Karen has helped her during their friendship, such as providing feedback on raising children, informational and appraisal support for educational and career goals, and various forms of emotional support. When asked to explain why Karen is such an important source for her at work, Shelley says:

... just having her be... having known her for 15 years and having her be 10 years older than I am then, you know, it really brought on a mentorship . . . She saw a lot of things in me business-wise that I didn't know I really possessed... She really can help me um, get out of my emotions and bring it back to business and, you know, and really tackle it from a business standpoint rather, versus a personal and emotional standpoint.

As the Human Resources Director for Shelley's employer, Karen was also able to advocate on Shelley's behalf when a new position was created as the company grew. Shelley benefitted from a multi-faceted, trusting, and very close mentoring relationship with the woman she now calls her best friend. Though Karen has long since left the company, Shelley still cherishes the friendship that has developed. "We talk every day. Every day. She's like wine; I need her. Every day. [Laugh]."

Many of Shelley's closer network relationships have been fruitful in providing multiple forms of social support. Co-workers provide friendship and information for living space. A

boyfriend provides job information, then advocates on her behalf. An employment supervisor becomes a mentor and best friend, providing emotional, informational, and appraisal support for assistance with child rearing, marriage, educational goals, and career trajectories. These types of multiplex ties were common among the native-born black women who had experienced some extreme hardship in providing stability for their children.

After relocating to the larger Midwestern city, Jeanine (age 43) found that she could talk to her real estate agent about her divorce from established surgeon, her finances, and the struggles with her divorce lawyer over which assets to negotiate. Jeanine has two part-time jobs to accommodate her children's schedule. She is a part-time adjunct instructor at a local community college, and she is a reading instructor for a non-profit literacy agency. Having only recently moved back to the Large Midwestern City, she found it difficult to make new friends because of her family situation, and because of the fact that she is a "rather private person." She ended up sharing her life with the same people that were helping her to build economic ties and find a new home. In this manner, Jeanine was able to receive informational support from the real estate agent, and still utilize the budding friendship as a space for emotional and appraisal support. Jeanine recalls:

She knew I was a single mom. I was very honest with her, saying I was not sure if I could do this right now...And then things started moving to where I could see a little more clearly as far as how things were gonna play out with the divorce ...And even sometimes I would share with her things that were going on. Like, I would leave the lawyer's office sometimes and just meet with her.

The multiplexity in network ties for single mothers is not unique to them. Many native born black women, mothers or not, gave voice to the importance of role overlay, or multiple types of social support coming from an individual network member. An important theme that emerged in coding was the dimension of appraisal support, as illustrated below.

Appraisal Support among Native-Born Black Women

When speaking of the feedback that native-born black women received from network members, they often spoke about trusting relationships with people who were honest and caring. Women sought help from friends, family, and other mentors who understood their personal and/or professional goals. I found that the most successful relationships for appraisal support were those in which native-born black women could relax and be themselves, while learning how to be even better versions of themselves.

Reflected appraisals and how to “be”

Many native born black women seek advice for career issues from a variety of sources rather than just professional associates. In fact, much of their appraisal support comes from family, church and personal friends. Respondents find themselves recounting issues at work while they are with family, then gathering family members’ perspectives on how to respond to various situations at work. More often, however, family members offer reflected appraisals on how a respondent should “be,” rather than just how she should behave in certain specific situations.

Sandy (age 35), who recently received her Ph.D. in education at a Midwestern university, is currently unemployed, but has just received an administrative position at a university in

another southern state. She notes that she has relied on church members and friends to guide her on how to behave in difficult situations. She has been working for years on a presentation style that is calmer and less harsh or confrontational. Older businesswomen in her church have offered continuous advice and feedback on her impression management and on keeping a “proper home.” She speaks of one highly educated business woman in her 60s who has provided appraisal support over a long period of time that has helped Sandy to transform herself:

...this is not who I ever thought I would *be*. I wanted to be, but I just didn't see it happening. So she helps me...she's my model of being domestic. (laughs). Because she is gentle and she knows when to say things and she's an encourager and...I wanted to *be* like that....So I can talk to her about the spectrum of things, you know. Being married, being domestic, going to school, interacting with the politics at school. Um, how to talk to people, church politics. So I can talk to her about all of those things.

By the same token, Kim, a 48-year old with two jobs in the medical and social service fields, often seeks the support of friends and family to help her when she is about to let her anger show:

...they don't try to sugar-coat it... Um, they just shoot it to the hip, ya know, and tell me, “No, I don't think that's a good idea”... “Oh, I don't think you need to do it that way”... “Oh, I think you need to re-think it and give me a call back.”... Um, “Learn patience”... “Step back.”

When asked to describe herself, Kim says, “Well, I can't say I'm quiet, 'cause I'm not quiet.” But she is, as she says, “just a down-to-earth city girl, who likes to have fun and...I don't have

time for mess.” Still, Kim appreciates the type of feedback that helps her to grow. She trusts friends and relatives who are honest with her about emotional strategies that help her to be her ideal self. I worked with Kim on a social project from 2013-2014, part of which I spent in Southern State, and the other half in Midwestern State. Because I had formerly served in leadership roles like the one she was undertaking at the time, and because I knew the community that we served, Kim often called and asked for my advice on dealing with certain difficult people in our leadership group. I listened and quickly became Kim’s biggest cheerleader, expressing pride in her work and doling out compliments like candy. I also frequently sided with her when she expressed negative opinions about those difficult people, assuming that she wanted the type of emotional support that provides a listening ear for venting. Over the course of the year, I noticed that Kim started to call me less frequently, until our conversations faded completely. My interview with Kim took place about four months after our social organization project was completed. Listening to her explanation of what she wanted in advisors, I finally realized that Kim had not expected or wanted someone to agree with her. Instead of emotional support, Kim had wanted honest appraisal support. When she realized I would not provide that for her, she moved on to people who would. I asked her if my suspicion about our relationship was correct, and she did agree with my assessment of the situation.

Reflected appraisals and stigma

As native born black women occupy more than two disadvantaged social statuses in American society, this influences not only how black American women see themselves, but also shapes the perceptions, expectations, and responses of others toward them (Brown and Keith 2013). Stereotypes and stigma shape larger societal views of minority group members and

outsiders, so that members of those groups behave with the constant awareness of the reflected appraisals that affect their social group and socioeconomic status and mobility.

Many of the native-born Black women in this study found it difficult to express racial identity and how that affects their interactions with persons of different races and/or classes. When asked in various ways, whether they had close interracial friendships, most responded negatively, regardless of socioeconomic status, and gave a myriad of reasons for the lack of racial/ethnic diversity in their networks. Those who do have racially diverse networks are find ways to mention it. Without prompting, Malinda speaks of diversity when I ask her about who gives her appraisal support for managing her many volunteer responsibilities. She first mentions one Latina friend, then a white friend, and says,

One thing I am blessed with is that God has positioned more Caucasian women in my life. Because I prayed and asked Him to diversify my friendships, you know, ‘cause all I had was black friends...Both of these women just grab at my heart. I just love ‘em.

When the native-born black women do speak of close friendships with whites, the explanations are usually juxtaposed with contrasting, less friendly interactions they have with those who are not as close.

Raised in a southern small town and now living in Moderate Midwestern City, Cora, a 45-year-old psychologist, is a little surprised that she has “these affluent white women” as friends.

I, ok, I have my black friends and my white friends, ok? Um, I've managed to land in places, and I really don't understand why. Sometimes, the friends that I make are really affluent white women here in town. And so I have connections with, I mean I don't know who you know, but I call friend, um, one woman who owns [an aviation company]. I call friend the woman whose husband owns [large motor company].

These are my friends. They're like, really, really affluent white women.

Cora notes that these friends provide her with lots of emotional and appraisal support, helping her with larger purchases, serving as references, taking her on lavish trips and generally supporting her and her family. She is amazed. By the same token, Cora distinguishes between white friends who are supportive and those neighbors or acquaintances who are watchfully suspicious. Living in this city with a distinctive small-town feel, in a moderate, middle class neighborhood with very few black families, Cora notes that the houses are fairly close to one another. One Sunday afternoon I join her and her family for dinner. As we stand in front of the sliding glass doors leading to the back porch, I can very clearly see all of the backyards that are adjacent to hers. Cora calmly remarks on the great interest her white neighbors take in her family affairs. She notes that when she has friends over for a bar-be-que, the white neighbors whose backyard is opposite hers will sit on their porch, wave, and watch the party as if it is their own source of entertainment. She also has a white neighbor who walks in the neighborhood, and inconspicuously peruses Cora's trash and yard to note what large purchases she makes (cars, TV's, stereos, etc.). Any of these observations are subject to being brought to Cora's attention at work by co-workers who are friends or relatives of her watchful neighbors. "I'll get to work and someone will say, 'Oh, I heard you got a new widescreen TV,' or things of that nature... we

realize it may be time for us to move, away from watchful eyes - for a little more privacy,” she says. I am struck by the calm in her voice and the matter-of-fact smile, on her face as she recounts these incidents of surveillance which stretch from home life to work life.

Many of these middle-aged black women were raised in segregated neighborhoods. As such, they did not begin to consistently interact with whites until late adolescence, either in university or work life. Others were raised in mixed neighborhoods for part of their adolescence and then encountered all-black neighborhoods later in life, when their families changed residence. So, when these black women’s racial interaction patterns changed, they became aware of the differences between all-black interactions and black-white interactions. They also became even more aware of how whites in mainstream society viewed them, and developed a keen sense for understanding inter-racial reflected appraisals.

Even when mainstream individuals are being helpful and friendly, native born black women report difficulties with trusting the motives and performances of whites. “Some [white] people know you’re a single mother ... moving up, and they just wanna be a part of your story, you know,” says Dee, a 42-year-old part-time claims processor and graduate student on public assistance. This seemingly calculated behavior of mainstream individuals sets a standard for the behavioral expectations of black women in the presence of whites. Some of the black women in this study expressed frustration that they are expected to act as if mainstream standards and culture reflect the norms that should be aspired to, even when those norms stood strongly counter to the cultural norms that these women were socialized with, the cultural norms that served as protection against mainstream discriminatory attacks. Dee explains:

I know how society views and recognizes me. I know I'm the lowest on the totem pole, so I'ma keep it movin'. I know there's a time and place, for, for lack of a better word, my ghetto-ness....And I know there's a time and place for my professionalism. And I try to be, bring professionalism in there. But I'm conflicted. Because on one end, I'm not right, but on the other end, I've been conditioned to think that being ghetto is the way to express. So where is – where am I, as a Black woman? Where is my... my, my thing? I, I can't, I don't even have a word for it! Where am I? Because if I get ghetto wit' you, that's still not reflecting me, 'cause I'm being conditioned to do this. But then, if I'm being proper (put's fingers up to reflect quotes), that reflects white society and I'm still not in there! (Claps.) And I'm just - first of all, who am I? ... I don't want to cry. (Wipes away tears.)

The women spoke about being socialized in white mainstream settings to denounce their own cultural norms, and being inconspicuously sanctioned if they did not. If they mentioned the sanctions in interracial interactions, they were called “hyper-sensitive,” neurotic, or angry. In the interest of economic mobility, they learned to smile back and continue with the communicative farce, noting varying degrees of confusion along the way.

Some of these difficult reflected appraisals and stigmatizing responses apply not only to interactions with whites, but also to interactions with black women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Being aware of the possibility that black women may internalize mainstream norms and appraisals, the native born black women in this study shrewdly distinguished between genuine and non-genuine facial expressions and gestures. But they also understood that each

individual in an interaction would be equally concerned about her own performance based upon their class, racial, and gendered placement in society. Sharnelle, a 35-year-old regional finance manager, relates the following:

I handle people. I handle them from the place of...I wanna know how what I'm saying to you affects you. I start out being frank, and I watch people's responses, and then I pick and choose what I can tell you.

As a middle class woman from an impoverished and abusive childhood, Sharnell easily recognizes differences between her own outlook on life and those of her two best friends. When Sharnell converses with her friends, she decides what she will tell them about herself based on her perceptions of the judgment in their reactions to her own behaviors and worldview. As such, she finds herself providing much more support to friends than she will ever allow them to provide for her. She decides to “handle” them by only revealing bits and pieces of her daily life. She will not trust them with the whole story.

The farther down black women perceive themselves to be on society’s economic strata, the more guarded and calculating they become in their own behavior. This type of interaction takes a toll on emotions by constraining expressions of identity, sometimes, even with those who are called friends. “Handling” people becomes a necessary tactic for emotional survival.

Appraisals in the “black church”

Very often, black women who were raised in the lower and working classes deal with an acute awareness of difference when interacting with members of the dominant class or race. Internalization of difference and racial or class inferiority may largely affect family tensions

arising from disputes about life choices, single parenting, interrupted education, unemployment, and legal troubles. Church members may degrade or otherwise make uncomfortable those who seek emotional shelter from difficult situations regarding these issues. The church serves as an alternative community resource for emotional solace and support in an age where many Black Americans still harbor an acute distrust of U.S. institutions. For instance, the long history of abuse and ethnocentric mistreatment of blacks by health providers reduces formal agency help seeking. This makes it all the more difficult for women who are rejected or viewed as inferior by their own church or community members, who could provide much needed social support.

One contrast in location I see, is the relationship between the “Black Church” and single mothers. While none of the participants in the Midwest spoke of rebuke or shame from the church with regards to single parenting, mothers in Southern City spoke about experiences of shame and a lack of social support, specifically from black churches. Malinda is a 65-year-old retired police woman who had her first child at 16. When she spoke of her current church, she was also quick to explain why she loves all of the support she gets from this church, which fills her life with activity and friends who support her and even come to her for advice. In her current church, Malinda feels “truly loved and supported.” Church members are the first people she mentions when I ask her who makes her feel loved and supported. “Well, I guess I would say a few friends at church. Do I have to name all of them?” When I say no, she says,

Ok, well there’s my prison ministry group, people in my church, and then a group of 10-15 [older] women that get together every second Saturday in the month. A couple of them are not members of the church. It’s a mixture of my church and a couple of other churches.

I finally learn how to be frank with Malinda about no longer attending her church, as she has invited me several times to services and church functions. She still shows visible signs of disappointment that I once again will not come, and makes mention of it in almost every conversation. “I’m just praying and waiting” she says. But during the first few months that I spend in the Southern City, Malinda gives a silent look of disapproval, or a frustrated sigh, whenever I attend a certain black, middle class church on the Southwest part of town. This church is one that we both once attended as members. She quizzes me on the Bible lessons and sermons and quickly provides a contrasting report of her experiences at her current church (Field Notes, March 2012). Over the years, Malinda and I discuss at length the larger church’s lack of support for and negative interactions with single mothers. I have conversations with another of that church’s older, long-standing members. She admits, “No, we really were not very supportive back then.” Even Malinda’s daughter, who had her first two children out of wedlock, recalls when Malinda left that church “because they weren’t open to the idea of her having a pregnant teen-aged daughter.”

In another black Southern City church, Anita also left her long-time family church after receiving a new, younger pastor who was “full of himself.” Anita tries to explain the situation that led to her departure, and finds herself getting angrier the more she recalls her almost constant negative interaction with the young pastor. She relates an encounter with him in a neighborhood discount store, and explains why he has not seen her in church for some time by asking a heated question:

I said, “What do you get off...telling my daughter...that...you don’t normally baptize unwedded kids?” And I told him -- I said -- I said, “Dear, you got the

audac [audacity]...” I said, “If I tell my mama what you said to her,” I said,
 “Don’t you know my mama [will] go up one side and down the other side of you?
 ... “Some of the things that you said to her, in that counseling before the baptism
 for my granddaughter was unappropriate.”

Though Anita is a very intelligent woman in her own right, she finds herself so hurt and angry at her former young pastor’s behavior that she cannot complete her words, let alone sentences.

Though she has disagreed with several actions initiated by this new pastor, his worst insult came with a negative interaction in a counseling session in which he derogated her daughter before her grand-daughter’s baptism. “And I told him, I said, um, “And you wonder why you can’t keep no members?” For Anita, this was extremely inappropriate, hurtful, and the last straw before leaving the church where three generations of her family had been members.

Again, these tensions within the black church were not apparent in any of the interviews or observations in the Midwestern state. However, here it must also be noted that the Midwestern state has a Black population that is below five percent, compared to 30.5% Black population in the Southern state (U.S. Census 2013). There are no all-Black churches in the Moderate Midwestern City (even the African Methodist Episcopal church in this city, a denomination founded by blacks in the 1800s, has many white members). Additionally, as a result of the population base, the income distribution among blacks is much wider in the large Southern City, creating a greater possibility for class-based intra-group conflict. Though this class-based conflict was not apparent with single mothers in the Moderate Midwestern City churches, it was apparent in those of the Large Midwestern City, which has a more concentrated black population base. For low-income

participants in the Large Midwestern City, conflict with the church has dissipated as they just stopped attending church. Their major conflicts arose in interactions with middle-class Black workers in the social service industry.

Support from social service workers

One respondent in the Large Midwestern City provides a detailed account of a single mother on food stamps and Section 8 housing assistance, Dee admits that her black social workers actively discriminated against her, and she had to get help from her white, more powerful social worker, who is now also a mentor to her 20-year-old son.

...you have a social worker, and then you have an Employment First worker. The Employment First workers were black females. But, the blessing was my white female caseworker was in the same building. So I used to go to these meetings, and be irritated because they [black workers] kept losing my files. I mean, my work, you know, stuff you gotta turn in.... And I began to think that, you know what? I think they're doin' this to me on purpose... this went on for months.... They tried to sanction me. And Mary Beth didn't let it go through.

Dee expresses great derision between her and higher class black social workers, noting that her greatest assistance in dealing with this conflict came from a white social worker who had also provided services to her mother and son on separate occasions. In many instances network diversity for lower class women occurs in times of confusion or difficulty, as negative interaction motivates a larger search for alternative sources of support. However, this search for alternative support sources can also occur for middle class women.

Reflected appraisal, being different, and standing their ground

The native-born black women in this study are aware that their culture and interactions are different from mainstream white women in some elementary ways. Because of these differences, they will sometimes need to find social support through different channels, and sometimes they have to whittle down their social circles and support groups to harness trust in relationships. But there is some difference with the native-born Black women who were either raised in or are now a part of upper-class families.

Isabella, a 45-year old middle class counselor in Moderate Midwestern City, also recognizes that she does not fit into any common mold. Single with no children, she will continue her doctoral study when she can, as it fits into her transnational work schedule. She finds support from white men, black women, anyone who can guide her to where she sees God calling her. She will not deal with people who do not believe in her trajectory and often deflects reflected appraisals that do not match her own values. She discusses interactions with people who maintain that she should uphold a certain class appearance through conspicuous consumption:

Isabella: That's social pressure ... This is from my colleagues who say, "You know you need to do better than that. You got to be a certain way, do a certain - oh please! You know?"

LJ: Ok. And you still end up maintaining relationships with those people?

Isabella: Umhmm. For the most part, you know. It might pivot, it might change a little bit. You know, I might not have uh...the depth might be a little less...I put 'em in a

different category. (laughter). Until they completely piss me off. But until then they can still serve a purpose for me. I'll keep 'em for a little while. But I might have to start honing in or backin' up! (makes motions as if driving a car.)

Instead of eliminating entire relationships, Isabella pragmatically preserves relationships by changing the strength of her network ties. Stronger bonds become weak ties so that she maintains key network connections without succumbing to social pressure from negative appraisal.

Similarly for Cora in the Midwest Moderate City, career and experience explain her choices of friends and closer family members:

Cora: Of course being a counselor, I'm not sure how much...

LJ: You share with other people?

Cora: (Shakes her head.)

LJ: No, you don't.

Cora: Yeah, I surround myself with people who are good for me.

LJ: And the people who are not?

Cora: I step away from them.

Terry, a 44-year old non-profit executive in Southern City, operates the same way. The one person that Terry trusts the most with her future is her husband, a well-established lawyer. Friends are easily dispensable, or at the very least, put aside when they provide more negative

interaction than positive feedback. “I actually very seldom get negative feedback. If advice comes to me in a negative way, I just move away from it and don’t indulge.” Terry is confident and trusts herself with her future goals and plans. When I ask who gives her advice and emotional support, her very calm and collected answers most always include “myself.” She is savvy in her maintenance of relationships with the former bosses and associates who can provide guidance and help with her plans. She is also careful in the maintenance of distance in those relationships. In a focus group discussion, Terry expresses surprise that respondents had so often mentioned long-term friendships with former co-workers.

I don’t know for me if it’s that prevalent in my world where my former co-workers over the years have become so close to me. I mean, you stay connected, cause you need references (everyone laughs), and you want to bounce ideas off them. But not transitioning to becoming a part of my close circle of friends and family and network in that way...

Terry’s standpoint on the necessity of boundaries between business and personal relationships reinforces her maintenance of weak ties. This standpoint also serves as the basis for her surprise at learning about some participants’ close, long-term friendships with co-workers. Like Isabella and Cora in Midwestern State, Terry’s network is large, diverse, and filled with more weak ties for potential mobility. She is able to maintain ties that are close enough when she needs support, yet still distant when any negativity is about to surface. Terry, Cora and Isabella are examples of highly educated black women who are quite adept at avoiding negativity in relationships. Their careers and education expose them to a variety of potential network

members, so that they can choose with whom they build close ties strategically, and distance themselves from or totally discard those that will distract them from their goals.

Direction on How to Move Forward – Negotiating, Planning, and Network Diversity

Michelle, a real-estate broker in Southern City, maintains network balance in other ways. Because she has maintained an 18-year-long relationship with her white former co-worker, that relationship has morphed from strictly professional to friendly and advisory. Raised in a deep-south, rural town with a very large family, Michelle has risen to lower middle-class status after several hardships with her health and her love life. She has drawn support from any available source and her worlds have collided several times, so she sees no need for pretense or posturing. Having built much of her current friendship network from relationships with former co-workers and school-mates who witnessed her hardships, Michelle notes that she was quite honest with her friends from the start of each relationship. As such, Michelle has been able to provide friendship and emotional support in exchange for information and appraisal support. With her own brand of southern straight-forwardness and keen observation skills, she has been able to see her ideal self in others, boldly strike friendships, and then broker long-term relationships for consistent, years-long sources of information and guidance to help build her career. For Michelle, as for many of these women, one source of support does not lend itself to economic mobility. Instead, a combination and balance of all support mechanisms yield the more successful approach to building a diverse network for economic mobility.

For others in this study, as with Michelle, network diversity arises from circumstance and location. Dinah recalls the tremendous amount of stress that she suffered while watching the black people she grew up with discriminating against a white woman in her workplace. After

leaving the neighborhood and joining the military, Dinah came back to town with a broader view of race relations. Her old neighborhood friends, who had now achieved success of their own and worked in the local community college administration, had not had the same positively diverse experiences as she.

...here's the interesting part. It was a program that was for the most part all African American. And my direct supervisor was a white woman. And if there's such a thing as reverse discrimination, she experienced it and it was just kinda one of those things.

Dinah relates the disappointment of watching her own social group applying the same discriminatory treatment that blacks have suffered for so long. She later speaks of her own empathy and inner conflict as she watched the situation unfold and take its own extreme emotional toll on her white supervisor.

I found myself, just feeling for this woman so much. And again that was per my opinion as to what I thought was going on. You know, it just it watered down to she had a nervous breakdown. And she left. She and I have stayed in touch. I just went to her wedding this summer. She's very happy now. But...I don't know. It never set well with me, and it was just too taxing. It was taking more from me than it was giving, particularly this position and it...just wasn't worth it.

Sometime later, Dinah left the job also, noting that she never got over witnessing this experience, and elected to maintain her relationship with the white woman, rather than the black people who had participated in discriminatory treatment.

Isabella claims that she has a diverse network of white males and females, but does not find it all that special, because she has had positive interracial interactions throughout her life as a part of her family's elevated class status.

...the thing about it is, you know from a class perspective, my family has always been....the muckety-muck, you know. But never really talked about it or said anything because that wasn't how we were raised. That wasn't how my grandparents raised their children, my great-grandparents raised their children. You know, you don't flaunt it. You receive your education; you give back to the community. You have resources, you bring somebody up who might not have that sort of thing.

These women believe, as the people around them believe, that based on social class they are different and do not fit into a mold. They believe that they must be strong enough to withstand the negative interaction and to repel it, and they make network choices according to this belief about how they see themselves, and about how others see them.

Reflected Appraisals, the Upper-Class, and Network Gatekeepers

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) notes that “when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole (Goffman 1959: 35).” But the accredited values of the society may be contradictory to the stereotypes that are held about a minority group. Therefore, as many will present what Goffman calls an “idealized self,” a certain type of front can aid in network acceptance and social

mobility. For minority group members, performance will quickly be cast against the more common stereotype held about his or her social group. In this manner, it is highly likely that, at the very outset, the performance of a minority group individual will not be believable to the dominant group members, simply because majority members are free to rely on stereotypes to build their general impression of the individual, whether he or she performs well or not. As such, when lower-class Black women attempt economic mobility, they must many times have their presentation approved by middle and upper class Blacks, who will act as gatekeepers to higher class networks.

After a focus group with native-born black women in Southern State, I arrived at my key informant's home in an upper middle-class neighborhood and parked my 2001 Jeep Cherokee behind his late model convertible Mercedes Benz. Upon seeing my car, Beverly came over to have a glass of wine and some private discussion, while my benefactor was upstairs. She noted that one woman in the focus group (Sharnell) did not seem to fit in with the others, who all had more upper-class orientations and networks. Beverly remarked on the problems that the woman was having with her friends and relatives, and concluded the following: "She's just young." I didn't quite know how to take Beverly's remark, and before I could ask her to explain, our conversation was interrupted. The owner of the home came out of his office upstairs and greeted us from the balcony. Beverly began a discussion with him on critiquing her resume. She says in a sidebar to me that the focus group has reminded her that she needs to move forward with her own economic mobility. The benefactor agreed to help and immediately launched into a list of instructions for how to proceed with her network interactions. Her first task, he instructs, is to initiate tactical conversations with the very influential Black men that she jogs with every week.

He knows two of them well, and will initiate conversations on Beverly's behalf. I ask him if I may introduce him to the "young" participant in the focus group. He asks a few questions about her, including how she "looks", then announces she cannot help her until she loses some weight. "If she can't control something as simple as her own body, then she won't be able to control anything else." He then eyes my own obese body and asks how my Zumba classes are coming along. (Field Notes, January 2015).

In another instance of gatekeeping, I sat in the very upscale home of a participant when her husband walked in with their son. When introductions were complete, the husband, a well-established lawyer, launched into a very serious interrogation of my work, my hypotheses, and the counter-argument to my hypothesis. He asks if I know of a sociologist who is a friend of his. I have heard the name, but note that the researcher's specialty is not the same as mine. He remarks that this researcher was in their wedding party, and that he would be keeping the copy of my informed consent (meant for his wife) to discuss with that sociologist. (Field Notes, October 2014).

The maintenance of boundaries for upper class women is distinctly different and more pronounced than those for poor and working class women. Male partners and friends take a very active role in protecting upper class networks from infiltration. As such, these men also protect their female friends and acquaintances, and are very clear about what they see as their roles in such gatekeeping practices. Upper class women themselves seem to take a different stance than their male protectors. They simply say that they are very independent, or that they don't have time for negativity. They are often unaware, or resistant to the idea that the negativity they shy

away from often comes from lower class family members and acquaintances who could benefit from their guidance and assistance.

Social Support, Roles, and Types of Relationship

For the women in this study, levels and types of support vary according to the context of relationships. Reflected appraisals from coworkers are presented differently than those with family, church, and romantic partners. Negative interaction may be more emotionally damaging in relationships with family members than it would be at church. Context and the type of relationship have large-scale effects on whether support is given, received, reciprocated, or absent altogether.

Relationships with coworkers and bosses

When the working class, native-born Black women seek advice from co-workers, they do so with an honesty that defies impression management rituals portrayed in Goffmanian style interactions, where performances of self are predicated upon the expectations of the network to which the respondent wants to be accepted (Goffman 1959). Many women in this study presented themselves wholly to potential new network members, with no pretense at all.

While searching for a home, Kim spoke often spoke with her real estate agent over the phone at work during lunch hours. She had a conversation with the realtor, expressing concern that the realtor had shown her houses well below her current standard of living. “I said, ‘Um, would you live in that?’ And he said, ‘No.’ I said, ‘Well, why da hell you showin' me that?’” She had been practicing her coping techniques and was calmly trying to convince the realtor of what she wanted in a new home. After overhearing the conversation for some time, Kim’s boss

marched over to her desk, took the phone from her hand, and explained to the real estate agent that his services were no longer needed. “And y’know, I really do, I really did appreciate that... because I had a realtor that was a butthole.” Because Kim works in an office where her bosses and coworkers do not police her presentation style, her relationships with them flourish to the extent that allows them to watch out for her in ways that other employers may not, thus strengthening ties that create role overlay and multiplexity.

Michelle, a lower-middle class woman in Southern City, has often boldly initiated friendships with co-workers by asking them pointed questions relating to her own goals for economic mobility. She noticed that a white woman got a promotion and raise that she and her black co-workers had previously thought was impossible, so Michelle went straight to the source and asked the woman, point blank:

I went to her, and I asked her how she got full benefits. I asked her how she get paid that much money. [I sniggled.] Why do you laugh? I wanna know! I'm not getting mad with her. If she slept her way to the top, I'm not gon' do that, but maybe she could know something I don't know!

Once the initial contact was established, Michelle was able to build the relationship that survived even after both women left the initial company where they met. Over the years-long span of the friendship, Michelle and the woman have attended concerts and other events that helped the relationship to progress from that of coworkers to very close friends. Michelle was able to gain more feedback for the attainment of other goals, and later, information for a new job. And the social support was not only relegated to appraisal support.

...later on she became, I think she was, HR manager of this company or something and I saw her and...She asked me was I looking for a job. And I said as a matter of fact I was... And she told me about an opening that she had where she worked, and I got a job there. Um-hmm. So it was a first, she asked me how much money I needed and.... Yeah, she asked me how much money I needed! ... she said, she knows how I work, she knows my work ethic and she would want me to work for her.

Because of the relationship and trust that Michelle had built with her white, middle-class friend, Michelle was able to take advantage of a great source of informational support which led to a better paying position. It should be noted, however, that Michelle's friendship with this higher-class white woman was not only based on her own straightforwardness. Michelle was also very nice to the woman, who had inadvertently created walls between herself and the other co-workers. Michelle's new friend, Mandy, had come to the original workplace because of some racial tension when former bosses openly made racial jokes and she revealed that she was married to a black man. Reactions to Mandy's inter-racial marriage, tensions over her great salary and benefit package, and other circumstances under which she was hired (the company was splitting), also alienated many of the workers at Michelle's place of work, and created a distinct tension between them and Mandy. Michelle recalls, "I was told that she was making almost as much as my boss was making. My boss told me this." As a result, "everybody was...didn't like her at all...*I was her only friend.*"

In the building of relationships for economic mobility and the formation of multiplex ties, reciprocity acts as a tangible source of leverage. Michelle is very grateful for the appraisal and

informational support that Mandy has provided for her over the years. Michelle also provided a great source of emotional support for Mandy over the years. The relationship was one based upon a balanced exchange of support.

Relationships with family and kin

When the native-born Black American women speak of providing support for their families and friends, they speak of situations in other households that they cannot ignore in good conscience. So when a low-income mother's grandchildren lose their custodial mother to a fatal accident, before- and after-school care is provided, complete with snacks, trips, and clothing.

When I get to Eunice's home, a small toddler boy is on the porch with her. She introduces him to me as her grandson, and he shyly says hello. Then she invites me in and instructs the boy to join his sisters in the family room to watch their favorite after-school show. She closes the double doors to that room and invites me to sit in the adjoining living room. As we sit in this modest but stylishly furnished room in her small home, I actually forget that the children are still there, they are so quiet. (Field Notes, April 2015)

This is all accomplished to fill in the gap for her son, the formerly non-custodial father, who does not know how to raise three children on his own.

...he's not working right now and he's trying to, you know, get a place, and get something up under them. Because it's different when you're dad and mom has custody. You know, mom's doing everything and you're, you're the UPS dad.

That's what I call 'em. You droppin' something off and ring the doorbell, then you're out. It's different. So now you are the sole provider, you know. And so I'm here to assist you... There's so many female figures. Everyone is doing everything. You know, because we're moms. It's like the whole village just surrounding him and the kids.

Eunice, teams up with the maternal grandparents to provide what is needed for the father and four, now motherless children between the ages of one and twelve.

New family is often formed in place of another that is far away, disrupted, or otherwise inaccessible. Existing family members take the helm to make sure that those they love are kept from harm. When asked specifically, not one of these women ever agrees with the idea of being coerced, but the participants in this study do agree that providing these types of support is sometimes draining. For them however, the concept of "drain" often depends upon the circumstances under which support is provided, and how it is received.

For the native-born Black women in this study, there appears to be a difference between supporting family and sacrificing needlessly for them. Many of these participants gave willingly and without fail to family and friends who need very large amounts of material support. The difference between support and needless sacrifice seems to lie in the recipient's responses to supportive measures, and is therefore not entirely apparent until after negative interactions spring from expectations of gratefulness. Some people respond well to kin support, understanding limits and reciprocation. When others do not respond as expected, the entire situation creates strain on relationships and causes these women to consider breaking the ties.

In the beginning of the interview, each participant is asked a series of demographic questions about their geographical histories, self and family educational background, assets, etc. When asked “Do you have any other relatives or friends for which you occasionally provide large or small monetary assistance?” most say “no.” When asked how much support they usually provide for extended family or friends, some of the women provide some small number: “about 50 dollars a month, maybe, but that’s not every month;” “I don’t really know, just whatever is needed for this and that, but it’s usually not that much.” Then as the conversations flow, I begin to hear about middle class women who bought a car for a niece, or bought a house and a car for a mother, or took their ex-boyfriend’s sick mother to doctor’s appointments for a year because “she wouldn’t go unless I arranged it and was with her.” One woman allowed her husband to empty an account so that a sister could have \$20,000 to buy a house (maybe allowed is a strong word – I don’t know. Also, though this last measure is noted as common for white families with more wealth, it should be noted that the year after this loan was made, this black family found themselves supported by only the wife’s income.) One woman cleans house, waters the plants, does the shopping, and feeds the cats for her best friend who is disabled. Another woman prepared her schedule and cleared a space in her home so that she could provide the same type of care for her friend who is ill: “I have a friend who has Lupus who's actually going to move here. ... Um, so I help her a lot.”

None of these measures of instrumental support are ever mentioned when asked the initial question about the amounts of support provided. No one complains about the time and money spent – unless or until the recipient disregards the effort that was applied. Many of these women do not even think about the amounts of support they provide, much less quantify it. They

certainly do not think of it the way social scientists do, counting the hours and market pay rates. If they did, they would have had long lists ready for me when I asked the original question. For these women, this is just what friends and families do. More often than not, the distinction between friend and family is blurred.

But for some participants, family support stops when recipients take it too far. On the Saturday morning of my interview with Sharnell, she explains that she and her husband have just come from retrieving her car at the county impound lot. Her brother had stolen her wallet and her car, used the car in an illegal activity, and abandoned it on the side of the road somewhere. This is the same brother whom she had taken into her household and moved to a larger rental home based on promises that he would help her with half the expenses.

You know and he was like "Aw sis' I'm gon' help you with the rent." And he never helped with the rent. Before my brother lived there, I had a roommate. And my roommate moved out so he could take the extra room. He was like "aw I'ma help you" and I believed him! You know?

Only part of those expenses were later covered by her husband when they married. Sharnell quickly answered affirmatively the question about providing support. She recalled her brother, her mother, and a friend. When asked the amount of monetary support she provides for the three, she replies, "I'll say maybe \$500 a month." This is 12% of Sharnell's income.

Emotional and appraisal support in romantic relationships

About half of the participants in this study are in long-term, seemingly successful marriages. Another scant few are in committed relationships. In most of the spaces I visited,

whether native Black American or Sudanese American, everyone in attendance knew that I was doing research, so they did not appear to feel uncomfortable when I remarked on their closeness. Black married women openly spoke of financial difficulties, family disagreements which turn into heated arguments, and times when they felt unsupported by partners. And then, many of them talked about “working it out.” Many of the women in this study are very aware of the structural inequities that affect most in black communities. Lower and working class groups handle relationships differently from middle-class groups. But there are some similarities across cultures and social class that give a framework to Black women’s attempts at gaining emotional support from the men in their lives.

When asked about their marital relationships in interviews, these women swoon over their men: “He’s my biggest fan,” says middle class Deborah in Large Southern City. She speaks of her husband’s support of her Zumba studio and business expansion in the fitness industry. “I probably could do this without him, but my Lord that man is wonderful to me and I can’t imagine how that would look, honestly.”

Shelley is actually very complimentary of the way her husband, Marcus, takes care of her. Throughout our many conversations, she constantly remarks on the fact that Marcus is so good with money. She tells me about the ways that ‘he takes care of the bulk of things outside of bills for us. Major house repairs and car repairs and stuff like that,’ and that, since the couple manages their finances separately, she does not have to contribute to those issues. Relating that Shelley has had such a hard time with her finances since her days as a single mother, she speaks of how Marcus has provided vital appraisal support through his provision of material and emotional support. I asked her how she financed her major purchases, like cars and the house (which she solely owns), and who helps her make her financial decisions.

My cars, you know I always finance my cars through, usually, cause I had a bankruptcy once before, coming out of a relationship. I did finish the bankruptcy, so my credit was really, really bad. So I had cars with buy-here-pay-here's. But in doing that my credit improved. You know once things began to fall off from the bankruptcy my credit improved. So I was able to begin getting financed with people, you know. Um... (she starts crying). So it got to the point where someone would finance me. I would go to a buy-here-pay-here, and they would sell the loan to a finance company once you had it for 6 months or something. So I began to repair my credit like that. And um, I've never really been back into credit cards until I got this house. And, when I started dating Marcus, Marcus really opened up my eyes, I guess to really seeing my finances and stuff.

The emotional support that Cecily and Shelley receive from their partners is very obvious, and is indicative of the emotional support provided to many native-born women in the middle and upper classes. Middle and upper class black women are also quite vocal about the emotional, material, and appraisal support they receive from spouses. In Southern City, Terry readily admits that her husband is her primary adviser, and in a subsequent focus group, she is the first to speak about how important her husband's opinion is. But Terry also explains that she did try seeking advice from one of her friends about a situation with her son; Instead of focusing on Terry's situation, the friend turned the conversation into one about the friend's own son. For Terry, this "cemented my position that I needed to look to myself and my husband, rather than girlfriends." She went on to say that, because of her husband's high social status and her own

very independent nature, her friends “may not feel comfortable giving advice. They may feel intimidated because I’m so independent.”

Women who were not married, but in committed relationships, also spoke of their partners in loving terms. Cecily, an older upper-class black American woman, is in a dating relationship with an older businessman who, quite literally, fawns over her. He opens doors, pulls out her chair, ushers her into rooms with a gentle hand at the small of her back, and takes every opportunity he can to woo her with his latest culinary concoction. She is modest, not overly affectionate, but meticulous in her understated display of love and appreciation for him. When apart, they talk sometimes two and three times a day, depending on schedules and international business travel. And again, when they are together, the energy in the room shifts. It is life-affirming to be in the presence of these couples.

Cindy, a middle-class, Midwestern City professor, has been involved with a truck driver for five years. She talks about the respect that she has for this man and notes why his appraisal support works for her:

...He really motivated me to get my credit together, get my finances together. He just did. So I noticed that I have to have someone in my life that I respect. And then if I respect you, I look up to you, I'm gonna do what you say. I'm gonna listen to what you say.

None of this is presented to say that respondents had no problems in their relationships. Dinah, another middle-class, Midwestern City professor, notes that she is very happily married, but also speaks of the trouble she has had with her husband. Still, when I ask her who her best friend is now, without any hesitation she says,

My husband. Trial and effort. Trial and effort. It's daily work. For the last 10 years he's been my best friend. So I say to people if we've been together for 27, and I say the last 10, then you do what you do with that.

Now that her husband has become her best friend, Dinah talks to him about all of her career goals and retirement dreams, as well as how these goals and dreams fit in with the goals of their extended family and friends.

By contrast, Sharnell, the middle class woman in Southern City who rose from poverty, admits in our initial meeting that her marriage is one “of convenience only,” where social support is severely lacking. “Yeah, I've learned not to talk about emotional things with him. You know, he'll make it worse.” Additionally, Sharnell’s husband provides very little material or appraisal support. In fact, Sharnell, pays most of the household expenses, including the bulk of her husband’s legal fees. She acknowledges that she cannot speak to her husband about “emotional things.” Months later, Sharnell’s husband moves out.

When native-born black women do have problems in marriage or romance, the absence of support is quite obvious. Kim, a working class woman in Southern City, relies on family and friends for all of her emotional and appraisal support needs because the state of her marriage does not allow those types of support to flourish.

...he's a very negative individual. Uhm [long pause], y'know, it's his way or no way...whatever he say is supposed to go... or is the right way something's supposed to be done. And, um, and he feels that he can do...whatever he wanna do and everything's supposed to be all right.

She describes her husband as a very negative person who is controlling rather than supportive. Still, in the year that followed, Kim did continue to work with her husband, and expressed gratefulness that they were able to attend a couples' spiritual retreat.

Dee, a low-income black woman in the large Midwestern City, attempted to take the father of three of her children into her home, and included the children in the decision-making process. The family decided that forgiveness was the best route in this situation, and the father should be given another chance. But after only two days, she realized that the situation would not work out.

He moved in Tuesday. He got put out Wednesday. Because I was not comfortable. And I'm just gon' keep it 100. I was in a triangle with him and his other kids' mother. And she did everything possible to discredit me and also bring havoc. What I mean by havoc? Called social services, housing. Stuff like that. So when he sat up on the porch and told her, 'Well I'm with Dee'...I said, now this is a vindictive bitch. . . And you putting me in harm's way. You have to go. . . And I wanted to do something because my eldest child did say, she brought God in there. Spirituality. But...he moved in Tuesday, moved out Wednesday.

Dee explains that she would not tolerate "havoc" in her household. Though her eldest child wanted to practice forgiveness and a giving spirit toward the man (who had recently lost his own home), Dee finally decided that a stable home environment was more important in this case. Though Dee describes this man as the love of her life in the interview, she had broken ties with him and receives no material or emotional support from him.

Surviving or Thriving

Social theorists have offered the notion that, in order to succeed in the pursuit of goals and economic mobility, one must be able to both withstand adversity and to take advantage of life-altering opportunities for advancement (Deci and Ryan 2000; Emmons 1991), able “to pursue personal goals, and to pursue them in a self-determined manner” (Feeney and Collins 2014: 4). Humans need help and direction with perceiving opportunities and learning to navigate the circumstances surrounding them, often provided through appraisal support. For the native-born black women in this study, such appraisal support is usually attached to emotional and material support, though social scientists often cite it as occurring mostly through informational support (Thoits 2011; Cohen and McKay 1984). The native-born Black women in this study seem to view themselves as incapable of achieving economic mobility without the informational and appraisal support that are linked to emotional support. Therefore, they seek emotional and appraisal support from various sources, including family, friends, and church, then parse through each of these sources to see where additional means of informational support can be gathered, or where multiple types of support can be combined to help in the achievement of economic mobility.

CHAPTER 5

NETWORK SUPPORT AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY OF BLACK IMMIGRANT WOMAN:
DIFFERENT BEGINNINGS, STANDPOINTS, and (SOME) DIFFERENT RESULTS

During my time with South Sudanese women in the Midwestern and Southern states, I was met with female members of four different ethnic groups that originate in South Sudan. These include the two most prominent, Nuer and Dinka, as well as Shilouk and KuKu. While I did not find many differences in ethnic group influences for interactions once members are in the U.S., I did find differences in interactions that were influenced by the different geographic communities in which participants resided. Group population in each location influences how and whether different ethnic groups interact with one another, and this affects the types of support that are available in the U.S. I also found differences by education level, which, for these immigrant women, is a major status indicator that influences how they regard and interact with each other, their family members, as well as those outside of their community.

In this chapter, I first identify how local and transnational forms of material support are exchanged, both within and across ethnic group origins among Sudanese refugees. Here, the collectivist orientation of the South Sudanese population is particularly highlighted, as well as the role of churches and agencies (both government and non-government) in providing forms of material support. The impact of refugee population density is explored as an intervening factor for refugee networks engaged with local churches. Appraisal support through education is then highlighted as a key element for access to community and family social status and support.

Material Support and Collectivist Perspectives

As refugees transitioning from collectivist society, women from South Sudan often incorporate their former culture into new ways of integration in more individualist host countries like Canada, Australia, and the United States (Khawaja and Miller 2012; Smith 2013; Bereketeab 2014). Though many of the women in this study are now citizens of the United States, they still consider themselves South Sudanese and take care of one another in the same kin inspired fashion in which they were raised. As these women's former community lives centered on sharing resources for survival, they naturally applied these same principles to their lives in new international spaces. In fact, research findings in medical journals report psychological distress and shame expressed by South Sudanese refugees when they are unable to provide support for kin group members (Coker 2004). The collective perspective is deeply embedded in these women's way of life. Naomi (Nuer) explains:

“Sister can be in her house, and I will be in my house and mom can be in her house. I will know that they have food to eat, maybe they don't have something and I have something and we divide it. **I cannot eat and she not eating.** We can do together and sit down and eat it.”

When women from South Sudan explain their material support situations to me, they speak of “cousins” that were married into their groups, or those who were taken into their families from other groups because they were orphaned as children during civil strife, or even “captured.” The married, orphaned and captured new members were then raised within the family, just as regular family members who helped the family with subsistence. From this point on, this new family was the primary family, and the family's survival was tied to their individual survival.

As such, now that the South Sudanese women are in the U.S., they are family and share whatever they have. If someone from the Shilouk marries a Nuer man, as Mary did, then the Shilouk woman is “cousin” and family to the Nuer. Mary’s mother also becomes family to the Nuer, and the survival of Mary’s Nuer-headed household is tied to the survival of the larger Nuer clan in their current destination. As such, when Mary needs practical material support for help with getting her six children ready for school, Nuer women “stand in the gap” and come together to collectively care for the family.

Upon arrival in the United States, Mary’s family was chosen to come to this Midwestern Moderate City. Her husband received help with job hunting from their church-based resettlement agency and quickly found work in in a meat packing plant. Joseph hated the job, did not like the way he was treated by the white and Hispanic supervisors, and soon left the job (reported by Mary in Focus Group, May 2012). When Joseph could not find other work, Mary then appealed to the resettlement agency, which helped to find her work at a different meat packing plant. The hours were long, the warehouse was very cold. The work was monotonous and the machinery difficult to handle, especially at the very fast pace which was required. After a few months, the repetitive, straining movements caused a severe injury to Mary’s shoulder and she could not return to work. The same social worker at the Christian based resettlement agency helped Mary to file Worker’s Compensation paperwork, then to apply for Social Security Insurance Disability. Eventually, funds from both of those sources ran out. While she was incapacitated, her adolescent girls still needed their hair braided, and her infant son needed to be held and cared for. Nuer women took turns coming by the house to braid the two girls’ hair (Figure 1). Mary’s mother came from South Sudan to help with other chores and take care of the

infant (Figure 2). The material support that Mary's mother from Sudan provides for her at a later point then evolved into caring for the children of other South Sudanese women as they collectively had need.

The collectivist standpoint also engages itself in other parts of the women's lives. Community support is offered often in times of need such as funerals, baby showers, weddings, bail bonds, and large bills. I attended a baby shower which was not like traditional American baby showers. There were no silly games or group activities. This event was in a split level home. About ten women were present, but they were not gathered together, instead, some were upstairs at the dining room table. Some were downstairs in the den watching television. All were just sitting comfortably and engaging in personal conversations. I assumed that the event had taken place earlier in the day and that I was late. Occasionally, other women came in, shook the hand of each woman in the house, then put a gift on the table downstairs or left an envelope in someone's hand (Field Notes, November 2013). A year later in interviews and gatherings, I asked women where they would go if they needed large amounts of money. One group helped to explain the community funding phenomenon:

“So if it's a big bill they just kind of rely on the community, or they just have a fundraiser. Or sometimes they just have it in the house. I think the best example would be funerals, or baby showers, where people just come into the house and just check, and then leave something. It happens almost every week that there is a need.”

Miriam is a multi-talented single mother who is often called upon to help with interior design, event planning, purchasing clothing and helping with transportation. Though she charges fees for organizing larger events such as weddings and concerts, she also tends to individual

needs without any expectation of reciprocity. As I spend time in her home and attend several events, I begin to recognize the clothing on certain women that I know came from her closet. Then I remark on beautifully furnished homes, with rich dark furnishings, complete with corresponding accents and fabric textures, and begin to recognize the design style as hers. My interview with Miriam comes years after I have met her, and she confirms my suspicions.

Like now you can see those people coming..."Can you go and take me to store?" "Can you go and fix my living room?" "Can you go and fix the bed for me, or choose me the bed?" (we laugh) Then I walk all day with them, I do it. Yeah, and they don't pay me, they don't give me nothing. Yeah. I go to[the] Furniture Mart. We go to [another Midwestern state] just to choose the couches there. Yeah. Yeah, color "Choose me a color." Yeah. They wanna buy dresses, they wanna go to parties, they have to come to me first. "You go and help me?" And I'm like, ok, I do it.

As I observe over several months, there is no pressure or demand involved when Mary's girls need their hair braided, or when children need a better English speaker to help with their homework. Work needs to be done, and people who care make sure that the work gets done, even if the "work" involved is making sure that homes are furnished and young women are dressed in a manner that exhibits acculturation to a new American lifestyle. This is not coercion, or domination by force: this is family collectively identified. For many immigrants from collectivist backgrounds, kinship and community support is much more common than the individualist way of life found in mainstream capitalist societies.

While some scientists find evidence of social pressure among lower income black American family members when the need for material support arises (Stack and Burton 1993), I found very few difficult exchanges or resistance to helping with child and home care, transportation, job assistance, and food – at least among the women from South Sudan. Relying on their cultural practices, the women from South Sudan do not view their way of life as “pressurized” in any way. Because of this seeming absence of pressure, the close ties observed by these women could be indicative of what scientists call “bounded solidarity” (Portes 1998; Dominguez and Watkins 2003), except for one important caveat. Though bounded solidarity can be present regardless of coercion and is often found in immigrant communities, it is also explained as emerging in behavior as a group comes together in new locations. The South Sudanese women in this study all agree that these values were present in their way of life before they ever set foot on American soil.

Transnational Material Support

This same collectivist attitude also applies to transnational support. Whatever South Sudanese women in the U.S. can do for kinsmen back home, they will find a way to do this. I accompanied some of the women from the Moderate Midwestern City as they travelled to a Nuer fundraising party in Larger Midwestern City. The party was initiated to raise money for schools and hospitals in South Sudan. But before we leave, Naomi needs to search in her garage for a pair of shoes for her husband, who is in South Sudan working with the new government. One of her cousins in Larger City will go to South Sudan the next week, and she can take the shoes to Naomi’s husband. Once we are in the city and stop at Priscilla’s house, Naomi’s daughter, Ruth, who is a university student, makes sure to check the schoolwork of Priscilla’s adolescent

daughter, and an impromptu tutoring session ensues. In the span of one evening, I witnessed both community-wide and family-based transnational support, through fund-raising and the transport of personal needs, as well as community based informational support in the form of tutoring for a young girl (Field Notes, January 2011).

Transnational support is deeply entrenched into the way of life for South Sudanese women, as it is a part of their collectivist nature. Their love for their country is evident as they support men who often travel back to the homeland to help in the new country's establishment. In addition, money and clothing are sent regularly to family members who could not leave South Sudan. Miriam (Nuer) in Moderate Midwestern City, is a single mother of five, and estimates that her total household income is about \$22,000/year. She receives a Section 8 housing voucher along with food stamps and Medicaid, all of which were initiated for her by the resettlement agency when she came to this city. Miriam has had quite a few jobs since coming to Moderate Midwestern City in the 90s. She has a temporary position in a factory assembling small machine parts, which her state supported social worker helped her to find. This social worker also makes regular visits to Miriam's home to check on her financial progress, as well as her housekeeping and parenting skills. Miriam also occasionally works as an event coordinator for Sudanese community events, or works from home braiding hair. Miriam manages to send about \$350 per month to relatives in Kenya and Ethiopia. "Yeah like my sister back home. Yeah and my nephews and nieces, I have to send them money every month...I send like \$200 or 150 to Kenya, and then I send like 150 a month to Ethiopia."

Esther (Dinka) also a single mother of five, lives in Small Southern Town and works for \$10/hour as a maid in an upscale hotel in Southern City. As her schedule is irregular, she cannot give a firm estimate of her annual household income.

“Oh, sometimes it change because of our schedule... like this week is slow. I am off now, like three days: Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. So it's come different, but the regular work is five days.”

Her oldest son was accepted to Job Corps, and comes home on U.S. holidays, but the rest of the family is supported by her meager wages along with food stamps and Medicaid. Still, Esther sends a small amount to her cousin in South Sudan annually.

“Just sometime I have a lady there, she is close to me, she is my cousin.

Yeah, she's like me, she have six kids and they don't have husband. Sometimes I just help her. Like this Christmas I sent her 100 dollar and maybe next year, because here maybe I don't have finance. But every time [I] have something, just help [her].”

As years pass, and my place within this group of kin becomes more salient, even I am asked to transport clothing and household goods from one sister in the large Southern state to another sister in the Midwestern town, as the Southern sister has just received gifts from another cousin in Australia, which also has a large South Sudanese population (Field notes, December 2014). Transnational care is a large part of life for South Sudanese women. Regardless of the meager income they receive in the U.S., participants found ways to share with less fortunate family members in their homeland.

There is only one instance where coercion or resistance may be evident in the exchange of practical material support among South Sudanese women. This is when some difficulty is expressed in caring for more than one family at a time, or with the impossibility of being in two places at once. Situations which require kin to make decisions which may place restrictions on their individual freedom can be difficult (Dominguez and Watkins 2003). In the case of these women, however, the individual freedom is one which is still tied to the care of others, and the freedom to choose which group to care for. When Mary experienced her work related injury, she asked her mother to come from South Sudan to help. As Mary explains it, tradition states that the mother is supposed to help to raise the first born. Since Mary had her first born in the United States rather than South Sudan, her mother could not fulfill the traditional duties of her role. After the sixth child, Mary called on that tradition as a way to get her mother out of South Sudan, which was still in the midst of ethnic conflict. But Mary's mother, who is a member of the Shilouk group, was heavily involved in taking care of other elderly women at her own home, many of whom had been displaced during the wars. Mary struggled with her mother over the idea of leaving South Sudan, and finally convinced Mother Mary to come to the United States on a tourist visa to care for her grandchildren. "Your first born child, your mother is supposed to come and take care of the child. So she came here to take care of my children because she is late," says the younger Mary.

Mother Mary, however, often expressed great sorrow in leaving her home life in South Sudan. She enjoyed taking care of the elderly women in her small town, and had formed great bonds with them. She compared home life in South Sudan with that in the United States, and found that life in the U.S. left much to be desired. She had no small garden plot to care for and

grow fresh vegetables. She had very few friends her age and no friends from her own ethnic group, as the Nuer and Shilouk do not co-mingle in the Midwestern state as they do in the Southern state. In addition, Mother Mary complained of being in the home for long periods of time. “It’s box in box,” she says, with the small amount of English she can muster. She means that she watches the television often, within the confines of the four walls of the family home. “Sudan, I go here, there, I go [see] auntie, I sit in sun, I move. In America, I sit.” [Field Notes, March 2012]

Tradition and intra-ethnic family care are deeply entrenched in the South Sudanese way of life, so much so that the only conflict that arises is deciding which needs are more immediate. This same collectivist nature influences material support provisions for South Sudanese immigrants once they arrive in the U.S. Inter-ethnic support tends to present itself with the presence of inter-ethnic marriage and adoption, as well as the ethnic population of communities involved.

Ethnic Group Population and Differences in Community Support

Elizabeth, a 41-year-old, married mother of six, is from Central Equatoria (also known as Bahr al Jabal, which houses Juba, the capital of South Sudan). Elizabeth is a member of the KuKu. When she arrived in Small Southern Town, she and her family knew no one and had no existing ethnic support networks in place. Most other community members are from the Dinka. Her only support came from the Christian mission resettlement agency workers who handled her resettlement care. Confident that she could make friends and find some community support, Esther decided to simply stand outside in her apartment complex and wait for new friends to appear.

“...the day the caseworker brought us here, I don’t know anybody in the United States. When the caseworker brought me here, she's the only one I know. Yeah, I don't know anybody here ... And then I stayed like two days, and then the third day, I just say I don’t want to just stay inside like this. I cannot meet people when I stay inside. I better go outside. Let me go outside. Then I decide to go outside. Just standing there looking for people. Then I saw another guy look Sudanese, just crossing like this (crossing the street). And he greet me Arabic.

I say, ok, let me call this guy. I tell my husband, go and see that guy. . . I say Ok, maybe he's coming. Let us just stand here. Since morning I stand there waiting for him. After that the time I come in, my husband went outside. Then my neighbor come from work. Then he meet them outside there just standing. He just greet with Arabic. My husband greet him. He say, “Ok are you Sudanese?” “Yeah!” Just like that, he embrace him immediately. I say thank you! (Looks up and folds hands as if to pray.) “Please, can you help me? I want to know where is the church. Yes, because husband don't know where, please help me.” And he call the church members and we enjoy together.” (She laughs.)

Southern Town is so small, and so is so highly populated with refugees, that Esther had no problem connecting with other refugees from Sudan. All she had to do was go outside, stand, and wait. Esther also remarks that she can start walking to the grocery store and, halfway to her destination, someone from the South Sudanese community will pick her up and take her the rest of the way. The church that Esther speaks of is housed in a set of community buildings which houses churches for several ethnic populations, including Burmese, Bhutanese, and Vietnamese. The Sudanese (not South Sudanese) church has members from Dinka and Shilouk ethnic groups.

Esther is the only KuKu member there; however, other church members are from Northern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan (see Figure 3: Map of Sudan). Regardless of conflict abroad, the members of this church work to form relationships with one another in hopes that peace can be fomented in their homeland. The emotional support that they receive from church is clearly visible both during and after service.

Church networks and support

The diversity in church populations does often affect the subject of communications and reciprocal support. In one Nuer church service in Midwestern Moderate City, held in and supported by a Lutheran church, only Nuer attend this small service. Arabic and the occasional ethnic languages are spoken, and the Christian praise songs are sung *a Capella*. The only accompaniment is drums from the homeland, played by women in the audience [Field Notes . The same type of service is held at another Lutheran church on the other side of town. These services are usually held in the afternoon, after the mainstream church service is completed and early parishioners have dispersed. The service is held in a smaller gymnasium of the large church, and the announcements and community support are specifically about the Nuer community in the U.S. and abroad. When a Nuer community member dies, or a large political event is held in another state which affects the Nuer, this service is cancelled so that all of the members can travel to that state together.

I am aware of this collectivist response to church attendance because I went to this church twice in 4 months only to find later that services had been cancelled for these reasons. The mainstream Lutheran church provides support to its Sudanese members through counseling and other material support services. However, the Nuer tell me that

sometimes the (mostly White) Lutheran leadership tries to impose their views on the Nuer way of life. This causes serious conflict, as noted below.

Mainline church experiences

In addition to the churches that are established specifically to support the Sudanese or South Sudanese communities, refugees are often invited to mainline churches, whose members often volunteer at resettlement agencies or donate large amounts of furniture, clothing, and supplies, and money for resettlement efforts. Two of the largest entities that support refugee resettlement are the Catholic Church, through Catholic Charities, and the Episcopal Migration Ministries, which utilizes support from the Episcopal Church as well as local Lutheran, Methodist, and other denominational affiliates. As church members offer various types of support, they often take a firm hand in efforts to socialize the South Sudanese to U.S. ways of being. Some of the women, particularly the Nuer, find these efforts pushy and demeaning, and opt to leave these churches after some time.

Naomi (Nuer) has quite often complained of the fact that her husband does not financially support her and her six children. In fact, Naomi and her daughter often speak to me about the decisions Joshua makes that negatively affect the family's efforts at stability or economic advancement. As she was attending the Nuer service in the Lutheran church and had come to know of the Lutheran members' willingness to help, she decided to take advantage of the counseling services that were provided by the church. However, she was shocked and highly disappointed when her counselor advised Naomi to divorce her husband. As we sit and discuss the issue in a focus group, Naomi, her daughter Ruth (who serves as an interpreter), and Mary engage in an animated accounting of the series of events.

Ruth: She was saying she went to the church and got a counselor, where they were saying she needed a divorce. (All of them laugh.) Because my dad refused to go.

Naomi: I didn't like the way she talked. It's not the way I go, you know?

LJ: Yeah. Wait though. Because your dad refused to go to church they wanted her to get a divorce?

Ruth: No. She went to go get counseling, just to like better the relationship between the two of them.

LJ: Ohhh, like marriage counseling.

All: Yes, yes!

Ruth: But I did tell her that's not what they 'sposed to say. . . But I think it's just they really just saw the treatment.

Mary: There was my other friend, she went there. Maybe for something, not for the church. They talk to her much about her husband.

Naomi: No because the counselor cannot tell you kill somebody. And so they cannot tell you to you need to get divorce. It's not right. It's not right! Because when you go to a counselor....

LJ: Did they suspect abuse? Sometimes they will tell you that if there is abuse.

Ruth: No. Because it's not professional, that's not what they're supposed to do. But I think it's just like they looked at the treatment and that's what they based it on.

LJ: Ok, so what do you mean by treatment?

Ruth: I think it's just the finances...and maybe because he didn't have a job at some point.

Naomi: No, it's not the job. If you don't have a job it's ok.

Ruth: It's not wanting to help her when she's...ok for example right now, he has a job and he has time but doesn't help, you know? So it's just one of those things.

But still, a counselor can't tell you to divorce. . . She talked to a relative in

Tennessee and he goes - he's her nephew. And he asked her, are you going to church today? And she said, oh no. I'm not going to church. I don't think I like

the Lord anymore. And I say, “If you don't like the Lord where are you gonna go?” (They all laugh.)

Naomi's negative interaction with the mainstream church counselor steered her away from the church altogether. The counselor's lack of cultural competence resulted in the separation of Naomi, Ruth and Mary as well from that same church.

Other South Sudanese women in both states decide what they will share with church leaders. Some, such as Martha (Nuer) and Lillian (Nuer) in Moderate Midwestern City, join large racially mixed congregations where they feel they cannot ask for material support. Martha is a Jehovah's Witness, and quotes the Bible quite often during our interview. She enjoys being with her church members and finds great solace in services and studies with the members. But when asked about help from the church, she replies, “It's not for that, you know. It is for learning about God's plan for your life. Not for what they can do for me or what I can do for you or any of that, you know.”

Others, like Esther (Dinka) in the Southern state, are a part of smaller Sudanese congregations that double up as the primary community support. These women understand that material support from other refugees is sometimes not available. When asked who she would call if she needed a small loan, Esther gave the following reply: “We have community but I never call them. They say if you need help, but sometime it's maybe you call and they say they don't have.” For these women, churches in the United States vary widely. As much of their immigration resettlement and acculturation is sponsored by churches and religious organizations, the church is often very useful as a gathering place for community members from home, and for

the dissemination of information. However, the U.S. sponsored “church” is not family, and therefore not thought of as part of the South Sudanese collectivist community.

Appraisal Mixed with Material Support

When Esther, a Dinka in Southern Town, needs appraisal support in the form of guidance for raising her children, she seeks the advice of an older Shilouk man, whom she calls Uncle David. When she mentions him, I am not surprised. I met David when I tutored his youngest son in the Afterschool Care program for refugee students. We both agree that David is a warm-hearted and gentle man with a giving and intelligent family. Esther tells me of how she came to meet David and his family in Cairo, Egypt, a common destination for refugees fleeing conflict in Sudan. Egypt is different from other destinations for refugees, as there is no official refugee camp there and very little support from the Egyptian government. Without local government or religious support, The United Nations High Council of Refugees (UNHCR) provides direct support to Sudanese refugees, who fend for themselves materially by finding their own (usually menial) jobs and or education, while appealing to UNHCR for refugee status and resettlement in a more supportive nation.

“Yeah, Uncle David, yeah, because I know him from Egypt and even before we had the business together. So when I came here, I was surprised. Oh, this is Uncle David! Because when I came here they asked me if you know somebody in America, give us the address. I say I know a lot of people, but I don't have their addresses, I don't have a phone. Just tell me to where you go. I'll go, no problem. I'll stay there, I will make

friends I know. I said that and they just bring me here in [Southern Town]. And when they are bringing me in the apartment, I come at night.

In the morning I see these kids. I saw these kids, I said OH! That is the family of Uncle David. Ohhhh! You are here! I say thank God. And they help me. When I came they took me shopping. They make me care here that time. So now when I have a problem I just call him and that family and they will help me with kids, with whatever.”

For Esther, Uncle David and his family, who coincidentally live in the same apartment complex, form the collectivist basis for whatever type of support she needs. The appraisal support comes naturally for two reasons. On the one hand, Esther already knew Uncle David from her time in Egypt, where they had a business relationship. On the other hand, when Uncle David’s large family, including his wife Michelle, first provided material support to Esther upon her arrival in the U.S., the emotional and appraisal support naturally coincided with it. She now goes to Uncle David’s family for “whatever.” She even attends the same South Sudanese church where Uncle David is a highly regarded member. Incidentally, this is the same church that Elizabeth found when she stood outside of her home waiting to meet someone from Sudan.

The material and appraisal support that is provided in the southern state are a little different in the Midwestern state, again, because of ethnic population differences. The Nuer women who provide material support for Mary and her children also provide appraisal support on how to manage children’s schedules and relationships with school teachers. Similarly, Miriam seeks help from other Nuer, including her mother, her best friend, and her niece, who works in a Native American child care facility.

And she work with kids since she was 17 in Indian community. So she work with Indian tribe, Poco tribe. So she know what's going on with teenagers and all this.

Because South Sudanese women are able to obtain stable employment opportunities in the Midwestern state, they are able to capitalize on their relationships with American groups by learning techniques for acculturation that is beneficial for group members. In this instance, the type of support shared is appraisal support for raising children.

Education as key to appraisal support

Cara (Dinka) has an Associate's Degree from an American university, and holds the highest degree of any of the South Sudanese female participants in the Southern state. In Southern Town, she is highly regarded, as is Michelle (Shilouk) whose husband has a law degree from Egypt. Even though Michelle's husband cannot practice law in the U.S., the fact that he completed this amount of education is respected widely. Most of the South Sudanese women in this study finished only their Intermediate 2 schooling, which is the equivalent of a junior high or middle school education in the U.S. Very few of the middle-aged women have degrees. Abigail (Shilouk) in the Moderate Midwestern City, holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, and therefore uses her education to serve as a leader in the human services sector. She is called upon often, by both the agency who employs her and others in the community, to interpret for countrymen and women, and to facilitate resettlement or other services. Women like Miriam (Nuer) with a U.S. high school diploma, or her friend Naomi (Nuer), who completed high school in Lebanon and has both a husband and daughter with U.S. college degrees, tend to serve as informal leaders in their communities.

Miriam's U.S. high school education gives her an edge over many of her community members in speaking with U.S. agencies. As one of the younger women in this study, Miriam was resettled in the U.S. through a Christian resettlement agency, and as a 19-year-old, and was provided an American church family that sponsored her and her children. She lived with this family and they helped her to enroll in high school programs, as well as encouraging her to complete her schooling. Now, at the age of 36, she uses her skills to negotiate for community members when they need help with event planning and other communications with government entities. Over the course of years, I attend several events, such as concerts, weddings, and mass celebrations that Miriam has helped to organize. She has also introduced me to speakers and diplomats who advocate for South Sudanese peace and public relations.

Deborah (Dinka) is a 39 year old mother of an adolescent girl in Southern Town. She has two successful brothers, one who received a Master's Degree and now works in a different Midwestern State, and another who received a U.S. Bachelor's degree and returned to South Sudan to work on building the country. Deborah, who was supposed to continue her education as well, receives criticism from family members in South Sudan for the decisions she has made. Instead of immediately pursuing her education as her brothers did, Deborah fell in love with a black American man, married him, and had a child. Deborah's family constantly criticizes her for not continuing her education.

“Most of my families, uncle, aunties, they call me, they ask me what are you doing? You go to school? Did you started anything? And I say no I just, you know, work (as a cashier at the farmer's market) and raise my child, and that's what I'm doing. They told me no. That's not gonna be working this thing. You

need to go back to school. And you can come [back to South Sudan] and help to work your place, you know. You need to be in a place. So the education is there. Because when I was in my school I just finish high school and I come here when I was a girl. And I didn't do anything. And now some of them they are really mad at me. They say I just came and just start with the life and its nothing gonna help me with the future. So they told me you have to go to school.”

Abigail, age 53 from the Shilouk, is a counselor and interpreter at a local service agency in Moderate Midwestern City. She agrees with Deborah’s family. All of Abigail’s six children are highly educated, and hold prestigious careers in fields such as engineering, computer technology and counseling. Her last child graduates from college this year. She says that the key to success is concentrating on education the moment you arrive on U.S. soil:

My people, sometimes they don’t realize, eh, that if you don’t focus on that thing [education] the most, all of the other things will get in the way, and you won’t ever get it. You will get overwhelmed with all of the other concerns and you won’t be able to help others the way you need to.

The strong tie of education to appraisal support clearly influences leadership positions in the South Sudanese community. Education alone can bestow higher appraisals by other refugees, even if the degree cannot be used in the United States. If you have skills and knowledge to access material resources from outside the collectivist community, adding measurably to family

material support, you are also elevated in appraisal. This role of education in appraisal support may be a key to understanding variations among refugee and U.S. born black women.

Emotional Support from Church

Some churches are a central means of emotional support for South Sudanese women, even when it is not a source for material support. In Southern Town, holiday celebrations are held through the Sudanese church and gift exchanges take place at Christmas. I see some similarities with native Black churches in regards to patterns of attendance. For instance, churches are much more crowded during Christmas time. In Southern Town, the room in the community building is filled to standing-room only during the Christmas gift exchange. The New Year's celebration is held with other refugee populations and has to be held in the larger community center. Also like native Black churches, many of the South Sudanese in Southern Town go to church to see their community members and keep connections alive, just as they do in the Midwest. But instead of news circulated about one ethnic group, news is shared of happenings all over Sudan in the church in Southern Town. Prayer is held for peace in each region of the country, from North to South. Because the church houses so many ethnic groups, church is never cancelled for one ethnic group's regional funeral or other event. Though this church service is officially run by Northern Sudanese Christians, I notice a shift in recognition over the months that I attend. As many Sudanese ethnic groups are represented among the congregation, men from each region take turns with prayer and announcements. Much of the service is held in Arabic, the sanctioned official language of Sudan. But as I attend more often, the sermon begins to be held with interpreters who also speak in English.

During the Christmas month, members of each ethnic group are allowed to pray aloud in their native language, and then speak to the congregation about their thoughts in either Arabic or English, the new official language of South Sudan. This church in Southern Town is the only one I witness which has members of different ethnic groups in South Sudan, as well as both North and South Sudanese members. Though the men and women sit on separate sides of the church as they would in the Northern Sudanese Islamic tradition, the rest of the service is adapted to mainline U.S. Christian worship protocols, with the Call to Worship, announcements (again, in different languages), sermon, offertory prayer and offering, and the invitation to join. Though new adaptations are made to accommodate the Southern Sudanese members, the service is led mostly by North Sudanese men.

In the Moderate Midwestern City, I attend two Lutheran services held and led totally by Southern Sudanese, in two churches on opposite sides of the city. Each of these churches has smaller congregations than the one centrally located church in the Southern Town. I witness no visible difference in interactions between members in these churches from those in the Sudanese church in Southern Town. But I do see a difference in the interactions with the community at large. The Midwestern churches that support one ethnicity are able to support their members through community activism (travelling to funerals and political events) and emotional support on a much larger scale than in the South. Still, women in the South speak of the inter-ethnic church service in a different way than those in the Midwest. They speak of the joy of worshipping with community members on Sunday, and note it as an opportunity to be with other Sudanese, regardless of ethnicity. For instance, Deborah (Dinka) speaks of the happiness she gains from being with other Sudanese, no matter what ethnicity or region:

My community make me happy, all the Sudan, everybody still my people. That's why I don't like to live far away from my people. We can all live here in [Southern Town]. The community, anything, we can make a lot of things together.

Esther also speaks of the joy that she receives from being with community members, who are also in the church. When I ask her if she has made many close friends in the year since I helped her to resettle in Southern Town, she says the following:

Uh, not really. But for fun I try, because you know I am one here and I have kids and I come sometimes late from work. But like holidays, this, or even on weekend, I come late, but even if I hear of something in community or they have like, they have meeting. Or they have like prayers for something happen, so they have wedding, I try to go and share with them. Whatever I have, one hour or two hour. It doesn't matter. I have to show up to share with them, in bad thing in good things, whatever. Or in holiday. . . I go to church to have a good time, to talk together, to laugh, to have joy, peace. So you have to find, you cannot separate yourself from that. That is the part of the human being. You have to, yeah, you cannot hear of the war and the kids suffering and the going around and around and around. So yeah, I have friends, but not like deep, deep friends. Those are with community. But I have fun with them. (Esther, Dinka)

For South Sudanese women who came to the U.S. as refugees, a mixture of government, community, and kin support is vital to their survival and economic mobility. But they show that emotional and material support are linked accompaniments, and in some instances, prerequisites

for the appraisal support which is needed to help them with acculturation in a new country. They accept help with acculturation from people that they trust. This is another reason transnational phone calls are so prominent.

Transnational Kin Support

The South Sudanese who have been admitted to the U.S. know that their economic successes and failures are linked with families abroad, both in their home country and in refugee resettlements throughout the world. Whole hosts of people are relying on them to do well. Because of this, much of their appraisal support comes from family and kin either here or abroad. Lillie's (Dinka) husband was in the homeland for one year after she got to the Small Southern City. She often spoke with him by phone, helping to make arrangements for him to get here. Lillie's mother, who is 106 years old, lives in Juba, the capital city of South Sudan. Lillie and the rest of the family send money to Juba for her mother's care. Now, since Lillie's husband's death years ago, she has grown close to three friends, one in the U.S., and two who provide transnational emotional support.

“I have a cousin, she lives in Canada, and a very close friend, she's from my tribe too, she lives in Seattle, and a Nigerian friend. These three people really are close to me. They really stood by me, especially when my husband pass[ed], especially my cousin in Canada. We three, we talk every day.”

About two years ago, Lillie's aunt in Canada died. Lillie now goes to Canada quite often to visit the same cousin who provided emotional support to her in her time of bereavement.

The women speak of transnational support quite often. As mentioned above, I was asked to transport clothing from the Southern State to the Midwestern State for Miriam. Those materials had come from Miriam's cousin in Australia. And remember that, when I travelled with the Nuer women to the fundraising party in Large Midwestern City, Naomi was gathering shoes to send to her husband in South Sudan, through a cousin who would travel there soon.

Deborah's (Dinka) family members in South Sudan chide her regularly, trying to convince her to continue her education as her brothers have done. Though these family talks are difficult, Deborah clearly recognizes that her family's appraisal support stays on her mind. "I know that I need to do it one day; it will just take some time now." Deborah notes that raising her little girl alone is the main reason for the delay in her education. She also notes that the absence of a supportive father is a definite hindrance. She is still married, but is separated from her husband, a black American man who does not work or support her in any way. Deborah, like other women from South Sudan, was raised to make decisions about romance based on what types of support are provided or needed. She recognizes that, in this case, she chose romance without support.

Romantic Relationships and Forms of Social Support

Deborah's decision to leave her husband was a difficult one, especially since she had gone against her family's wishes and married outside of her nationality. But his lack of support finally drove her to leave the marriage:

In 2010 I left him... Yeah I said, you need to go and stay with your family. 'Cause I cannot take care of you and my daughter, and you stay home watch TV all the time. And his family, they are {a} nice family. Even they work in the day. Their

house is nice. All the time they {are} doing the work. Only him doing things they're not. People talk to him and he don't listen.

Deborah is careful to explain, both to me and her family, that her husband's faults are not the faults of all black American men. She explains that the rest of his family works hard, has education, and runs a middle-class household. She also explains that his family had tried to convince him to get a job and care for Deborah and their daughter, to no avail. "I cannot do nothing about it now but accept it for life I just pray for my daughter," she says.

Miriam (Nuer) works over 30-hours per week, attends some type of schooling, and relies on governmental assistance. She has five children ranging in ages from 6 to 21. Somewhere along the way, Miriam recognized that Choul, the father of her younger two children, could not stay with them, but she still has a strong and supportive relationship with Choul and his family. Choul helps with the children quite often, but living together is not for them. She cites his predilection for other women and his attachment to his mother as reasons for the estrangement, but harbors no ill feelings toward him at all. They remain great friends who help each other through hard times. Miriam receives material support from this man in the form of monetary donations and help with child rearing.

"You know, he's a very good father. It's just between me and him, he doesn't know how to treat a woman... So, we talk you know. Like, we're like brother and sister. (Laughter) Even sometime when people see us they like "Why you guys not together?" Yeah. It's just him... he will feel insecure and he will leave without telling us. And then you can't see him, he's in his mom house. And he doesn't like to be judged. Or tell him,

"You're doing something wrong." He doesn't like that. So I give up. We try 14 years it didn't work, so I let it go."

Despite the trouble in their interpersonal interactions, Miriam acknowledges that she also receives emotional and informational support from Choul. He is the one who helped to find a reliable car dealer and who helped with the down payment for her car. When she needs to talk, she can sometimes rely on his listening ear. He is like a brother, she says.

Though some of the women decide to end relationships with married or betrothed, other relationships may end when husbands decide to return to the homeland and/or take another partner in the U.S. Athalia (Nuer) is 36 years old, has eight children, and has been working at a meatpacking plant for five years. When I ask Athaliah how she came to live in the Moderate Midwestern City, she replied:

My ex-husband, he came here for study. He was going to university in [Large Midwestern city], and then he was going for his Ph.D. and then he decided to go to Africa...and then he came back and he decided that we had to come to [Moderate Midwestern City]. He said [the larger city] is not good... When we were in [moderate city], he always used to drive to [larger city] to go to school and stuff. So that's what he always did until, he just live with somebody else. (She the other woman start laughing.) He changed his road and left me hear.

When Athalia's husband left her, another South Sudanese women helped her to get a job at the same meatpacking plant and helped to care for her six children. Athalia met another South Sudanese man, whom she has been dating for years. He is the father of her youngest two children.

Some married low-income women are committed to their relationships, regardless of circumstance or ethnicity. Remember Naomi's marital situation, mentioned above, as the instance where she would leave the church rather than leave her husband just because he does not support the family. Naomi has worked at a local factory outside of the Moderate Midwestern city for over a decade. Her working-class salary has provided for her children and gotten them through school, and one through college. It has also provided the means to take care of her husband as he attended college. Naomi's family, however, does not respect her husband, as Joshua is often without work, and does not contribute to household expenses or duties even when he does work. One Sunday night after a graduation celebration in her home, Naomi walked me to my car. Once we got farther away from the house, she spoke with obvious frustration; "He won't work! He won't do anything! He will just sit, and sit, and sit."

Joshua himself speaks to me about attempts to find employment in Moderate Midwestern City. He speaks of his master's degree and his experience. He relates conversations he has had with the local school administrators of ideas to establish special tutoring programs for Sudanese students.

I try to talk to the people about what I see these children need.

They won't listen to me. I apply for jobs to work within the school

system. Then they will understand what we need. They don't hire me.

But there are other problems. Joshua will not allow one daughter to marry, citing a disagreement over dowry exchange, and will not support another daughter's college education, often "misplacing" required tax documents for financial aid. Obviously, there are several frustrating issues in this union. However, the church counselor who recommended divorce only convinced Naomi that staying with her husband was the right thing to do. Additionally, the negative

interaction with her rather insistent counselor has convinced Naomi that she does not need to share her personal business with social workers, though she recognizes that the woman meant well. In fact, this same interaction foments a certain distrust that Naomi also sometimes has with me, as well as any other American “do-goods.”

Naomi vacillates between being openly critical and quietly docile about her marriage. Her daughter explains that Naomi stays in the marriage because it would be too much trouble (time, effort, money) to divorce. In addition, Naomi can remember times when Joshua’s family did not regard Naomi as a good wifely choice because of her own low status. Her mate did not abandon her then, so she will not abandon him now, or ever. She also describes how American employers openly discriminate against both immigrant and non-immigrant Black men, often favoring other immigrants over Black males. She is aware of the large numbers of her fellow kinsmen who have trouble getting or keeping jobs, and knows that, while much of the blame should fall on her brothers’ shoulders, the unemployment rate is not entirely their fault. On one Sunday evening at dinner the women speak of men and unemployment at length. Mary, the Shilouk woman who married into the Nuer, is one of Naomi’s closest friends, and one she calls cousin. She speaks of supporting her countrymen through hard times, knowing that the situation both here and abroad has grave effects on their already fragile identity:

“Some they say, ‘Oh I cannot do this job - it’s not my education or it’s not my, what you say it’s not my...training.’ But we are woman. Yeah, like me . . . Even they give me to go clean the bathroom. I have to do it because, I need money. And this is not my country. It’s - it’s some... where. We have to go the where they [U.S. agents] say go. But our men, they cannot learn to go wherever. But we are women. We go with the wherever. Even in Sudan some people, some

women, they don't work in somebody house to clean the bathroom. They don't like to do that. But here, we have to do it. What we can do? We see it is not a good job to do but we have to. Because you need money ... Some men [are] doing the bad job, because it's money. But some men don't do it. Some say when they go to company, when they [supervisors] see Africans they see they big, tall; they put them in the bad job. And they say some other people [are] in the easy job. That's what they say. But if you go in the true, you have to do everything you can do because of the kids."

Mary (Shilouk) understands the problem of discrimination in the U.S. and sympathizes, noting that the women will do whatever is necessary even if the men do not (or cannot). She also notes that the U.S. is not their home, so they cannot stand up for their rights as they would (and are doing at great personal cost) in South Sudan. When I first met Mary in 2011, her husband had just lost his job and remained unemployed for several months. By the time I re-interviewed her in 2014, he was employed again as a security guard. Mary has reacted to the situation with some resolve and worked when she could, speaking often with her church-based social service agent to help adjust her food stamps and housing assistance.

Naomi (Nuer) however, is more critical of her countrymen. She notes that in her job at the meat packing plant, as well as her comparable job in Texas, she has seen that the Hispanic and Asian supervisors treat African men badly. She also notes that these discriminatory actions are sanctioned by higher ranked White managers. She knows it happens, but still has little patience with her husband and others who refuse to stay on the job. [Field Notes, August 2011]. Today, Naomi's grown daughters are impatient with, and openly critical of, a father who will not

support them or provide a pleasing American example of success and hard work. But even with her frustrations, Naomi sees more in him and their marriage than outsiders do. Besides, she is older now, many of the children are grown, and she has made it this far. “Why not stick it out?” says her daughter, Ruth, as she interprets for her mother.

Some of the South Sudanese men’s current employment status creates community stigma, as some criticize these men for allowing their wives to carry the financial burdens for their family. But others still accept them as worthy community leaders, especially those with education, noting that the labor force in the Midwestern state is not one which is kind to black men, regardless of nationality. Naomi, however, does seek Joshua’s advice constantly for business matters and notes that he helps to tutor school children in the Sudanese community. As such, she recognizes that the community reveres her husband, and she keeps quite, most of the time. As such, she recognizes that other community women regard her highly for having an educated husband and children, and for using her own resources to raise their individual economic statuses. Naomi is one of the few South Sudanese women in this study who owns her own home. These women maintain that, though their husbands do not provide enough material support, the emotional and appraisal support that they provide is, at least, something worth noting.

Still, it is also worth noting that not all South Sudanese men require as much material support from their wives or partners. Lillie’s home is beautiful, large, situated in a well-regarded middle class neighborhood, and affording every middle class comfort. She openly and readily acknowledges that this home is a product of both hers and her husband’s hard work. In fact, the financial support that Lillie’s husband provided through his job as a truck driver also supported all of the children through college. His upstanding provisions convinced her younger son to also

become a truck driver. The youngest son now lives with Lillie and helps to support her since her husband's death.

The emotional, informational, and material forms of support that are provided for, from, and between South Sudanese women is seen to vary by location and ethnicity. Though both states are prime refugee resettlement locations, the Midwestern state seems to have more material and informational support for the larger refugee families through church-based resettlement agencies. These agencies provide extensive support for women who need employment assistance, adjustments in public assistance provisions, and assistance with education procurement for themselves or their children. In addition, local churches that are attached to these agencies attempt to extend support and acculturation efforts by providing space for ethnicity-specific church services and assisting with family counseling. These church services are avenues for emotional and informational support for many of the South Sudanese women in the Midwest, as they are in the Southern state. However, the ethnic specificity of church membership in the Midwest is different from the more nation focused membership in the South, leading to greater ethnic cohesion in the Midwest. This would seem to lead to more division between ethnic groups, but the evidence seems to point to more division in the South than the Midwest, since the Nuer and Dinka hardly ever come together for events, unlike those in the Midwest.

The mixing of ethnic groups in the South (excepting Nuer) seems to provide for greater multiplex ties, as the Dinka women and the KuKu glean great amounts of appraisal and emotional support from members of their own ethnic groups, as well as Shilouk and North Sudanese members of their church. But church membership still does not provide the types of appraisal and emotional support that family members provide, both at home and abroad. As all

of the South Sudanese work to provide transnational material and emotional support, the appraisal support that is reciprocated from family abroad proves invaluable in their efforts toward economic mobility.

In Chapter Six, the experiences of these women will be discussed in comparison with those of Black women who are the descendants of slaves in the U.S. These comparisons by class, nationality, immigration status, location and ethnicity will yield a much greater understanding of the heterogeneity of the Black female population in the United States. I will summarize the current study's contributions to intersectional approaches for understanding the diversity of black women's experiences of differing forms of support. I will identify key contrasts in the economic and support experiences of native born and refugee black women, address methodological limitations in the analysis, and discuss future research paths.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

“Women of African descent ... remain differentially placed within an overarching matrix of “global gendered apartheid” organized via a plethora of distinct nation-state politics. As a result, dialogues among Black women across national boundaries ... promise to shed light on current issues within U.S. Black feminism that now appear to be ‘American’ yet may be better understood in transnational context.” (Collins 2000: 233)

The current study uses an ethnographic approach to uncover patterns of oppression in the lives of U.S. native-born and South Sudanese immigrant black women. Highlighting respondents’ own words, my observations, and validation from focus groups, I draw conclusions about how participants perceive their network structures and available social support for economic mobility. The findings indicate how U.S. native-born and South Sudanese-born black women perceive, create, and use their network structures and availability of social support for economic mobility. For native-born black women, social class is seen as a vital marker in the provision of social support, as ethnic group membership and collectivism are important for the women from South Sudan.

The use of intersectionality theory, along with black feminist thought, shapes the design of this research so that highlighting individual standpoints can reveal several different combinations of intersecting oppressions based on social statuses evident in these black women’s lives. The

“matrix of domination” that is evident in their lives is both shared and individual, based on their own personal biographies, the groups to which they belong which shape their culture, and the social institutions with which they interact. The cultural context that shapes their understandings are created by race, class, gender, and nationality. And each of these statuses which shape culture are products of the institutions, or structure, in which they survive or thrive (Collins 1991; Thornton Dill and Kohlman 2014).

For South Sudanese women, evidence of local and transnational material, emotional, and appraisal support are shown to frame motivations for support reciprocity and cultural cohesion. The collectivist orientation of the South Sudanese population links their views on kinship, sharing resources, and appropriate pathways to economic success. Ethnic group population density is seen to affect the presence of inter- and intra-group support by location. And appraisal support for education is shown to be a vital resource for South Sudanese immigrant women.

Predominant findings on network support indicate how ethnic group population influences inter- and intra-group interactions and the availability of support, as well as the provision of it. Social support and economic mobility for both immigrant and non-immigrant black women in this study are strongly associated with both present and historical group relationships with institutions in the location of residence. The availability of material support for low-income women depends upon the nature of the resource provider and its relationship to the state. The availability of employment depends upon the labor market and economy of the state, along with the availability of informational support (from agencies and friendship networks), which link respondents to the labor market along with possibilities for promotion. Stable employment then allows for local and transnational material support, which, along with education, increases the

standing of network members, who are then sought out for emotional and appraisal support by others. Friends, churches, ethnic community members, and romantic partners provide vital means of emotional and appraisal support for both groups, as women either revel in successful relationships or try to work through difficult ones. Appraisal support (reflected appraisals, feedback and advice) is the missing link that accompanies and connects all other means of social support for these groups.

I have observed the role of churches and church-based social service agencies, as well as government and secular agencies, in providing forms of material support for both immigrant and non-immigrant black females. Institutionalized support is linked to social stigma for low-income native-born black women, and these organizational responses differ by labor market strength and resource availability in the two states. Appraisal support is then highlighted as a key element for thriving, which is often accessed through the acceptance of material and emotional support.

The low-income black women in this study (both immigrant and non-immigrant) reveal relationships with agency representatives and social workers that are different depending upon location and immigration status. All of these women show themselves as working toward acculturation of middle class norms. Yet, findings from this study reinforce literature in immigration and acculturation revealing findings that few black women, either native-born or immigrant, are able to access middle class rewards for their efforts (Bean et al 2005; Corra and Kimuna 2009). Consider the sanctions and stigma placed on the native born black women who have children out of wedlock. Parallel to previous literature, the stigma of lower class membership, revealed in negative reflected appraisal, is visible in interactions with middle class blacks in service agencies (Offer 2010), with blacks in informal elite social settings, and with

church leaders, all of whom serve as gatekeepers to maintain homophily in higher class native-black networks. The negative appraisal serves as a signal that social network entry will not be granted to poor and working class individuals, despite educational or economic efforts. This interaction is most noticeable in locations with higher black populations.

Enid Logan (2014) offers a very clear argument on class cleavages between blacks in current context. She explains that, after the notion of colorblindness surfaced, contemporary racial discourse 1) promoted a distinction that should be made in mainstream middle class discussions (both white and black) between “good blacks ‘like Obama’ and more problematic black others,” who complain about race too much, while simultaneously 2) using morality claims and conduct codes to differentiate between poor blacks and more affluent blacks.

According to the new race politics, blacks seeking access to white spaces should be mainstream, articulate, clean cut, *black but not too black, friendly, upbeat, and accommodating*. They should openly acknowledge how much progress the country has made, avoid divisive racial issues, and stand on their own two feet rather than seeking racial preferences [*italics mine*] (Logan 2014: 654).

By this definition, the very idea of seeking agency assistance is seen as a moral deficiency, and more of a deficiency for black women than for whites. Use of cultural language, display of a full range of emotions (including sadness, anger and disgust), or public discussions of institutional or personal discrimination, are all viewed as improper conduct for anyone seeking entry to upwardly mobile networks. Therefore, as middle and higher classed black women seek entry to racially diverse networks, they must promote themselves as proponents of the new racial code (which, by the way, is not at all new). In addition, these women find themselves with the

responsibility of maintaining boundaries of the network to which they are admitted. Any lower class black woman who seeks entry by means of a higher-classed black woman's already tenuous network ties must first prove that she will not damage the higher-classed woman's plans for reaching more powerful members in the network. This means acceptance of the racial code of conduct as part of the socially constructed definition of professionalism: smile a lot, be agreeable, complement, and do not criticize the current racially stratified economic system (Logan 2014). Lower class women who can accept these precepts will receive appraisal and informational support that will allow them to advance economically. Racial discrimination may be preached from the pulpit in black churches, but after service is over, the country's mainstream code of deracialized conduct prevails, and lower class black women are socially segregated from others, particularly in larger black congregations.

This study also reveals evidence of racial cues for both groups of women in the U.S. labor market. Native born black women who work in the secondary labor market find ways of initiating economic mobility through racial network diversity. Consider that Michelle in Southern state has been placed in an employment queue and climbs out of it by expanding her network racially, and that Cora's help with housing and finances in the Midwestern state comes by associations with her "affluent white friends." McGuire (2002) notes that black women in work environments are viewed as members without power, even when they are in managerial positions. As a result, their positions in informal networks are not central to occupational operations and they are not granted key information by other network members that could result in further upward mobility and social assimilation. Some black women however, strategically

find ways around the hierarchical boundaries. As in Michelle's case, they find out what type of support may be needed by the network target, and provide it.

Adding to work by economists and sociologists on labor market and gendered, racialized wage inequality (King 1995; Newsome and Doodoo 2002; Pettit and Ewert 2009; Dozier 2010), we should consider the idea that, regardless of education or previous experience, refugees of color are typically admitted to the U.S. labor market through the tertiary market as unskilled workers, rather than primary and secondary markets. Native born black women made gains in the latter markets after civil rights legislation, but then lost ground due to institutional discrimination and occupational segregation. As many of the U.S.'s recent refugees are people of color (i.e., Burmese, Bhutanese, Syrian, Somalian, Sudanese), the relegation of refugees to the labor market as unskilled workers – a move formally sanctioned by the federal government - reinforces current occupational segregation practices and creates environments rife for segmented assimilation (Bonacich, Alimahomed and Wilson 2008). Taking into consideration the fact that many women from South Sudan enter with very little human capital, employment in meat packing and processing (jobs held by many refugees in both states) may seem substantial enough at first. However, when South Sudanese men enter with prior college educations, their absence from at least secondary labor status positions clearly reflects the same process defined differently by academic groups. Economists call it economic discrimination; psychologists call it structural stigma; sociologists call it institutional discrimination. The result is the same – structured, institutionally sanctioned marginalization.

George Borjas' (2001; 2005) work details the economic benefits of immigrant workers on efficiency in the host nation labor market. When measuring regional (Midwest, South) economic

gains rather than overall national gains, economists find more long-term gains to efficiency from low- and unskilled immigrant labor than from what is gained by low-skilled native-born workers. One key factor in the analysis is the realization that “new immigrant arrivals are much more likely to be clustered in states that offer the highest wages for the types of skills they have to offer” (Borjas 2001:70). This explains the higher ethnic group and overall density of South Sudanese in the Midwestern state rather than the southern state. Low and unskilled immigrants represent cheap labor that increases U.S. regional labor markets’ profit margins, while reducing workers’ chances for economic mobility. Steering refugees, even educated refugees, into the U.S. workforce through the tertiary labor market would signal a gain in efficiency for the region. Black refugee laborers are very grateful for the escape from conflict. But after a few years in the workforce, first generation South Sudanese men (and women) begin to understand the U.S. market labor system, as well as the economic and social psychological mechanisms that fuel their oppression (Haedicke 2013).

When South Sudanese women work to support families and refuse to leave their men at the behest of white middle-class religious counselors, we see an active awareness of and resistance to host nation segmented assimilationist agendas. Though marital and financial troubles may result from male unemployment, the South Sudanese women in this study continue to provide social support to their husbands, even when they are angry with them. In return, husbands provide appraisal and/or material support when they can. These patterns do fit dominant expectations of family structure and economic mobility. But in the Midwestern state, there are enough available tertiary market jobs for the women to absorb the men’s occasional unemployment. In the Southern state, government officials and resettlement agencies regularly

appeal to the national resettlement officials to not assign South Sudanese widows or single mothers with large families to these cities, as the labor market and state social service roles will not support them. These government and agency barriers put a strain on attempts at network diversity and economic mobility by 1) isolating educated male refugees of color in labor markets for which they are overqualified and in which they are ill-treated, and 2) positioning black female refugees in conflictual situations where they must constantly choose between supporting their men and providing for their children. Future research should further investigate similarities in segmented assimilation practices of refugee service agencies and public policy in the United States.

Each group and subgroup of black women approached network diversity differently. Working class native-born black women could build bridges with higher class black or white women through family or work contacts. However, churches referenced in this study were not described by respondents as providing much positive appraisal support for lower income black American women. Therefore, social class network diversity for lower income black women was more dependent upon population dynamics of the location in which they resided. If the location had a higher black population and several churches from which to choose, lower class women, particularly those who were single mothers, found it easier to locate a church with members and leaders who would not stigmatize them.

Higher class native-born black women with more education had more white friends and associates, with only one older woman having a close Latina female friend that she identified as providing emotional support. Native-born black women who had been raised in difficult circumstances (like Niece, Sharnell, and Shelley) reported fewer racially heterogeneous

networks. Though these women had pulled themselves and their families out of extremely difficult circumstances, they found it difficult to trust many people at all, let alone people whom they perceived were less likely to understand their situations. This lack of understanding is similar to what the South Sudanese women felt about external networks for social support.

The South Sudanese women never forgot to express gratefulness for their opportunity to escape war, starvation, and mistreatment. But they also never allowed the support they received to make them waver in their indigenous values. To this end, they follow American rules and some informal norms, but do not accept people into their close-knit circles who will question their culture. Americans who push for strict assimilation to dominant family norms or traditional economic roles found themselves unable to reach the South Sudanese. Some ethnic group differences will remain dividing points for these immigrant women, especially as conflict continues to ebb and flow in South Sudan. However, depending on the nature of the environment (church that preaches and prays for peace in all of Sudan), or the cause for coming together (fund raising for schools and hospitals in South Sudan), South Sudanese women can put some ethnic group differences aside to both offer and receive emotional and appraisal support.

One major point that arose in the Midwestern focus group was a warning to make sure that low-income native-born black women's emotions were portrayed with the proper explanation. Of prime concern for black female community leaders in the Midwest was that much of the academic work published thus far has portrayed low income black women as "angry black women." They are voicing Collins' (1991, 2000) notions about accessing different "truths;" these women wanted to make sure that the truth I noted for low income women was theirs and not mine. They forced me to recognize that my truth would still be tainted by my own

sociological training and professional development at a white university in a very white state. “You’ve spent the last few years reading work about black women that was typically written by whites for other whites,” said Cora calmly. At this point, I relayed to these women some of Dee’s story: how she deals with the stigma of single motherhood, poverty, and the difficulties associated with learning the art of code-switching as she pursues her education for economic mobility.

I admit now that this body of work cannot pay Dee’s story the attention it deserves, nor any of the other women who have come through such trying, devastating circumstances in their efforts toward middle class mobility. I will note, however, that the “anger” that other researchers claim to see in black women’s eyes, does not translate as anger at all to me as these women tell their life stories. These middle-aged black women wiped away tears and took breaks to take high-blood pressure medicine, refill wine glasses or get another beer, as their faces and vocal tones portrayed anything but anger. I saw and heard pain, sadness, confusion, fear, frustration, isolation, and, for some, extreme weariness. Anger was not a factor. This was some sort of collective depression. If anger is all that sociologists see, then perhaps we need better measures, greater conceptualizations of mental health diagnostics for people who are not prone to white middle-class or European orientations. As I recount these stories of women brought to the U.S. under forced migration generations ago, I wonder what will be revealed in the stories of third, fourth, and fifteenth generation women of South Sudanese heritage. Will we see the same tears in their eyes?

Community and Agency Support

Right now, the South Sudanese women do not consider support reciprocity to be a hindrance to their own social mobility. Their collectivist cultural socialization precludes the notion that reciprocity would cause harm, and some of them, at least those in the Midwestern state, are highly critical of the individualist orientation in the U.S. which, they feel, fosters a sense of selfishness. The South Sudanese in the Midwest have thriving refugee networks that allow them to pool their money for international travel to see family members, and for help during emergencies. Southerners are not able to do this because of the lackluster labor market and a social service industry that is not as supportive as that in the Midwest. Executives in one southern resettlement agency often commented on the regional differences, noting that resettlement officials often reject large families and those with one parent because the state does not have the resources to care for them. Indeed, in the Midwest, women are able to share collectively because they have the jobs and social service assistance that allows them to do so. They are able to form long-term relationships with workers in the church-based service agencies that work toward their resettlement. When a job is lost, the same agent can help find another one. This is not the case in the Southern state. Agency workers are overwhelmed with newcomers and usually break ties with refugees after their first few months in the country. Since my initial field observations, two southern agencies merged and restructured in an attempt provide more long term, consistent care for clients. Several managers of the new firm noted, however, but such long-term care will still largely depend upon the resources provided by the state. The church-based agencies in the Midwest have other resources which allow them to build relationships with refugee women for years, often visiting homes and checking on children of clients who were resettled 15-20 years ago. In addition to more long-term appraisal support and greater educational opportunities, more subsidized housing is available in the Midwestern state

as well, so that clients can acquire a large house to accommodate larger families and then adjust rent as income increases. Both South Sudanese and native-born black women in this state had lived in subsidized rental homes for multiple years, providing a sense of stability for their children.

One important caveat to the support that Midwestern service agents provide is the “neoliberal maternalism” that accompanies such support and often results in a lack of cultural competency regarding appraisal support for immigrants from collectivist orientations (Cumins and Blum 2015). The home visits, informal and formal counseling on child-rearing and marital relationships are carried out with a maternalistic stance that “reinforces class and race superiority while producing moments of genuine care and connection” (Cumins and Blum 2015: 623). On the one hand, the Midwestern service agents, many spurred by religious organizations’ protestant ethics of helping the less fortunate, do work hard to provide network diversity and vital material support to immigrant women. On the other hand, their condescending appraisal support from individualist standpoints create a lack of trust among immigrant women, who often take note of intrusive and judgmental suggestions regarding autonomy in marriage, work, and family support. Though this interaction was more evident in the Midwestern state, I must admit that it was also evident in the Southern state, especially in the lack of understanding for single mothers with younger children who could not afford to take the first job offered because of child care concerns, or who could not easily “control” children who had behavioral issues in school resulting from traumatic war memories in their homeland. The biggest difference in neoliberal maternalism is that the Southern state agents had fewer opportunities to provide long-term care

to refugees, and therefore would not have formed the closer relationships in which neoliberal maternalism would be most evident.

Appraisal Support for Educational Achievement

Though educational attainment is highly regarded among all groups, I see varying levels of support for achieving it. Some of the native-born women work or have worked to achieve their educations even when family and community members (or social workers) regarded them as lazy or avoiding work. Usually these single mothers have to combine part-time work with government assistance, student loans, and scholarships to achieve their goals. The time required and use of government resources creates a stigma for them that is difficult to manage. Single mothers create circles of friends who support their educational goals and have travelled this road before. They then provide support for others. Exceptions would include mothers like Shelley, who found that she could achieve middle-class status without a college degree. All of the mothers still encourage their children to place a high value on education to avoid the hardships that the mothers encountered. This value of education is also common among the South Sudanese.

For South Sudanese women, education is more than a link to economic mobility for the immediate family. It is the link to supporting communities and rebuilding a nation. Educated community members are able to provide appraisal support to less educated members because of the social and cultural capital they have developed in their schooling. Not all educated older men can draw higher salaries or stable employment, and husbands of these women still struggle with institutional discrimination in both states. But they provide needed support to the women and the collective in other ways that are not visible to people who are oriented toward individualist

perspectives. Younger educated men, usually sons, and educated women, who were educated in the U.S., are able to draw higher salaries that are used to support families in the U.S. and abroad. South Sudanese women recognize that, though they are citizens of the United States, everything they do is tied to the homeland. To this end, education helps to build wealth in the collective by advising women on navigating their relationships with American institutions such as their children's schools, as Uncle David does for Esther in the Southern State. Some women, particularly those in the Southern state like Deborah and Esther, believe that they are unable to manage the pursuit of an education and while providing for children at this time. Though these women have plenty of emotional support from church, and appraisal support for raising their children, they lack the appraisal support that would come from other women like Abigail in the Midwestern state, who understands the rigors and priority that must be afforded to educational attainment. Women like Deborah would also need child care provisions and other material support that Southern State social service agencies and her thinly populated South Sudanese community are unable to provide.

Providing Support, Negative Interaction, and the Issue of "Drain"

When social scientists speak of "drain," should this be considered in the literature as an associate variable of negative interaction (Dominguez and Watkins 2003: Taylor, Chatters, Woodward and Brown 2013)? To be clear, I speak of the working- and lower middle-class mothers who have found their way out of abusive relationships, have raised or are still raising their children, and struggle to increase their own economic status through promotions, home ownership, and diversified incomes (i.e., two and three *legal* jobs at a time). Then, all of a

sudden, teen-aged daughters are pregnant, or retired mothers, law-breaking brothers, and other people's children now need a place to live.

Kinscription was defined and conceptualized by Carol Stack in 1976 when she reported on low-income black single mothers and their networks for survival. She and Linda Burton defined kinscription as “the process of assigning kin-work to family members” (Stack and Burton 1993: 157). According to Stack and Burton (1993), the kinscripts framework was developed to help us understand the scope of interactions among poor black single mothers as they negotiate the exchange of services, create “new” families for the same, and pass through generations cultural norms which can aid in survival, as an answer to systemic prevention of wealth building (Stack 1976). Stack criticizes the welfare system for promoting policy which “prevents the poor from acquiring capital investments typical for the middle class” (Stack 1976:127). So, kinscription is, in effect, a practical answer to the added difficulties placed upon poor single mothers as sanctions for becoming single mothers in the first place. With this conceptualization of kinscription in mind, I wonder at the way the term is used more currently in sociological research. Burton (2007) has since taken over the field of research on kinscription, investigating the ways in which poor, black single mothers recruit non-residential fathers and others to help with the raising and care of children. The process is not always a voluntary or welcome one, but one that is necessitated by availability or lack of economic and social resources.

I sense a slight negative tone in the telling of accounts of kinscription in the current academic literature. Burton speaks of a northeastern town where men are psychologically coerced into forgoing their own life course desires for success (marriage, a family of their own)

in order to care for their sisters' and other relatives' children. Heflin and Patillo (2002) speak of the "drain" that is placed on middle class siblings as they aid in providing resources for poverty stricken family members. But there is a difference between socioeconomic drain and emotional drain or "strain." Though many note the often frustrating feelings that accompany familial requests for material assistance, they also sometimes note that they are privileged in their ability to help, and much less anxious than in past instances when they could not assist family members or themselves with attempts at surviving and thriving. I encourage social researchers to better distinguish between the two when we are interpreting the results of stratification, social psychological and mental health investigations. Closer attention at the intersection of structural and cultural influences may assist in the delineation of concepts.

Higginbotham and Weber (1992) express the idea that middle class women acknowledge "owing" family members who helped them in their paths to economic mobility. This is the same notion that some of the women in this study express. They note that, though there are difficulties with family members, even these difficulties are small compared to the difficulty of not having enough money to go around. These difficulties are unfortunate circumstances in their eyes, but not detrimental or stigmatizing, unless recipients fail to express gratitude or reciprocation. When social researchers speak of the drain associated with providing support to family and friends in kinship groups, we need to specify under what circumstances participants themselves would conceptualize drain. For many of the women in this study, drain is not as automatic or even perceived as a symptom of constant family conflict as researchers have assumed.

Romantic Relationships and Social Support

After years of reading so much about the “pathology” of black culture, the erosion of the black family, and other such nonsensical sociological literature in graduate school, and particularly, of having white professors in a Midwestern state point these out, I find it quite refreshing to see in this study women who love their men. I mean, some of these women really LOVE their men! Somewhere along the line, I wonder if someone told sociologists that their main focus, their primary worth as scientists, would be in reporting everything that is wrong with groups (e.g. a social problems approach), especially everything that is wrong with minority groups. If this is the case, then sociologists have certainly taken well to the task. We have been diligent, vigilant, and exhaustive in our investigations, making sure that everyone knew about everything that was even slightly wrong with black people, black culture, and the black family. Our findings have often been reported to a mainstream (white, middle-class) audience, in a mainstream (white, middle-class) language, for the purpose of – and I truly believe this – validating the rightness of white middle-class-ness. But I found something with these participants that is not often reported in sociological literature: some black women do marry and /or have positive relationships with successful, caring, intelligent black men.

In the Southern state, I attended several events, visited several homes, and sat and observed black people in several spaces around the capital and surrounding towns. I spoke with couples who had been together for decades, raised children, and took many opportunities during parties to show public affection or gaze across the room at one another. In the Midwestern state, I spent time in people’s homes and attended events with couples who were so used to being close to one another that the energy in the room shifted when they were too far apart. I often watched these couples like they were my favorite re-run TV show, displayed in the background while I

carried on other conversations or otherwise took care of business. But other times I was compelled to stop what I was doing and openly stare at them.

About half of the participants in this study are married, most in successful unions. Another scant few are in committed relationships. In most of the spaces I visited, whether native Black American or Sudanese American, everyone in attendance knew that I was doing research (word spreads quickly about a black woman pursuing a doctoral degree), so they did not appear uncomfortable when I remarked on their closeness. Black married women openly spoke of financial difficulties, disagreements which turn into heated arguments, and times when they felt unsupported. And then, some of them talked about “working it out.” Women who were not married, but in committed relationships, spoke of their partners in loving terms.

Cecily, an older upper-class woman, is in a dating relationship with an older businessman who, quite literally, fawns over her. He opens doors, pulls out her chair, ushers her into rooms with a gentle hand at the small of her back, and takes every opportunity he can to woo her with his latest culinary concoction. She is modest, not overly affectionate, but meticulous in her understated display of love for and appreciation of him. They talk sometimes two and three times a day, depending on schedules and international business travel. And again, when they are together, the energy in the room shifts. It is almost sickening, but also life-affirming to be in the presence of these couples. For the life of me, I cannot understand why sociology does not record this. Is it because we approach with “surveys” that distance us and call for parsimonious efficiency? Or we are not working within the intimate spaces of black family life that would reveal the participants’ “truths” rather than our own?

What I see in the literature is an almost celebratory accounting of the things that are wrong with black relationships. It is almost as if the academy is ruled by people who implicitly wish to affirm centuries-old stereotypes about the base-ness of Africans and black Americans, as if to say, “See? We told you they were inferior!” This is all recorded sociologically with particular scholarly aplomb and, sometimes understated implicit understanding. For instance, the constant mention of the lack of support from black men for low-income black women, noted in earlier chapters, would develop a general expectation of pathology in the black community regarding relationships. I completed a very deliberate search of successful black relationships and came up woefully short in sociological literature. But I did find one lone commentary that states my point much more clearly than I ever could: “When people reason from an unquestioned white model of marriage and relationships, they often end up suggesting that there is something pathological about the marital patterns of blacks” (Johnson and Loscocco 2014: 3).

The current work does not arbitrarily omit positive findings on the relationships of these black women, as these may present a more culturally competent contrast for the seemingly negative findings in this work, and those which abound in sociological literature on the black family. Many black women realize and are strongly aware of the structural inequities which affect most in black communities, immigrant and non-immigrant alike. South Sudanese and native-born black women handle the situation differently as groups. By the same token, lower and working class groups handle the situation differently from middle-class groups, according to their available network and economic supports.

Surviving, Thriving, and Trust

My respondents report that, regardless of ethnicity, the networks of women in higher class groups are larger and more diverse, so that assistance can be provided by a larger number of individuals. As resources are more abundant, higher class network members can relax their expectations for reciprocity, knowing that material and initial emotional concerns are already in place. They have the privilege of providing and receiving advice or information for economic mobility without the stigma and emotional inconsistencies which accompany a lower social class positionality. However, when members of lower class groups attempt to form relationships with high status group members, they carefully monitor the levels of stigma that they perceive from higher class blacks. If the level of stigma can be managed successfully without harsh criticism or cultural insensitivity, then a level of trust can be established between both parties. Once trust is established between members of different social classes, then higher class network members can provide appraisal support without danger of being perceived as condescending or judgmental, generating misunderstandings and angry replies that derail the original intent to help. The same trust in this relationship allows lower class members to receive appraisal support from higher class network members, perceiving that the advice is provided with a clear and dignified understanding of the lower status recipient's future goals as well as her current material and emotional situations. Considering the material conditions without taking care of emotional concerns of lower class members, such as anxiety, depression and family conflict that at times accompany the lack of material wealth, reinforces lower class women's perceptions of cultural insensitivity from high class members, and intra-racial class cleavages may be reinforced.

Potential negative interaction between social classes can be further exacerbated when women are also from different racial or ethnic groups. For instance, white middle class women who attempt to provide appraisal support to black refugee lower class women will need to consider

class differences, language and other cultural differences such as dimensions of collectivism and distinctive betrothal arrangements, as well as experiences with war trauma and refugee camp life. Without careful consideration of these differences in interactions, marginalized women are only further reminded of their stigma, and trust of the higher class member is no longer a possibility. At this point, communication between network members is difficult and the provision of appraisal support is often futile. If network members cannot provide appraisal support as a product of trust, then subsequent provisions of informational support will also be unsuccessful.

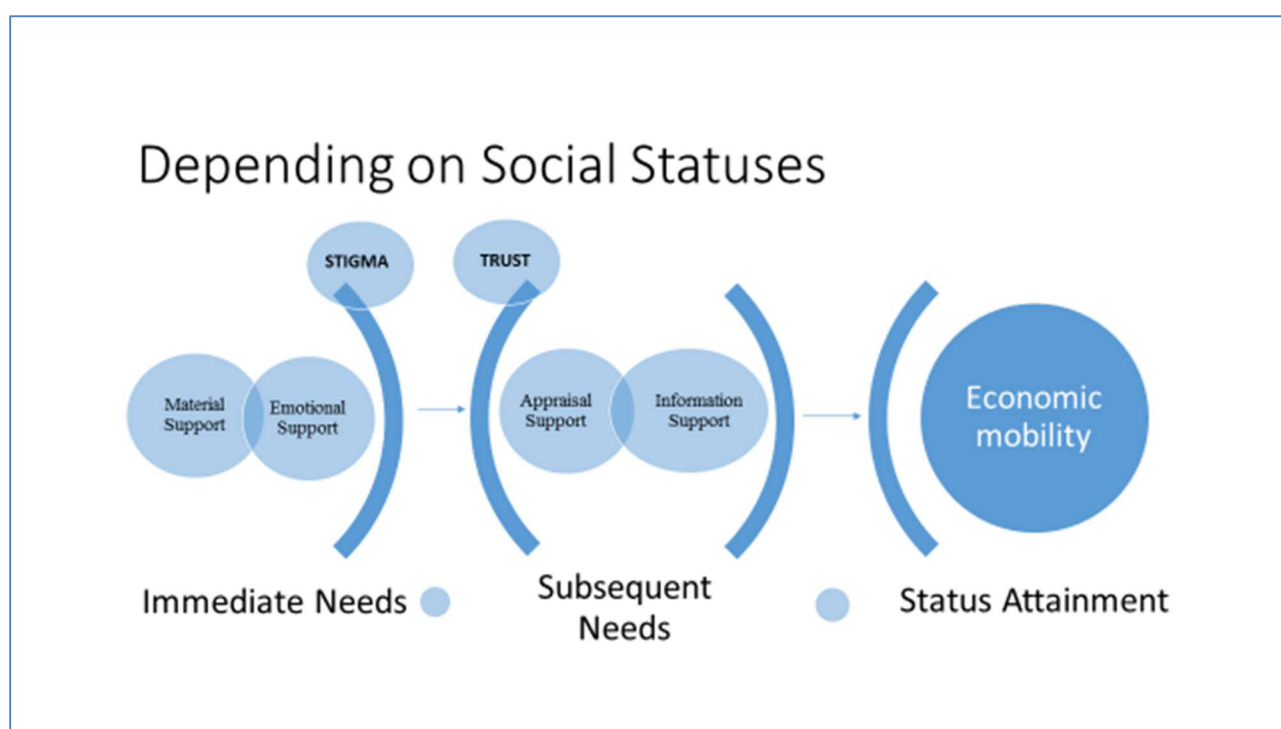


Figure 2: Relationship between Social Supports and Economic Mobility

The collectivist perspective, however, is also found among the lower income native-born women, who rely on close friends and relatives to help provide for families. Kinship itself is a cultural expression of a collectivist orientation, because kinscription is one of the behaviors of collectivism. As the collectivist orientation and behaviors are often found in U.S. families with

fewer material resources (Vargas and Kemmelmeier 2013), I acknowledge psychologists who note that “cultural views of self and social relations are used to organize [both] daily practices and social institutions” (Kitayama and Park 2007:203). By the same token, we see that black women’s cultures are formed, to some extent as a result of their placement in the institutional structures of society. Our socioeconomic status shapes our daily practices and interactions. This is not to say that poverty has a culture, by any means. It is to say that structure shapes culture and that, as the theory of intersectionality notes, structure and culture are indeed inter-related, or interlocking. Collectivist practices and ideologies are a part of the protective survival mechanisms that allow low-income black women to resist and work around the various forms of institutional racism that would deprive them of the ability to care for their families. It also allows them to resist mainstream labeling notions that would stigmatize them as inferior beings for doing so (Collins 1991, 2000). Culture clashes occur most often when they attempt to achieve economic mobility and must adapt to new ways of being, speaking, and conceptualizing their place in society.

As the theory of intersectionality relates, each woman in this study is privileged in some ways and oppressed in others, and oppressive statuses are evidenced in a manner that belies older additive and competitive notions of one group being more oppressed than another. As one Southern participant stated after a focus group, “There are no Oppression Olympics here.” What is evident, however, is that the use of intersectionality for social network analysis may reveal both multiplicative and additive points in the matrix of oppression when analyzing network ties for economic mobility. The standpoint of each individual may be revealed as multiplicative if we regard each group membership status as an affiliation with the most powerful status in a

category, and through ties that are also simultaneously structural and cultural (Thornton Dill and Kohlman 2014). However, when combining and comparing individual intersectional standpoints to form group analyses, the process becomes additive [(history x structure x culture) + (history x structure x culture)...], as if the analyst is stacking matrices on top of one another to reveal three-dimensional patterns (Scott 2008). Each woman's ability to build supportive relationships can be reflected in the cultural and relational lines which tie her to other high status individuals. An understanding of similarities in relationship ties by multiple intra- and inter-group categories, however, would then require a systematic stacking of individual (ego) network standpoints to reveal similarities and patterns in the cultural meanings behind interactions, in addition to the structural constraints on relationships, both of which change according to social setting (McCall 2005). To some extent, this would require investigation into the standpoints of individuals who inflict oppression as well as those who experience it (Fiske and Molm 2010).

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative, ethnographic research is consistently critiqued for not representing the positivist goals of large numbers of respondents and systematic responses that can be investigated for representative population characteristics and reliable measurement. It is true that these in-depth interviews cannot be generalized to all native born Black women, nor to all immigrant Black, or even all South Sudanese women. The richness of these participants' responses in interviews and focus groups cannot capture the full range of potential responses, class distinctions, and economic and educational pathways that black women follow in the U.S. All ethnographers and qualitative researchers admit to this up front, in exchange for the thickness of their data.

The inability to focus on one ethnic group for sampling of the South Sudanese population was unfortunate and unfolded across several years of data collection. Focusing on one ethnic group may have yielded more nuanced realities of collectivism in a specific Nilotic cultural group (a group whose original life-patterns are agricultural and pastoral, and who move in migratory patterns along the Nile River). In addition, the expansion of sampling to other ethnicities at a late date created difficulties with obtaining an equal proportion of respondents across ethnic groups. These factors may lead to invalid and unreliable comparisons among groups, and should only be viewed as a beginning for social scientists who wish to further investigate acculturation and network strategies of South Sudanese immigrant groups in the U.S.

Handling evidence from so many different groups reduces the researcher's ability to focus on the particularities of one group. To this end, the current intersectional qualitative analysis is a particularly ambitious project. The small group sample sizes may provide evidence of difference, but also provide only general comparisons which would need to be investigated in more depth, with greater numbers and diversity among immigrant cohorts, etc.

Additionally, I am constantly aware of my own cultural alignment with the native-born black women, which allows me to "see" linkages in this group more clearly than with the South Sudanese. One such instance is on the point of neoliberal maternalism. In the Midwestern state, my relationship with the participants was quite different than with those in the Southern state, as I had developed close relationships with Nuer women three years prior to this study as a student who wanted to learn. My relationship with the immigrant women in the Southern state began as a refugee resettlement agent who was contracted to "help" with acculturation and adaptation to the United States labor market. In some instances, the same neoliberal maternalism and lack of

cultural competence that Midwestern immigrant women spoke of, may have been portrayed by me as a highly educated woman in the Southern state. Though I actively sought to develop the close relationships and understanding with clients that I thought were missing with other middle-class agents in the South, I truly did not recognize my own complicities until reading the Cumins and Blum (2015) account of inter-cultural, inter-class interactions between service workers and lower-class women entering the job market.

The Midwestern immigrant women would have been much more open with me about the condescension that they perceived from service agents. The Southern women would have needed to tell me that I was a part of the same system of maternalistic condescension and derision. Given my privileged position in that system, I cannot expect them to be that forthcoming without some worry over the consequences. Here is where my own intersectionality comes into play.

My immersion with Midwestern Nuer women for three years prior to this study still may not have been enough to account for the cultural differences in analysis, even with the focus groups providing “checks and balances” in the analysis. I can only hope that future research on the networks of South Sudanese women can be undertaken by South Sudanese researchers, who have more personal, in-depth knowledge of the socio-historical practices of South Sudanese ethnicities and nuanced inter-group interactions for collectivist groups living in individualist host nations.

Goals for Future Research

As noted in Chapter 4, I would like to use the information gleaned in this work to construct items for quantitative research to investigate the availability of appraisal support and its connections to other means of support for economic mobility. These measures could also be used in investigations of social support and mental health. The absence of standardized and culturally appropriate items on informational and appraisal support in current data sets which investigate the associations of social support with mental health currently reflect evidence of these connections for a mostly European background. More investigation should take place on these associations for people of color from different cultures. The heterogeneity of the black female population still has not been explored to any great extent in quantitative research, therefore the field of social support and definitions of social capital in qualitative research should be explored robustly, so that quantitative measures can be devised, treating these populations with the care and respect that has previously been afforded to white middle class population samples in the United States.

Drawing from the standpoint and intersectionality theories that frame this project, I argue that social support and economic mobility investigations should be undertaken in cooperation with populations of concern. Of particular concern would be black immigrants from various “new immigrant” African origins, such as Somalia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as an expansion of black Caribbean origins, in addition to expanded knowledges of the black community that could aid in economic advancement for all black populations in the United States. The existence of a data set such as the National Survey of American Life only excites black researchers about future possibilities in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research that will aid us in providing much needed support to

those in our own communities, and to their educational and economic prospects. We wait and dream of expanded uses and knowledge that comes from scientific innovation and situated knowledges that yield “truth” from these respondents’ points of view.

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Relationships among Theoretical Premises

[APPENDIX 2]

Identification of Project: *Network Support Variation of Black Women in the United States*

Recruitment Script

Hello,

My name is Lesa A. Johnson and I am a doctoral student in Sociology at the University of Midwestern state, Moderate Midwestern City, in the United States. I am conducting a study on the social network support of South Sudanese and native-born black women in the United States. The purpose of the project is to find how network support groups function for black women, according to socioeconomic status and group of origin.

You must be 25 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a woman from Southern Sudan or a black female born in the United States, and because you reside in either the state of Midwestern state or Southern state.

Participation in this study will require approximately 90 minutes of your time for an interview.

There are no known risks or benefits to participation in this study. If you agree to participate but would like to make other arrangements for the interview, I would like to take your phone number and email address (if applicable). I will make an appointment with you for a date and time of your participation, and will email you to remind you of our appointment. I will also call or text you on the day of the interview.

If you have any questions at any time, you may feel free to me at (404)416-2182. Thank you so much for your agreement to participate.

Participant's Name _____

Participant's Phone Number _____

Participant's Email Address: _____

[APPENDIX 3]

Participant Informed Consent: University of Midwestern state-Moderate Midwestern City

Project Title: Network Support Variation of black Women in the United States

Purpose of the research: This semi-ethnographic research project is intended to examine the social support and network experiences of black American and South Sudanese women in two regions of the United States. You are selected to give consent for this study because you are a black woman currently residing in either state of Midwestern state or Southern state, and born in the United States or in South Sudan.

Procedures: As a part of the study you will be asked to participate in an audio taped, face-to-face interview for approximately 90 minutes. You will also be asked, on a separate occasion, to participate in an audio taped, focus group discussion which will last approximately 90 minutes. The face-to-face interview will take place at a location of your choice. The focus group discussion will take place at a local venue which will be the most convenient for all participants involved. You may participate in both activities or either.

Risks and Discomforts: The only known risk that may result from your participation in this study is the loss of confidentiality. We have safeguards to ensure that this will not occur, and all data will be coded and eventually de-identified to ensure confidentiality.

Confidentiality: Any personal information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. All identifiable data (i.e., contact information, interview transcripts and focus group transcripts) will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigative team (researcher and faculty advisor) during the study. The informed consent will be kept separately from the interview and focus group transcriptions and field notes. The interview will be coded to only provide a pseudonym from the beginning and the group meeting recordings and field notes will be transcribed and coded after each meeting. Interviews will be thematically discussed and all personal identifiers stripped from the codes.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits from participation in this study. Your participation in this study will NOT give you any additional privileges. However, your participation will

contribute to knowledge about the range of experiences by black women as they enact social support networks for economic mobility. We anticipate that phases of this research

will result in community discussions to present aggregated findings and to enact changes for economic mobility of black women in your community.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask questions concerning this research and have those questions answered by the investigators before agreeing to participate in interviews and/or focus groups. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered, please contact the investigator or the faculty advisor at the contact information below. To report concerns about the study or ask questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the UNL Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Freedom to Withdraw: You are free to decide not to participate in this project or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relations with the investigators or with leaders in your community. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in the requested procedures. Your signature certifies that you have read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Please place a check by the statement that applies to your level of consent. Please also provide your initials on the line following the statement (s) that best apply to your level of consent.

I consent to participation in the interview process.

 (Your initials)

I consent to participation in the focus group process.

 (Your initials)

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

PI: Lesa Annette Johnson

Contact information: Phone: (404) 416-2182. [E-mail: lesai@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:lesai@unlserve.unl.edu)

Name and phone number of the Other Principle Co-Investigators:

Dr. Helen Moore: Phone: (402) 472-6081 hmoorel@unl.edu

APPENDIX 4Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Questions:

1. Is there someone in your life who makes you feel good about yourself? Gives you complements and encourages you when you do well? Tells you that he/she is proud of you? (friends, family [parent, sibling, aunt/uncle, cousin, son/daughter, grandparent], church members, club/group members, agency workers, co-workers, neighbors, others?). Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them?

2. Do you have any goals for the future? If so, please share your goals with me. Now, who do you talk to about your goals and dreams for the future? Why do you talk to this/these persons specifically? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often to you talk to this/these person(s)?

3. Is there someone who makes you feel better or advises you when you are worried about a problem with your children? Who? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often to you talk to this person(s)?

4. Is there someone who makes you feel better or advises you when you are worried or angry or need direction about your job? Who? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this person(s)?

5. Who would you go to if you needed to get a better job? If you needed to get a second job? Have you talked to this person(s) in the past about this? Tell me about that. About how often do you talk to this person(s)?
6. Is there someone who makes you feel better or advises you when you are worried or angry about your husband/partner/significant other? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this person(s)?
7. Do you have someone to talk to when you have problems with or need advice about your finances? Have you talked to this person(s) in the past about this? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this person(s)?
8. Is there someone whom you would ask if you needed a *small* emergency loan? Have you talked to this person(s) in the past about this? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this/these person(s)?
9. Is there someone whom you would ask if you needed a *large* emergency loan? Have you talked to this person(s) in the recently? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this/these person(s)?
10. Do you have someone to talk to if you wanted advice about continuing your education? Have you talked to this person(s) recently about this? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this/these person(s)?
11. Do you have someone to talk to if to if you wanted advice about buying a home or car? Have you talked to this person(s) recently about this? Why these persons? Can you tell me

about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this/these person(s)?

12. Is there someone in your life that you can trust will give you honest feedback on your decisions or goals that is not overly critical? Who? Can you give me an example (s)? Why these persons? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this/these person(s)?

13. Can you name anyone who tends to give you feedback which is sometimes too harsh, critical, or condescending? Anyone who has in the past? Can you describe an instance when this happened? Do you still go to this person for advice? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this/these person(s)?

14. (Expecting emotional, getting neg. int.) Have you ever talked to someone about a problem, expecting them to just listen, but they ended up telling you what to do? Tell me what happened? Do you still go to this person for advice? Can you tell me about this/these person(s) and your relationship(s) with him/her/them? About how often do you talk to this/these person(s)?

Demographic Information

Geographic Location:

- Moderate Midwestern City
- Large Midwestern City
- Small Southern City
- Large Southern City

Age: _____

Ethnicity: Nuer/S. Sudanese

Native-born African American/black

Marital Status: What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Married
- Domestic partnership/Cohabiting
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

Education:

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (Please circle one)

- No schooling completed
- Nursery school to 8th grade
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree

- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

If currently enrolled, what degree are you pursuing at this time?

At what institution?

For S. Sudanese: What year did you arrive in the United States? _____,

What was your immigration status upon arrival (circle one):

Refugee Asylee Immigrant

What is your immigration status now? _____

For Native: In what U.S. city and state were you born? _____

How long have you lived in your current city/state? _____

ALL: What brought you to this location?

- Employment
- School
- Family
- Other: _____

Employment Status: Are you currently...? (circle one)

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work

- Unemployed but not currently looking for work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Military
- Retired
- Unable to work

Household Income: _____ per (circle one) Hour/Week/Month/Year

Do you have a 2nd Job?

Full or Part-time

- Please state the ages of your children:

- Which of these children currently live in the home with you? _____

Do you have adult children in college?

- If so, about how much do you pay for their expenses?
_____ per week/month/year

Do you have other relatives or friends for which you occasionally provide large or small monetary assistance? About how much per month would you say you provide for this?

Are you currently the primary caretaker for any older or indigent relatives?

Do you currently receive Food Stamps, SSI, or other federally funded benefits? (circle one)

Yes No

Social Support	Family	Friends	Co-workers	Bosses & Supervisors	Social Service workers	Church leaders	Church Members	Teachers	Health Professional
Material Support									
Informational Support									
Appraisal Support									
Emotional Support									
Negative Interaction									
Discouragement from pursuing goals									
Extreme Criticism									
Contact with people on higher level than you.									
Educationally									
Spiritually									
Economically									

Appendix 5. Ego-Network Matrix for Social Support Analysis

Location	2013 Population	Individuals Below Poverty Level	Identifying as Black or African American
Large Midwest City	> 400,000	17%	14.0%
Moderate Midwest City	> 250,000	17%	4.0%
Large Southern City	> 250,000	25%	54.0%
Southern Town	< 10,000	42%	58.0%

Appendix 6. City Population Statistics