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Experiences of African American College Graduates

by

Aundria Chéphan Green

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies

(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2014

Experiences of African American College Graduates

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University of Nebraska, 2014

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The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons that African-American alumni from a historically Black university (HBCU) and a predominantly White university (PWI) chose to attend, remain in, and graduate from college. The central research question was how do African Americans describe their college experiences? The secondary research questions were (a) What led the participants to attend college? (b) What led the participants to persist in college? (c) What led the participants to graduate from college? and (d) How was race described by the participants? Thirty-seven African-American graduates from a historically Black university (HBCU) and a predominantly White institution (PWI) were interviewed in the qualitative study. Analysis of the transcripts led to five themes challenges, support, race, personal knowledge, and involvement. Findings of the study indicated that (a) Financing college was a major concern. Participants selected their institution based on financial aid/scholarships they received; (b) Having a support system was an important component of college completion for the participants; (c) Campus climate played a role in the African Americans' interactions with others on campus; (d) Participants experienced growth when provided opportunities to become more self-aware; and (e) Participation in on-campus activities kept the participants engaged, and exposed them to new people and cultures.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God because without him I could not have completed this task. I would like to thank Drs. Marilyn Grady and Rachelle Winkle-Wagner. Both women have been so supportive and afforded me so many opportunities as my advisors. I appreciate you both more than words can express. To my committee members: Dr. Barbara LaCost, Dr. Kent Mann, and Dr. Dixie Sanger. Thank you a hundred times over for all you have done to help me be successful on this journey. Thank you to Dr. Jan Deeds who believed in me and encouraged me to pursue a doctorate in Educational Administration. Thank you to all of the students I have worked with in the past. You have and still inspire me to keep following my dreams. Last, but certainly not least, thank you to my biggest cheerleaders, my family: Charlotte Duncan-Wagner, Jason Wagner, Sr., Jason Wagner, II, and Darryl Speller. I could not have done this without your encouragement, love, support and time. To my husband, Otto Green, Jr., thank you for allowing me to pursue my dreams unrestrained. To my baby girl, Ava Simone, you are my inspiration.

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Chapter One

Overview

Many reasons influence a student's decision to attend college. "Women, minorities, and individuals from low-income backgrounds are enrolling in colleges at higher rates than previously seen, altering the profile of the American undergraduate, and diminishing the meaning of the label nontraditional student" (Goldrick-Rab, 2007, p. 2450). Tinto's (1993) Retention Model indicated that students are more likely to continue college due to their personal characteristics, career/educational aspirations, and their level of dedication to the institution prior to enrollment.

According to the Department of Education (2014) there are 104 Historically Black Colleges and Universities. These colleges and universities represent three percent of the nation's institutions of higher learning yet they graduate almost 20 percent of the African-Americans who earn bachelor degrees in the United States (UNCF, 2014). HBCUs were founded in areas where large numbers of African-Americans lived such as the South, Southeast, and Northeast (Evans and Evans, 2002, p. 3). "Education, then, according to the more liberal and dominant segments of missionary philanthropists, was intended to prepare a college-bred Black leadership to uplift the Black masses from the legacy of slavery and the restraints of the post-bellum caste system," (Freeman and Thomas, 2002, p. 351). The following list includes the names of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States. The asterisk indicates a land grant institution.

Table 1
Historically Black Colleges & Universities

Alabama A & M University*
Alabama State University*
Albany State University*
Alcorn State University*
Allen University
American Baptist College
Arkansas Baptist College
Benedict College
Bennett College for Women
Bethune-Cookman University
Bishop State Community College
Bluefield State College
Bowie State University*
Central State University*
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania*
Clafin University
Clark Atlanta University
Clinton Junior College
Coahoma Community College
Concordia College-Selma
Coppin State University*
Delaware State University*
Denmark Technical College
Dillard University
Edward Waters College
Elizabeth City State University*
Fayetteville State University*
Fisk University
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University*
Florida Memorial University
Fort Valley State University*
Gadsden State Community College
Grambling State University*
H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College
Hampton University
Harris-Stowe State University
Hinds Community College-Utica
Howard University
Huston-Tillotson University

Interdenominational Theological Center
J F Drake State Technical College
Jackson State University*
Jarvis Christian College
Johnson C Smith University
Kentucky State University*
Lane College
Langston University*
Lawson State Community College-Birmingham Campus
Le Moyne-Owen College
Lincoln University*
Lincoln University of Pennsylvania*
Livingstone College
Meharry Medical College
Miles College
Mississippi Valley State University*
Morehouse College
Morehouse School of Medicine
Morgan State University*
Morris College
Norfolk State University*
North Carolina A & T State University*
North Carolina Central University*
Oakwood University
Paine College
Paul Quinn College
Philander Smith College
Prairie View A & M University*
Rust College
Saint Augustines College
Saint Pauls College
Savannah State University
Selma University
Shaw University
Shelton State Community College
South Carolina State University*
Southern University and A & M College*
Southern University at New Orleans
Southern University at Shreveport
Southwestern Christian College

Spelman College
St. Philip's College
Stillman College
Talladega College
Tennessee State University*
Texas College
Texas Southern University*
Tougaloo College
Tuskegee University
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff*
University of Maryland Eastern Shore*
University of the District of Columbia*
University of the Virgin Islands*
University of the Virgin Islands-Kingshill
Virginia State University*
Virginia Union University
Virginia University of Lynchburg
Voorhees College
West Virginia State University*
Wilberforce University
Wiley College
Winston-Salem State University*
Xavier University of Louisiana

Parents with higher levels of education have historically been more involved in the educational process of their students when they are young than parents who are less educated (Smith and Fleming, 2008). Davis-Kean's (2005) study showed a correlation between the parent's educational expectation and how well the student was actually performing in class. The first transition into college, as well as a student's desire to persist in college, is largely effected by familial influence (Wartman and Savage, 2008). Research has shown that African-American children who receive positive educational affirmations, conversations on having pride in their race, and an awareness of societal inequalities did well academically (Leach and Williams, 2007). The literature, however, lacks qualitative examples of how African-American college graduates describe the experiences that led to their desire to attend, remain in, and graduate from college.

Statement of the Problem

College completion rates are a national concern. African Americans face a number of barriers in the college environment. The achievement gap is not solely an issue in the K-12 system; it continues into college (Leach and Williams, 2007). African Americans are often viewed as an at-risk population and described in negative terms such as "endangered, dysfunctional, dangerous, and lazy," (Strayhorn, 2008, p. 27).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons that African-American alumni from a historically Black university (HBCU) and a predominantly White university (PWI) chose to attend, remain in, and graduate from college. The two universities were chosen because they are public, land grant institutions with racially distinctive student bodies. The predominately White

institution (PWI) had a 2.4% African-American student body and the historically Black university (HBCU) had a 72% African-American student body (stateuniversity.com, 2014).

Central Question

How do African Americans describe their college experiences?

Research Questions

1. What led the participants to attend college?
2. What led the participants to persist in college?
3. What led the participants to graduate from college?
4. How was race described by the participants?

Target Audience

For individuals who work in roles related to college retention and college completion initiatives, the findings of the study may suggest strategies for assisting African-American students in their efforts to complete college.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study contribute to the literature on African-American college student success. The information provided can assist faculty, staff, and administrators who work in areas of academic recruitment and retention.

Theoretical Lens

I used the Talented Tenth as the theoretical basis for the study. Developed by William Edward Burkhardt Du Bois in 1903, Talented Tenth has been employed in areas of study such as sociology, the sociology of higher education, and educational administration. According to the

theory, the African-American race will be saved by the exceptional men and women of the race which Du Bois believed were those who are college educated.

Winkle-Wagner (2009) cited Du Bois in a discussion of the double consciousness felt by African-American students in a study of race, gender and identity. Tukufu applied Du Bois' theories in studies on race and social statistics (Tukufu, 2000; 2004). Bonilla-Silva (2003) based studies on Du Bois's theory on racism and social injustice.

An excerpt from Du Bois' essay, *Talented Tenth*, follows.

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races. Now the training of men is a difficult and intricate task. Its technique is a matter for educational experts, but its object is for the vision of seers. If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools — intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it — this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life. On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain, with never a fear lest the child and man mistake the means of living for the object of life (p. 1).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The literature review provides the context for the qualitative study of how African Americans describe their college experiences. The review provides an explanation of the research related to influences on the African-American college student's ability to attend and persist as well as the racial motivators in the college setting. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the study's contribution to the literature.

Influences to Attend College

Young people attend college for a variety of reasons. Understanding the initial motivation for attendance provides higher education administrators a basis for how to retain the student. Perna and Titus (2005) conducted a quantitative study to address the issue of parental involvement and college enrollment. The researchers analyzed a sample of 9,810 high school graduates who participated in the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) to ascertain how parental involvement, social capital, and social networks in high school vary by race and gender. African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and White students were the groups analyzed in the study. The following information was relevant to the study. *Economic capital* was measured by the actual and perceived amount that can be paid toward the student's college expenses. *Cultural capital* was measured by the student's cultural competencies, skills in language, social class, and the value placed on higher education. *Human capital* was measured by how prepared the student was academically and the student's academic accomplishments. *Social capital* was measured in terms of parental involvement and was defined as a "form of social capital that may promote college enrollment because of the relationship between a student and his/her parents, the relationship between the student's parents and school officials, and the relationship between the

student's parents and the student's friends' parents" (p. 495). The findings were (a) Students whose parents spoke with them about their academics are more likely to enroll in a 2 or 4 year college rather than not enroll, (b) African Americans (21%) and Hispanics (32%) were less likely to enroll than their Asian and White counterparts, (c) The student's access to resources at school increased the likelihood of enrolling in college, (d) Students whose friends attend a 2 year college will attend a 2 year college regardless of their original plan, and (e) The decision to attend a 2 or 4 year institution by high school graduates from the previous year impacted the decision of the next year's graduates.

Leach and Williams (2007) examined the academic achievement gap from school entry through college graduation and the impact on the African-American family. The achievement gap was defined as variations in "academic achievement between groups that are generally based on race/ethnicity, gender, and/or socioeconomic status" (p.40). The implications of the study were (a) As a group, African Americans value and desire educational attainment for their children, (b) Students with supportive families and who create educational goals at an early age are more likely to desire to attend college and be successful academically, (c) School personnel have to build respectful relationships with these families in order to overcome cultural and social barriers and (d) The lack of family financial support strongly impacts a student's ability to remain in college. "Students whose families regularly discuss grades and academic expectations as well as college plans with them, beginning at an early age, are more likely to attend college" (Leach & Williams, 2007, p. 53).

Smith and Fleming (2008) studied the role of African-American parents in the college search process and how this contributes to the female-to-male enrollment gap in college. The participants were 11 parents of African-American high school students: six sons and six

daughters. Smith and Fleming conducted focus groups and interviews with the participants. The findings indicated that African-American parents expect their daughters to attend college; but, college was seen as an option for sons. Sons were encouraged to attend community college unless they played a sport. Daughters were encouraged to attend four-year institutions. Once the child decided to attend college, the parent showed support which involved the sacrifice of time and money.

In summary, this section provided an overview of how African Americans decide to attend college. The literature identified the role of the African-American family as an influence on academic success for African-American students. Peers and mentors also influenced the type of institution the student decided to attend.

Persistence

The reasons why African-American students remain in college varies. Herndon and Hirt (2004) conducted a qualitative study with 20 college seniors on the issue of Black students, their families, and academic success. The findings were separated into three sections: precollege, early college, and late college. Influences in the precollege stage were family, macro perspectives on race and factors of motivation. Family was mentioned most in this themes. The researchers suggested that participants reported being close to their families, but also created fictive kin relationships which hold similar importance to relatives but are not related by blood. Early college influences were negotiating environments, sense of community, and spiritual support. African Americans were successful in college when the student created community on campus. Family expectations and being a role model were the themes in late college. Being a role model for younger family members was a motivator.

Strayhorn's (2008) quantitative study on the issue of building support on campus to help African-American males be successful in college contained 231 participants. He used Sanford's idea of challenge and support to guide the study. Strayhorn defined challenge as "encounters with new situations, people whose background differs from one's own, and ideas that cause cognitive dissonance; support as the human and material environment that provide students with security, sense of belonging and information needed to succeed" (p.29). The findings indicated that (a) Black men had greater satisfaction in college when they had strong supportive relationships, (b) negative stereotypes about Black men hinder their ability to find mentors and other support on campus, and (c) having peer, faculty, and staff relationships on campus also added to increased satisfaction for Black men in college.

Guiffrida (2003) conducted a study on the issue of African-American student organizations as a means for social integration on predominantly White campuses. Eighty-eight people were part of focus group interviews at a midsize PWI in the Northeast. The findings showed that organizations such as honors programs, Greek letter organizations, political groups, and student government offered participants an opportunity to make on campus connections with Black faculty and other students outside of the classroom. These organizations provided professional connections, a way to give back to the African-American community, comfort for the participant, and gave African-American students who came from predominantly White communities a chance to connect with Black culture.

Flowers (2004) studied African-American student college development related to campus involvement. Based on Astin's theory, student development was defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p.634). Like Strayhorn (2008), the College Student Experience Questionnaire was used to

collect a sample of 7,923 African-American undergraduates from 192 colleges and universities. The findings revealed that class and extracurricular experiences were positive indicators for student development. Four points were identified: (a) Student involvement helped African-American students gain a better understanding of liberal arts and vocational preparation; (b) The student involvement measures showed the level of African-American campus participation to be low to moderate; (c) Academic involvement played a greater role in student development than recreational experiences; and (d) Activities such as following an exercise routine or working on a committee negatively impacted African-American student development.

Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor and Lewis-Cole (2006) conducted a study on the issue of religion, spirituality and career development in African-American college students. Twelve participants who self-identified as African American were interviewed. The findings indicated that religion and spirituality helped the participants overcome challenges experienced on PWI campuses, provide emotional support during career selection, religious activities such as church attendance and reading the Bible alleviated stress, prayer was important, parents played a major role in the participant's spiritual lives, and their religious and spiritual beliefs encouraged participants to choose careers in which they can help others.

St. John, Paulsen and Carter (2005) conducted a study on college choice and persistence for African Americans and White students. "The nexus model examines how student background, finance related reasons for choosing college, college experience, current aspirations, prices and subsidies, and living costs influence persistence" (p. 550). The researchers utilized the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey to obtain their data. The findings indicated that finances for African-American students are not influenced by their parents' age or level of education, African-American students selected institutions with either low tuition or significant

financial aid packages; married students, independent students and those interested in pursuing advanced degrees were more likely to persist when living expenses were covered. The researchers also noted that African Americans had the most diversity in educational attainment by the parents of all four racial groups in the study.

Harper, Karini, Bridges, and Hayek (2004) used quantitative methods to study the issue of gender differences in student engagement among African Americans at HBCUs. The data was collected using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) providing a sample of 1,167 participants. The findings indicated that men and women are equally academically and socially engaged on campus, female students made more effort in preparing for courses than males yet females tended to interact with faculty less than male students, and both genders felt their campuses were supportive.

In summary, African-American college persistence is linked to campus relationships, religious beliefs, familial support, financial support and campus involvement. These are all important aspects of retention and subsequent college graduation for African-American students.

Race

This is a review of studies on the impact race has on the college experience. Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire and Green (2004) conducted a study addressing the issue of racial stereotypes and gender for African Americans who attended HBCUs and PWIs. The quantitative study included 143 undergraduate students from a large, Midwestern PWI and 147 undergraduate students from a large, Southern HBCU who completed a survey. The findings suggested HBCU students noticed less racial stereotyping in the classroom setting than students at the PWI. Men who were proficient in their major subjects admitted having fewer expectations of racial stereotyping. A difference was present in the way males and females responded to their

campuses and the experiences they had. Stereotype expectations caused lower academic proficiency for women than men at the HBCU. The opposite was true at the PWI.

Brown (2008) conducted a study of racial socialization and social support structures. One hundred fifty-four African Americans from a large Midwestern university completed an assessment on resiliency. The findings suggested that cultural pride and knowledge of history, the support of a person outside of the participant's family, and the connection between the two provided strength for the participant.

Kim and Conrad (2006) conducted a comparison study of academic success for African Americans who attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) versus those who attended Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs). Nine hundred forty-one African Americans participated in a longitudinal study at 10 HBCUs and 34 HWCUs. The findings indicated that the likelihood of obtaining a bachelor's degree from an HBCU or HWCUs are similar. Additional findings showed that the HWCUs provided more (on campus) resources than HBCUs. The African-American students who attended the HWCUs came from more affluent families and were more academically prepared entering college. HBCU students had the same level of degree aspirations as students at the HWCUs. More students transferred out of HBCUs than HWCUs. HBCU students were more likely to participate in research projects with faculty than at HWCUs.

In summary, this section was a review of studies about racial stereotypes, racial socialization and support, as well as a comparison of African-American academic success at historically Black college and universities and historically White colleges and universities. The findings indicated that with the instillation of cultural pride and minimization of stereotyping, African Americans can succeed in any academic environment.

The studies indicated that campus support, religion, parental involvement, mentor relationships, the reduction of racial stereotypes, financial assistance, and participation in campus activities all play a role in the academic success of African-American college students. The following study was conducted to explore the reasons that African-American alumni of a historically Black university and a predominantly White university chose to attend, remain in, and graduate from college.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons that African-American alumni from a historically Black university (HBCU) and a predominantly White university (PWI) chose to attend, remain in, and graduate from college. Alumni from two institutions were selected to provide a deeper understanding of the people and resources that contributed to their success in college. The findings of the study can be used as a resource for African-American students, families of college students, mentors, faculty, and people who work in the areas of recruitment and retention on college campuses.

Research Design

To conduct the study a qualitative phenomenological research design was used to explore the reasons that African-American alumni from a historically Black university and a predominantly White university chose to attend, remain in, and graduate from college. Data was collected through face-to-face and Skype interviews. A pilot study was conducted with undergraduate students to test the interview questions. The interview questions were modified based on the information gathered through the pilot study.

Research Questions

The central question was: “How do African-Americans describe their college experiences?”

Secondary Research Questions

What led African Americans to attend college?

What led African Americans to remain in college?

What led African Americans to graduate from college?

How is race described by the participants?

Sampling

The participants were African Americans who attended and graduated from the predominantly White university or the historically Black university. Participants were selected using snowball sampling with the goal of obtaining a variety of perspectives (Creswell, 2008, p. 155-156). An email was sent to colleagues at the predominantly White university and the historically Black university who knew individuals who met the study criteria. Colleagues then forwarded the attached email invitation containing my contact information and informed consent form to potential participants.

Rationale for Using a Qualitative Approach

According to Creswell (2008), "In qualitative research the intent is not to generalize a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon. Thus, the qualitative researcher purposefully or intentionally selects individuals and sites," (p. 213). Because of this, face-to-face interviews with participants to discuss the reasons that led to their decision to attend, remain in, and graduate from college was the best way to explore this phenomenon. The researcher selected Skype as a means to connect with participants who lived at a distance in order to maintain the face-to-face communication.

Phenomenological Approach

The essence of the phenomenological approach focuses on concepts, events, or lived experiences of humans (Saldaña, 2011, p. 8). Moustakas (1994) labeled his form of phenomenology transcendental or psychological phenomenology. The approach is less focused on the researcher's interpretation and more on describing experiences. Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, and Alejandro (2007) discussed Husserl's concept of epoche in which the researcher sets aside as much as possible, his or her experiences, to take a fresh perspective of the phenomenon under examination (p. 252). This state is challenging to achieve due to personal biases. However, this approach was the best fit for the type of study. The objective was truly to "come to an intimate awareness and deeper understanding" of why African-American college students decided to attend college, remain in college and graduate from college (Saldaña, 2011, p. 8).

Data Collection

Thirty-seven African-American college graduates from the HBCU and the PWI were interviewed. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via Skype. All of the interviews were audio recorded and lasted 20- 45 minutes. Each participant received an informed consent form to sign prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted fall 2012 through summer 2013. The interviews followed a semi-structured set of ten questions that inquired into participants' decision to attend, remain in, and graduate from college. See the interview questions in Appendix A.

Participants

Although 43 individuals indicated a willingness to participate in the study, only 37 participants are reflected in the study's findings. One participant did not meet the study

requirements and five recordings were unusable due to difficulties with technology. The study includes the stories from 21 females and 16 males. All of the participants graduated between 1996 and 2011. The highest number of participants from the PWI graduated in 2003 for a total of six. The highest number of participants, also six, from the HBCU graduated in 2006. Table 2 provides a breakdown of participants by graduation year.

Table 2
Participants Demographics by Year and Institution

Graduation Years	PWI	HBCU
1996	1	0
1997	0	1
1998	0	0
1999	1	
2000	0	0
2001	2	2
2002	2	1
2003	6	
2004	3	2
2005	3	2
2006	1	6
2007	2	3
2008	0	3
2009	0	1
2010	0	0
2011	0	1

Data Analysis

All of the audio data from the interviews was transcribed. I personally transcribed thirty-one of the interviews conducted at the PWI and the HBCU. Six interviews were transcribed by a professional who signed a privacy consent form.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Creswell (2008) described this technique as “a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account,” (p. 267). The process of coding is used to better understand

the text data, label the segments with codes, examine the codes for similarities and then combine the codes into broad themes (Creswell, 2008, p. 251). In vivo coding was used which states the codes in the participant's actual words (Saldaña, 2011, p. 99). The codes were arranged into themes or categories to create a database of topics most discussed by participants (Creswell, 2008, p. 252).

Role of Researcher

I originally became interested in this topic because I worked with students on academic probation. There were four students who struggled academically because they were forced to attend college by their parents. It was challenging to help them find motivation to persevere through college when they did not have an end goal in sight. These students, who all happened to be African American, were the catalyst for my educational pursuits. I felt it was important for other student affairs professionals and academics to be mindful of how best to serve this population. While conducting the interviews, the participants reinforced how important it is to have a support system while on the collegiate journey.

I have been a student, faculty, and staff person at a PWI and have also been a student and served as staff member at a HBCU. I understand the dynamics associated with being an African American in both settings which undoubtedly impacts my interactions with the participants. Student success is important to me. I chose this topic because I want to help others understand, from the perspective of people who have experienced it, how to better serve African-American college students and all students of color. I understand how important it is to engage students in dialogue in face-to-face courses and especially in online environments. Being passionate about wanting to see African Americans be successful is a bias that I hold.

Verification Procedures

Three methods were used to establish validity: member checking, providing rich, thick description of the participant interviews, and disconfirming evidence will be reported. Member checking is the process of sending the transcript to the participant to provide them an opportunity to make corrections if necessary (Creswell, 2008). Rich, thick description occurs when the researcher provides detailed information about the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Stake (1995) stated that thick description is “conveying to the reader what experience itself would convey,” (p. 39). Reporting disconfirming evidence is sharing the pieces of the data that report opposite results from the rest of the data (Creswell, 2008).

Reflexivity.

The process of self-reflection is a crucial step in the research process. Being close to this topic, I recognize that I hold biases and pre-conceptions. Creswell (2013) stated, “How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research,” (p. 215). It is important that I understand this and how it has an effect on my understanding and interpretation of the data. I kept a reflexivity journal in order to capture my view of the experience after each interview. I expected the reflexivity journal to help me during analysis; but, I simply wrote about how I felt the interview went. It was helpful during data analysis to recall the events that occurred surrounding each interview. Validation strategies are important because they are a safeguard against researcher biases.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to be mindful of the possible ethical issues that arise when conducting a research study. I received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of

Nebraska-Lincoln which protects the participants of the study. This approval also indicates that the standards for ethical research have been met.

Protecting the identity of the participants is extremely important in this study. Pseudonyms were selected for each participant in an effort to protect their identity. Each participant was described in the section titled vignettes but any information that would make participants readily identifiable was omitted. The institution names have also been removed to further protect participants.

The following chapter includes vignettes about the participants in the study.

Chapter Four

Vignettes

Vignettes of the 37 participants are presented in the following chapter. Twenty individuals from the HBCU were interviewed. At this institution, females were more willing to participate. Thirteen females and seven male contributed to the study. Nineteen participants were interviewed via Skype. One participant was interviewed face-to-face.

Seventeen participants from the PWI were interviewed. Nine were men. Eight were women. Thirteen participants were interviewed face-to-face and four participants were interviewed via Skype. The face-to-face interviews took place at various locations.

14 of 37 participants identified themselves as first generation college graduates. Table 8 indicates the number of male and female first generation graduates as well as the type of institution they attended.

Table 3

First Generation Graduates by Gender and Institution

	Women	Men	Total
HBCU	13	7	20
(1st generation)	(5)	(1)	(6)
PWI	8	9	17
(1st Generation)	(4)	(4)	(8)

Participants from the HBCU

It was a sunny, breezy winter day when I met Kesha Chanel at a local branch of the public library. She was excited to be my first interview and I was super nervous. We briefly chatted as we walked to a quiet corner of the library since there were no meeting rooms available. All of the tables and chairs were for (five-year) olds. We laughed as we got situated and we made it work. Kesha is from the Midwest. She wore a dark hoodie, jeans and Timberland boots. I was losing my voice, so we sat close to each other to ensure we would both be heard as I recorded the interview. Kesha is working on a master's degree in student affairs. "You know, that is funny because I don't think I utilized any resources as far as like a counseling center, study sessions none of that," she said. "It was just like me and my roommates were each other's support system. Made sure we ate at the same time, took a nap, woke up, and did our homework at the same time. I don't think I went to anybody." Kesha graduated the HBCU in 2006.

Alisha Thompson and I met via Skype one evening in July. We agreed to meet at seven o'clock. When I signed in early to ensure my equipment worked correctly she was there waiting for me. We laughed a lot during the interview. She was very thoughtful in her responses. Alisha graduated in 2005. She loved her college experience and it showed as she reminisced. "It's really, definitely the people that kept me motivated because you see so many positive African-American women and men, especially our Miss HBCU... Just to see that type of example of someone so beautiful and educated...It's beautiful to me." She is a Midwesterner and admitted that she had to get adjusted to life in the South. The interview ended with her stating, "I think everyone has their own experience and it is what you make it. And for me, I made it the

best experience I could. Like I said, I love college and I miss it. Just being on campus and just being in that atmosphere is just awesome.”

Tia Summers allowed me to interview her during the few minutes she had between work and school. Although she is in law enforcement by profession, she was venturing back into higher education to get a master’s degree. She stated that she did not necessarily enjoy school when she was in undergrad but she sees the benefits of furthering her education now. “I was the first generation child who actually went to college and it was challenging for me because I didn’t have anyone to talk to about my experiences because there were no experiences in my home.” Tia is also from the Midwest. She studied criminal justice at the HBCU and graduated in 2006.

Nona Jefferson was a human resource management major at the HBCU. Nona was in the process of moving but made time to share her experiences with me. She was pensive as she answered the questions. She was afraid that she would answer the questions incorrectly. I assured her that everyone’s answers were unique and there were no wrong answers. Nona was the first person in her family to complete a four-year degree when she graduated in 2007. She decided she wanted to attend college when she attended a Black College Fair in her hometown. “I didn’t really have a big influence to go to college; I’m not going to say my parents didn’t push me to go to college. It just wasn’t an important thing. My parents always gave me an option. You can do this or your can do that. It wasn’t yes, you are going to college. Or this is what you should be doing. I guess the lack of knowing, inspired me more because I wanted to see what the experience was about,” Nona stated.

Crawford Harris is a family man from the southeastern part of the country. His wife agreed to entertain their children allowing us an opportunity to conduct the interview. He had his family say hello during our Skype session. Crawford was a business administration major in

college. Both of his parents were educated, yet, it was his peer group who kept him motivated. “I was in the honors program at the HBCU. So the peer group I was in was pretty motivated. You don’t want to be the last place person in that peer group... So when they are studying and they’re going to class you figure ‘yes, I need to go to class. So that helped.” Crawford graduated with his bachelor’s degree in 2001.

Rashida Jackson was a total joy to interview. We laughed and talked like old friends. She, too, is from the southeast but now resides in the northeast. She is very inspiring because she is a true “go getter”; and from what she shared, she always has been. She admitted that she went to college because, “... I was so wanting to push myself out of my own comfort zone and challenge myself outside of what I knew I could already do...and like in a sense prove people wrong ‘cause it was like so many folks were like ‘oh so you’re going to the HBCU, it’s a party school... it kind of motivated me to work towards like proving other people wrong; but, mainly like proving myself wrong and thinking like okay you can do this, like if you really want to work hard and stay dedicated enough and really focus at least on just bettering yourself.” Rashida graduated in 2008 with a degree in journalism.

April Wiggins is a very spiritually-centered woman from the southeast. She spoke a lot about her faith and how it has shaped her and led her to and through many situations in her life. April comes from an educated family. She always knew she was going to college. “So it has basically been in my DNA from childhood on... I guess my desire to always do better and stand out above the crowd. I always believed in not just being average but being above average in my personal goal of what I wanted to do with my life.” April graduated in 2006 with a degree in psychology. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in counseling psychology.

Lauren Marley, a marketing major, who graduated in 2009, really believed in this study and encouraged her friends to participate. When asked about what motivated her to finish college she said, “My husband. When I met my husband I was at a point in my life where I wasn’t sure I wanted to stay in school any more. I wasn’t sure school was for me. I was struggling in my classes and just to see him being a young man who was so focused on his school work, he had a great work ethic, inspired me to want to do better in school.” She originally hails from the southern part of the country.

Anthony Smalls is a political science major from the south. He was one of the few people who knew what he wanted to do prior to going to college. Anthony was the minority in his family because they all attended the same college but he chose to attend the HBCU. He remembered that he had great counselors and they really encouraged him during his college search; but, his family was the driving force. “I always knew that I would have to go to college. I never looked at it as whether I was going to go or not...I don’t think I ever made a choice. It was like you go to high school then you go to college. In my family, it was just what you do. It was as basic as going to elementary or junior high school,” Anthony said. He attributed his motivation to stay in college to being able to actually learn about what he loved, which is politics. Anthony graduated in 2005 and is now practicing law.

Deana Lewis is a 2006 business administration graduate from the South. “Well, I am the first person in my family to graduate high school without any kids and the first one to actually complete college...So me having that and my own personal motivation to not follow in the footsteps of the women in my family. I didn’t want to make the same mistakes...” She was very determined to be different. She is working full time in order to put herself through graduate

school. She shared, “And I wanted to prove to my mother that I would go to college and finish. I wanted to make her proud too.”

Sterling Bennett is a 2007 graduate. As an undergrad, she was a chemistry major. Sterling came from a military family which caused them to move around quite a bit. “Meeting lifelong friends... We only stayed in a place a year to eighteen months. So we didn't really develop a lot of, we didn't really develop any friendships. While we were always moving around, our friends were always moving around as well. So once I got to college, I was able to make friends and develop relationships that other people developed when they were in elementary school or middle school. Some of them had friends since they were five. I never had that. But my best friend now, I met her standing in line in orientation.”

Chase Daniels was an English major in college. He said he took the scenic route to completing his degree but always intended to graduate. He said, “...most of my success in college came toward the end of my career. And that just came from finally knowing what I wanted to do ultimately. When I decided I wanted to become a teacher, I had a more clear cut motivation for the tougher parts of college which was doing the work. I connected more to the end goal and that made it more desirable and I was willing to work harder for it. Internal motivation helped me to do what I needed to do to finish it. Because I'm interested in school, I like the education process. I just had serious discipline issues.” Chase graduated from college in 2011.

Gianna Miller, a first generation college student, graduated in 2006. She admitted that setting a good example was a major motivator for her. “Being the oldest of three children I wanted to set that pace for my younger sister and brother that you can go to college and you can

complete it. You don't have to go and drop out like a lot of people do, especially because I went off to college. I left [home] to go to the HBCU to show them 'hey, we can do it.'

Olivia Grayson admitted that she always found school interesting. She selected her institution because "it was in a warmer climate; but I also wanted to go somewhere, where I could get that Black experience, but also go somewhere where I could make my own mistakes." Olivia shared, "In my family, I've always been looked at as the responsible one, even though I am the youngest of five; and, I have always been a role-model for my nieces and nephews. So I wanted to go somewhere that if I fell down and had to figure out how to get myself back up [I could] without everyone watching." She was a psychology major and graduated in 2006.

Veronica Jones is working on a doctorate in history. She was also a history major as an undergraduate as well. She spoke of her main influences stating, "My family...definitely my parents. I have a number of aunts and an uncle who are school teachers. I was always being taught. I never had an off day." She chuckled as she recalled the memory. "I was always being taught even in the summer. My mom and my aunt were always taking me to the library to read books as a child. I was always being given books. My uncle would give me books because he knew I had an interest in history. He would always give me books on African-American history or memoirs, stuff like that." Veronica graduated in 2004.

Reynaldo Livingstone was a business administration major from the Midwest. His father, a high school science teacher, was very instrumental in his college selection process. "I was unaware of any higher-level institutions besides the norm. Howard and stuff like that. So my father actually took me to a college placement center in Chicago which was founded to help inner city children, like myself, get exposed to other HBCUs and stuff like that. Like I said, you know, you don't hear about those schools, at the high schools. You hear about the White schools

and the famous Black schools. But you don't hear about all the other HBCUs out there.”

Reynaldo graduated in 1997.

Rashad Patton is a 2008 graduate and a marketing major. He spoke about a professor who encouraged him to engage in school. “He really took the time to challenge me to take more difficult courses and really gain knowledge from school. My big thing about school, initially, was I’m going to do what I have to do to get out and say I have it. But he was the one to really say, what do you find interest in, what challenges you, what excited you.” He said that without this professor’s influence he would not be in his current profession.

Shana Jenkins is also a business administration major. She spoke about her parents’ influence on her college decision. “It was always a mandate in our house to attend college. That was just how it was going to be. Mom and Dad, said we went to college so you guys are going to college. So we were going to go. But mother wanted us to attend historically Black colleges because we had grown up in predominately White schools; and she wanted us to experience higher education with people who looked like us.” She is a 2004 alumna.

Aaron Foster was both a scholar and an athlete. “I have always been smart. I was like 6th in my class in high school; and, I always wanted to attend college. I always looked at it like high school is not the end. Nothing starts until I get to college. The reasons were just growing up and seeing my environment. I grew up in a pretty poor environment and seeing the people around me I knew I wanted more for myself,” said Aaron Foster. He played football throughout his college career. He was the only twin who participated in the study from the HBCU. When he spoke of his college experience, he often said ‘we’ referring to he and his twin brother. Aaron graduated in 2007.

Jamaal Watson is a former basketball player from the Midwest. He was eager to be interviewed. Jamaal said that he really enjoyed the interview because it gave him a time to reflect on college which was something he had not done since he graduated in 2002. Jamaal came from a single parent home. He was not able to play basketball after his first two years of college. He described some of his feelings stating, "Basketball was my sport and I just knew it was going to be my profession as a small kid... It was a very, very challenging time especially since it was a passion of yours and something you did all day, every day, and you had dreams and aspirations of doing so much with it in order to provide for your family. Because that was one of the things at an early age, I thought this was the route I had to take in order to make it to take care of my mom." Jamaal expressed his gratitude for having people and resources to help him persevere and finish college.

Participants from the PWI

The first thing a person notices about Anton Jackson is his smile. His smile was bright when we met early one fall morning. He wore a light blue dress shirt and a pink tie as he sat across from me at the table. Anton went to college on a football scholarship. He is a first generation college graduate from the South. He admitted that getting involved on campus was really beneficial for him. "...playing football or any athletics at the PWI, it can feel like you're segregated from the rest of campus because everything is all in one area: where you eat, where you work out, where you practice. But I actually took the time to meet normal students," said Anton. "I was in the choir singing. Did some other stuff and it really allowed me to get out of my shell. Naturally, I am an introvert but just being involved helped me see another side of me." He graduated in 2003.

Kenton Deshone was an engineering major from the Midwest. We met in the campus library for his interview. He has a very deep, yet quiet voice, so the location was perfect. He wore a dark blue sweatshirt and jeans as he leaned back in his chair as he spoke. “I was one of the only, actually I think I was the only Black person in most of my classes in Engineering College, certainly the only Black American in any of my classes, so that was always a factor in the back of my mind,” Kenton expressed. “...you always question, is my race impacting my grade or anything like that, any kind of perception of me in the class.” Kenton graduated with his bachelor’s degree in 2007.

I met Scott Blackwell in his office. He was sitting at his computer responding to his email. Scott was an art major in college. He finished his bachelor’s degree in 2005. Scott stated that getting involved on campus was instrumental in his college career. “So when I joined my fraternity I actually saw men who were excelling and getting graduate degrees and actually doing big things. Like, one of the professors, two of the professors here at the university really persuaded me to join the fraternity. Persuaded me, not like recruit, but seeing what they do and how they operated it was, basically solidified it for me... the experiences that I got and the experiences that I went through as an undergrad just made me want to do better, improve my community and me.” He has since completed a master’s degree in student affairs.

Imani Shepard was gracious enough to allow me to interview her at her home one Friday morning in the fall. She and her two daughters greeted me with big smiles. The atmosphere was warm and cozy and comfortable. This social Midwesterner graduated in 2003. She shared that engaging in campus activities really helped keep her motivated in school. “I think definitely working on campus keeps you in the loop of things; but also, just being in student organizations, having people you can connect with, your own peer mentors that you can look to and say, ‘how

did you do in this class?’ or those kind of things. Just involvement on campus helps you graduate.”

Erica Johnson came from a home where excellence was very important. Her father was in the army. She mentioned that her participation in on-campus activities and being an RA for several years was one of the best things that happened to her. This 2001 alumna was an elementary education major. “I saw there was a position opening at Arc Hall so I ended up being an RA over on East Campus. I absolutely loved it. It was just different because I felt like I came home. Leaving City Campus and coming to East Campus was nice.” She is an elementary principal and finishing up her doctorate.

Miriam Belmont, a 1996 graduate, had big plans to attend college in another state. She applied to several schools and was accepted to all of them. She did not actually apply to the school she attended. Her mother, unbeknownst to her, applied for her. She described how the staff in the TRIO Office was a major support for her. “...they had that program that helped you, well that helped first time college students. They actually had a freshman orientation class, they taught you how to study, they taught you how to form study groups. They tried to come up with ways to help keep you on track and on task. They, your junior and senior years, they helped you with resumes and helped get you together for interviews and how you should dress. So I would say that was a big factor in keeping me in school.”

Maurice Franklin is full of charisma. He and I met at a local library on a Saturday afternoon in the early spring. He strolled in wearing a red, yellow and white jacket with yellow matching sneakers and blue jeans. Maurice was a marketing major in college. He said that one of the most impacting experiences he had in college was participating in his fraternity. “The social aspect of being in my fraternity was fun. It was organizing and being at parties. It was

philanthropic events and partnering with other Greek letter organizations to do things. It was step shows. It was traveling throughout the region to go to leadership conferences.” Maurice, a Midwest native, graduated in 2004.

Ashley Jacobs is a first generation student from the Midwest. She majored in elementary education and graduated in 2004. Ashley said that had her guidance counselor not asked her what college she was going to attend, she might not have gone. “Growing up in a house where my mother always told me ‘you are going to go to college.’ Before I even knew what college was, it was kind of ingrained that we were going to go. In high school, I had a lot of supportive teachers who sort of geared me and said this is your next step. So I did the research and was ready to go.”

Tyler Hampton played basketball during his college career. He was from a rough neighborhood in the Midwest and basketball was his way out. Even though that was the case, he did not solely want to be known for his skills on the court. He wanted to show his siblings back home that they too could go to college and do well if they wanted to. During college, he admitted that he was not as focused on being a ‘student’ athlete as he intended to and had to work really, really hard to make up the work and graduate on time. “I wanted to graduate in four years. I had many obstacles and let things distract me and was on the verge of not graduating in four years. So I had to decide how I was going to graduate... I had to put it on the backburner.... I don’t know how I did it but I completed 18 or 21 credits that summer. I was in class and professors’ offices after class.” With hard work and dedication Tyler graduated in 2007.

Shanice Alexander was an education major from the Midwest. She overcame some major obstacles in her pursuit to earn her undergraduate degree. “...when I got into that car accident, right before I student taught, so kind of like my last year. I broke both of my femurs.

Like I said, I couldn't afford school on my own; and, I had scholarships; and, they were all like four years. So, I was like, I can't take time off of school to get better...I can't afford that. And just that pressure of knowing that no matter what condition I am in physically I have to get back in school. I have to start student teaching." Shanice proudly graduated from college in 2005.

Monica Iverson and I had a face-to-face interview scheduled for earlier in the summer but our schedules never aligned. We made arrangements to have a Skype date on a Saturday afternoon. Monica always knew that she wanted to be a doctor but deciding what type of doctor took a little bit of time. She, too, received a scholarship in both athletics and academics. Monica decided that academics were more important to her than running track. She majored in athletic training while in college. Monica admitted that her friend group helped keep her motivated as she matriculated through college. "I think the activities I got involved with, student government, Black Student Government. I got involved with some leadership activities as a TA. I think those activities showed me that there was more to life outside of academics so that when I felt burnt out I had something else to turn to. I think that helped all around to make the struggle worth it and just to keep pushing forward until I figured things out." She graduated in 2004.

Shawn Griggs wore a burgundy polo shirt as he sat at his computer screen. He agreed to participate in the study when his wife informed him that more male participants were needed. Shawn was a political science major who graduated in 2006. He listened intently and answered each question in a thoughtful manner. Shawn is from the Southwest and came to college on both an academic and track scholarship. He decided that he would not wear his athletic gear to class because he wanted to set a standard. "...in business class, when I got to be a sophomore/junior and I was taking those business classes, they made it clear I was the Black guy in class; so then, that became a certain level of pressure/responsibility of "if I am the only Black guy you ever

meet you need to have a positive experience of what Black people are like”...double whammy, I’m black and I’m an athlete...oh you really put me in a box now so I wouldn’t wear my athlete clothes to class like I would just do certain things to try and make people understand you cannot put me in a box and put my race in a box.”

Kim Marshall was a transfer student originally from the Midwest. She and I spoke on a Saturday afternoon. Kim admitted that she was the type of student who was indecisive about her career path because she was good at several things. She ultimately decided on industrial engineering. Kim is a 2003 graduate. “Jobs that I had as a high schooler, I had it in my mind that if I didn’t have a college degree these types of jobs were my future. I was a cashier at Wal-Mart, I worked at McDonald’s. I worked at First Data doing data entry...so that was my motivation to go to college. The types of jobs I wanted required a college degree.”

Austin Benson and I met at Barnes and Noble one midsummer afternoon. Austin played football while in college. He reported that it was a tough experience for him being a first generation college student. He chose the PWI because they guaranteed his scholarship no matter what. “Success was the support you get in the academic center...and just knowing that I had someone there who cared about me...it proved to be the MVP thing of me being in college period.” Austin graduated from college in 2003.

Brandon White is a distinguished looking gentleman. He wore a dark colored suit when we met at his office. Brandon was open-minded and that seemed to open many doors for him personally and professionally. He was passionate about keeping in touch with and being a mentor to his younger cousin who began college this year. “I made sure I knew people in positions of power and I don’t think I did it consciously, I just think I realized that that person can get me farther than these guys could. I talk to my 4 year old about people – hey man, meet

people. Be friendly, be outgoing, be confident in who you are, look them in the eyes, make good relationships. He says, Dad quit talkin' to me about that.” Brandon graduated in 1999.

Phoebe Williams is a 2002 graduate. She is a person who really enjoys her life. During the interview, Phoebe said that she was really proud of the way she was able to give back to the community during college. “Upward Bound...during college, I worked with that program. So I did a lot of mentoring of high school students who were aspiring to go to college that were kind of in the situation I was in. I developed programs to kind of go around to the schools to get even elementary students thinking about college. I know in middle school I thought that was early for me; but I didn't realize, even getting someone in elementary school wasn't too early.” Phoebe is a recruiter for a college scholarship program.

Nicholas Harper is super smart and had three majors while in college: English, psychology and Black studies. He comes from a family that values hard work; and, he was sure that he did not want to do that when he grew up which is why he chose to go to college. “When I graduated from high school I really didn't know what I wanted to do...so my parents, being the parents that they were, went out and got me a job...in the summer they always hired college students during the busy season. I worked all summer making manhole covers...and it was awful. It was absolutely awful.” Nicholas graduated in 2003.

In summary, this section provided an introduction to the individuals who participated in the interviews. Two tables were created to provide a visual summary of the participants. Table 4 major, their home region, graduation year, and the institution they attended.

Table 4		
Participants by Major and Graduation Year		
Participant Name	Major	Graduation Year
Scott Blackwell	Art	2005
Monica Iverson	Athletic Training	2004
Gianna Miller	Biomedical Sciences	2006
Maurice Franklin	Business	2004
Brandon White	Business	1999
Crawford Harris	Business	2001
Lauren Marley	Business	2009
Jamaal Watson	Business	2002
Reynaldo Livingstone	Business	1997
Rashad Patton	Business	2008
Shana Jenkins	Business	2004
Austin Benson	Business/Communications	2003
Sterling Bennett	Chemistry	2007
Imani Shepard	Communications	2003
Phoebe Williams	Communications	2002
Shanice Alexander	Education	2005
Tyler Hampton	Education	2007
Ashley Jacobs	Education/Consumer Science	2004
Erica Johnson	Elementary Education	2001
Kenton Deshone	Engineering	2007
Kim Marshall	Engineering	2003
Chase Daniels	English	2011
Veronica Jones	History	2004
Nicholas Harper	History, Psychology, Black Studies	2003
Nona Jefferson	Human Resources	2007
Rashida Jefferson	Journalism	2008
Anton Jackson	Political Science	2003
Miriam Belmont	Political Science	1996
Shawn Griggs	Political Science	2005
Kesha Chanel	Political Science	2006
Anthony Smalls	Political Science	2005
Alisha Thompson	Psychology	2005
Tia Summers	Psychology	2006
April Wiggins	Psychology	2006
Deana Lewis	Psychology	2006
Olivia Grayson	Psychology	2003
Aaron Foster	Sociology	2007

Table 5 Participants by Institution & Home Region		
Participant Name	Institution	Home Region
Ashley Jacobs	PWI	Midwest
Erica Johnson	PWI	Midwest
Imani Shepard	PWI	Midwest
Kenton Deshone	PWI	Midwest
Kim Marshall	PWI	Midwest
Maurice Franklin	PWI	Midwest
Miriam Belmont	PWI	Midwest
Monica Iverson	PWI	Midwest
Nicholas Harper	PWI	Midwest
Phoebe Williams	PWI	Midwest
Scott Blackwell	PWI	Midwest
Shanice Alexander	PWI	Midwest
Tyler Hampton	PWI	Midwest
Anton Jackson	PWI	South
Brandon White	PWI	Southeast
Austin Benson	PWI	Southwest
Shawn Griggs	PWI	Southwest
Alisha Thompson	HBCU	Midwest
Jamaal Watson	HBCU	Midwest
Kesha Chanel	HBCU	Midwest
Nona Jefferson	HBCU	Midwest
Olivia Grayson	HBCU	Midwest
Reynaldo Livingstone	HBCU	Midwest
Shana Jenkins	HBCU	Midwest
Tia Summers	HBCU	Midwest
Aaron Foster	HBCU	Southeast
Anthony Smalls	HBCU	Southeast
Chase Daniels	HBCU	Southeast
Crawford Harris	HBCU	Southeast
Deana Lewis	HBCU	Southeast
Gianna Miller	HBCU	Southeast
Lauren Marley	HBCU	Southeast
Rashad Patton	HBCU	Southeast
Rashida Jefferson	HBCU	Southeast
Sterling Bennett	HBCU	Southeast
Veronica Jones	HBCU	Southeast
April Wiggins	HBCU	Southeast

Five themes emerged from the study: challenge, support, race, personal knowledge, and involvement. The themes will be presented in the following chapters.

Chapter Five

Findings

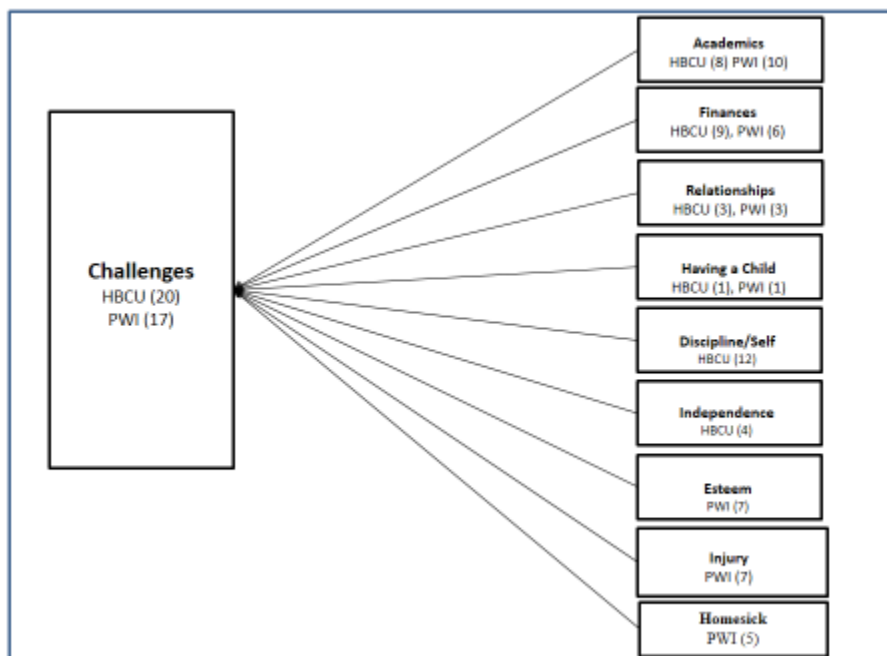
The purpose of the study was to explore the reasons that African-American alumni from a historically Black university (HBCU) and a predominantly White university (PWI) chose to attend, remain in, and graduate from college.

The analysis of the transcripts of the participant interviews led to the development of the list of codes. The codes were analyzed to develop the themes. Five themes emerged: challenges, support, race, personal knowledge, and involvement. The themes are presented in the following chapters.

Challenges

All 37 participants described challenges they experienced during college. Challenges were mentioned 279 times during the interviews. The sub-themes that emerged from the transcripts of the participants from the HBCU and the PWI were academic challenges, finances, relationships, having a child, discipline/myself, independence, esteem, injury and homesick. Table 6, a map of the challenges theme, has been included to show the sub-themes and the number of participants who mentioned them during the interviews.

Table 6
Map of Challenge Theme



Academic Challenges

Eighteen participants mentioned academic challenges 73 times from the HBCU and the PWI. Kesha Chanel said, “I would say accepting the fact that I wasn’t graduating on time due to issues with my advisor and just poor administration not looking stuff up in the system.” She continued, “Me, being a student fresh out of high school not knowing any better, I’m thinking they were there to help me so I put all my trust in them... Yeah I think that was probably the biggest challenge I overcame. And then graduating...it was a tough road. Not as bad as some may think, but obstacles being thrown at you sometimes you think you can’t do it until you actually get it done.”

Rashad Patton had problems with his advisor which he said taught him a valuable lesson. He said,

My biggest challenge I had to overcome was my student advisor, because my advisor put me in the wrong classes on my track to graduation. I really had to understand...I had a class that I had taken that I had already gotten an "A" in; but, my advisor put me in the same class again because it had a different course number. I ended up taking it again online. This class was keeping me from getting into my upper level courses so I had to address that. It ended up being a really big challenge. It taught me that sometimes you can't put your future in other people's hands; you have to go out there and really follow up and make sure people are putting you in the best position to be successful. For me personally, initially when I started college I wasn't really the ideal student. I was very distracted, my grades were bad, and it was a struggle.

Reynaldo Livingstone came from a different angle regarding the obstacles a person can encounter when attempting to finish in four years.

I would have loved to have finished in four years. But I don't know who thought that was possible. I don't know anybody that goes to college and...They're like yeah, four years. Shit, whatever, dude. It can be done but that catalog is very misleading. Because you take all the courses and electives and if you do well on your paper- something happens. This class ain't offered or this class got dropped or it's coming out in the fall, not the spring. Whatever. So I graduated in five years.

Gianna Miller talked about a struggle she experienced with academics. "I was focused and I was determined to do well but being on your own and trying to get the feel of registering for classes that was my biggest thing. I wouldn't say it was an issue or a problem or anything like that." She stated, "It was more so how I would arrange my time and manage my time so that I could graduate in four years and still kind of have a life still at the same time."

April Wiggins confessed, “School came easy for me; and I would be like, ‘I got that.’ I always got “A’s” and “B’s”. Then you get the professor who is the hardest of the hard and you’re like, what just happened?” She continued, “Or you meet the one who is the craziest of the crazy and you say ‘why don’t you understand my situation?’ And helped me see life is not going to always be easy. Things are not always going to come easily for you.”

Nona Jefferson stated, “Maybe one of my teachers seemed that she wanted me to fail. I feel like she did everything to try to make me fail.”

Participants told stories about struggles they had after their sophomore year in college. Shana Jenkins stated, “I was having a little trouble with my grades the end of my sophomore, beginning of my junior year. I kind of deviated a little bit and ended up having to stay an extra year.” She admitted, “And there was a professor, she was one of the Athletic Directors, and if you got in trouble with your grades not only did you have to report your grades to her for the next three semesters but you had to take one of her classes.”

Aaron Foster commented, “At the end of my sophomore year, my grades dropped a bit because I was dealing with some things from home.” He said, “I was on the edge of not being eligible to play football so I had to take like 12 hours in summer school. I had never been in that position before.”

Participants discussed being on academic probation early in their college careers. Monica Iverson said, “It was the first time I dealt with not doing well and I didn’t handle it well. It made me question should I be in college? Am I good enough to be a doctor? Totally threw my whole freshmen year off.” She admitted, “I was to the point where I almost dropped out. So I ended up talking to a counselor, talking to a faculty advisor, and ended up changing my major to something that I liked better.”

Ashley Jacobs stated, “My first semester, I didn’t do so well. I struggled a little bit grade wise. I don’t think I took it as seriously as I should have.”

Phoebe Williams talked about being on academic probation. Phoebe said, “I think the major one was getting off academic probation. We all know that once your GPA goes down, it is very hard to bring it back up.” She confessed, “That was a big challenge for me, because not only was I not doing well, but then my morale went down because I got kind of discouraged. I was like, ‘oh I am never going to do this.’”

Anton Jackson and Tyler Hampton talked about “flunking out.” Anton explained, “I almost flunked out my first semester; but with football, there are times you get knocked down and things don’t go your way. It allowed me to persevere, learn a lesson and really allowed me to get back on track.”

Tyler admitted, “Even when college was hard, it was easier than living in Chicago. And the scariest thing to me was flunking out of college and having to go back home to Chicago.”

Kenton Deshone said, “So it was a bit trying, especially when things got hard and you started to slip academically or anything like that. Who do you talk to about overcoming this, who shares your perspective?”

Scott Blackwell said, “One of the major challenges for me was overcoming my first bad grades. When I got my first “D” here it kinda threw me for a loop because I never expected to get a bad grade ever.”

Erica Johnson and Maurice Franklin talked about learning to balance. Erica said, “I think just the fact of balance. You’re like, ‘I’ll do it later’ then it’s like, ‘Oh man, I didn’t do it!’ So

just learning how to have that personal management because they don't teach you that in high school."

Maurice said,

Major challenge would definitely be improving my academic record because it took such a hit early on and it was so hard to get back. I ended up retaking some courses. I missed out on some opportunities because my grade point wasn't high enough...priority should have been academic excellence and preparation for a career. For me, it was easy to lose focus of that because I called myself being extra involved. And as I mentioned, my grades suffered because of it.

Finances

Finances were mentioned 67 times by 20 of 37 participants from the HBCU and PWI during the interviews.

Chase Daniels, for instance, began his college career with a scholarship but discussed what happened when he lost the scholarship. "My parents who were both college educated and both employed, but putting a child through college is a financial burden" he stated. "And once I lost that scholarship, my mother was employed at [the HBCU] at the time, so I was able to receive a discount on my tuition which allowed me to pay for it out of my own pocket." He commented, "And like I said, I finished my college career piecemeal, so it was never out of my means to pay for it, I finished college with no debt."

Tia Summers mentioned finances seven times during her interview. She talked about why she decided to attend college. "I think the fact that I got financial aid because my parents weren't wealthy, obviously, but I needed help financially. I was able to get a lot of help from the

government and able to get support from people,” she admitted, “Otherwise, I would have said forget about it, because I never wanted to be a financial burden on my family.”

Rashad Patton, like Tia, looked at receiving financial aid as a means to attend college. “Well, definitely financial aid because I would have never been able to afford college had it not been for that. I paid for my first semester out-of-pocket at a smaller school; but, I wouldn’t have made it without financial aid.”

Chase Daniels talked about being close to the end of his college career and having major financial scares. Chase said,

The last part of my college career a friend helped me to get a loan and cosigned for me for \$2,500 or something like that. I appreciate that, because I was on the last leg and I was doing really well and it seemed like I got to a point where I was like wow... is this \$2,500 really going to stop me here? Or the inability to get a loan, and then my buddy stepped up and helped me.

Alisha Thompson also talked about having a financial scare. She said, “...that battle with financial aid every year was my one major obstacle and the one thing I hate dealing with year after year after year.” Alisha added, “My senior year, I was denied for financial aid. I had no idea how I was going to stay in school. By the grace of God, I was able to get the money I needed and finish my last year.”

Sterling Bennett’s financial ‘burden’ was lifted because she did not have to worry about how to pay for college. She said,

College, oh my goodness, it's so expensive. And I would see that every semester. From the very first semester, where people had to [drop out] because they just didn't have the

money, to people at the very end who didn't have the money to finish their last semester. It was really a blessing to have full scholarship. And to have my parents and my grandparents be able to loan me the money that I needed to put me through summer school. That was a really big burden lifted off my shoulders.

Participants talked about having a job as part of their college career. Chase Daniels admitted, "...working part time was a big part of my college experience. And the last part of my college career was full time. I was still a part of the workforce really even though I was still in college."

Rashad Patton also prided himself on being a part of the workforce. "I have always been working full time since high school... everyone wants to make more money and stuff. So the best way to increase your income is to attach higher education."

Deana Lewis spoke about what kept her in college, "My grandmother and good old Sallie Mae. And I worked. When I became a sophomore, I got a part time job off-campus."

Anthony Smalls combined his discussion about financial aid with having a job. "I never did get a refund check. But if I did, it went to my mom who was paying for something for my college education." Anthony said, "I did work. When I got out of school, I had to go to work and I knew I only had a number of hours to get things done."

Nona Jefferson mentioned finances seven times during her interview. As an out-of-state, first generation college student, finances were often an issue. "As far as financial aid, every year I would go [to school], there would be no money, and all of a sudden, money would become available and then I would continue." She also discussed how valuable her work study experience was to her career. She said, "I had a work study job. My work study job was

working in the accounts payable department. My major was business.” She continued, “So it was the accounting department that put me in that atmosphere. They wanted to make sure whatever work study job I had, I was doing something that would help me along the way with my major.”

Shana Jenkins told a story about getting a job. She said,

I had to get a job. If it was just me going to class and not working there would be room for me to deviate from the schedule and my grade slipped a little bit. So Dad said, ‘well, you need to get a job because maybe if you contribute to your education, you will take it more seriously.’ It was similar to what the Huxtables did to Denise on *A Different World*.

Four HBCU participants mentioned the Financial Aid Office during their interview.

Olivia Grayson spoke of finances three times during her interviews. She commented,

I think Financial Aid is probably one of the more unpleasant experiences, I wouldn’t say negative, but it was definitely hard. To have people available and truly helping students to understand financial aid and for there to be advocates for students like financial aid resources for students would be ideal. Financial counselors really didn’t help unless you sought it out.

Kesha Chanel agreed, “The run around you get, as far as being prepared for the real world, I think [the HBCU] did a pretty good job at getting people ready for that.” She said, “Like, you can’t just go to one place and expect that you can get everything done. No, you need to go to another office.”

Alisha Thompson talked about financial aid as a means to stay in college. “Ooh, those lovely people in financial aid and Sallie Mae. I don’t like her now. I actually hate her with a passion. Somebody should have told me about her before I started using her resources,” she said with a laugh.

Rashad Patton put a positive spin on his financial aid experience.

If I went to a different university than [the HBCU], the whole experience might have been different. Like, dealing with financial aid or the records office, but they ended up being positive experiences because I’m there dealing with different challenges with students who look like me. But it was cool, because it helped mold me for what I’m out here trying to do now.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, according to Johnson (2004), credit card companies had a strong physical presence on college campuses. “Recognizing that entering college students are the primary market for new credit card holders, credit card companies swoop down every fall on American college campuses looking for freshmen or “fresh meat,”” (Johnson, 2004, p. 19). This was before internet and cellular phones were popular. Tia Summers talked about her experience. “I was very sheltered and didn’t know a lot about things. Plus, I was struggling financially. When students come in you, get attacked by credit card people quite a bit and that was difficult to avoid and not bog myself down in.” She continued, “I really believe that people who give credit cards to young people should be stopped. African-American students sign up for that stuff because they don’t know.”

Participants spoke of having a job during college. Shanice Alexander said, “I think one huge benefit with [the summer program] is they make you go out and get a job. Well, someone hires you on campus so that you work and you know your way around campus that way.”

Phoebe Williams noted, “The Women’s Center which is where I did my work study.”

Miriam Belmont added, “Where I worked, there were only two Black folks, two of us.”

Erica Johnson also mentioned working during college. She said, “The public school system has the Minority Intern Program. So that was the nice thing, I got paid for some of my student teaching time and my practicum which most people don’t. That was huge.”

Imani stated, “I worked at the Culture Center and then worked at the [Athletic] Center. I did grade cards for the athletes. Fun times in the computer lab.”

Nicholas Harper said, “I worked full time once I had my child and went to school full time.”

Participants mentioned they feared not being able to pay for school. Shawn Griggs said, “If I don’t earn a certain GPA, I can’t go to school. I can’t run track, if I can’t run track, how am I going to pay for school? If I can’t pay for school, how am I going to graduate?” He said, “I better figure out ways that I can get this stuff done and do it at a high rate.”

Anton Jackson admitted, “Before then [the college visit to the PWI], I was thinking, and honestly I didn’t know how it was possible. My folks didn’t have the money. I wasn’t the smartest; but yet, I saw it from afar. I just didn’t know how.”

Shanice Alexander described her situation this way. “Like I said, I couldn’t afford school on my own and I had scholarships and they were all like four years. So I was like, ‘I can’t take time off of school to get better...I can’t afford that.’”

Ashley Jacobs said, “I applied to Jackson State and Tennessee State. I got in; but, it would have been financial hardship. I would have had to take loans to pay for it.” She

continued, “I did get a Pell grant; but, it wouldn’t have paid for everything. So that just wasn’t the best.”

Maurice Franklin expressed, “I did have some student loans; but, my education was subsidized quite a bit by my parents.”

Kim Marshall said, “TRIO Programs were helpful because I was a transfer student and a non-traditional student. They helped me understand how to navigate financial aid. I was only on partial scholarship, partial financial aid, and then part out of pocket.”

Imani Shepard spoke about financing her college experience. She explained,

I’m serious, being a broke college student. I didn’t come with a lot of money. I didn’t come with any scholarships or a lot of reserves from my parents. So it’s like you’re here and we are so excited you’re here. Now figure out how to stay here. Figure out how to graduate from here. I think that is the major challenge for students of color, you can get a Pell Grant but that is only \$4,000-5,000 a year. You still have to figure out how to live on campus, how to eat, how to buy some books and you have all of those...and you don’t have a place you can go back to, to tap some type of reserve. Or somebody sending you \$100 or a care package. So I think that was the greatest challenge. I had folks who loved me; but, I didn’t have any money.

Relationships

Six participants of 37 participants from the HBCU and the PWI discussed challenges they experienced with relationships 28 times during college. Rashida Jackson confessed, “...maybe it was because of my skewed view with A Different World. I was like, ‘okay everybody’s going to be mature and focused and act like adults,’ and that just wasn’t the case.’ She continued, “...that

was challenging for me because I was so determined and I don't want to resort to elementary behavior or things like that; but, everybody needs to operate on a higher level cause we're in a higher education."

Anthony Smalls agreed, "One of the biggest challenges I had to overcome was...dealing with different personalities."

April Wiggins acknowledged, "Social wise, I interacted with people and I had friends, but that would be the challenge: meeting people because I don't think I ever experienced that." She continued, "I had to overcome things like people confusing my kindness for weakness...Realizing that everyone is not always out for your best interest. Everyone who smiles at you is not a friend."

Monica Iverson said, "It was made aware to me that I am dealing with people from all over the state that may have never seen a Black person before. So that really opened up my eyes a lot. I think it made me a little more cautious with the people I dealt with and the things I did."

Phoebe Williams remarked, "It was easy to build those relationships with other minorities or Black professors. But you have a White professor in a class with 300 people, it was more difficult. So you really had to work on building a relationship with them." She continued, "So they could help you really try to understand the material; or if you wanted to try to do extra to help your grade, but that was probably the most difficult."

Nicholas Harper said, "Also it [race] was a factor, when it came to meeting and engaging other students on campus."

Having a Child

Despite the literature on teenage pregnancy, only two participants, one from each school, spoke of the challenge of having a child during college. Nona Jefferson's experience at the HBCU involved overcoming stereotypes associated with pregnancy. She admitted,

I got pregnant in my senior year. Statistics show that I was supposed to drop out and not finish because I was pregnant. But, I finished. That was a major accomplishment to me. I think my teachers were expecting me not to be there or be a slack because of my pregnancy or use that as an excuse. I never used that as an excuse not to come to class or take a test. I never used that to my advantage. I feel like I beat the stereotype when it came to that.

Nicolas Harper was the only person from the PWI to talk about having a child during college. Unlike Nona, who dealt with stereotyping at the HBCU, his experience at the PWI was of a more personal nature. He said,

Lack of time...once my son was like a year old, and we had a routine established, everything was fine. But before that, it was really a strain and also just the nature of the relationship if I can be honest about it. We didn't have the kind of relationship where it was like, 'ooh we had a baby let's get married.' That was never a thought that crossed my mind like 'eh, I want to marry this person.' That was never the kind of relationship we had, even if it looked like that to outsiders at the time.

Discipline/Myself

Eight participants of 37, from the HBCU, spoke of their challenges as discipline or myself 21 times. Veronica Jones said,

I would say my biggest challenge was myself, really, and just having to learn how to get really focused at a party school. Especially since my first year I was able to engage in that partying and my grades didn't suffer. But that wasn't something that lasted, so I had to learn kind of the hard way that you can't hang out all day and all night and still do well in class and with your professors. I had to learn about things like time management.

Chase Daniels expressed a similar sentiment. "The biggest challenge I overcame in college was myself," he said. "My issue with discipline and follow through in my academic career and that by far was my biggest stumbling block... The biggest issue was just me doing my work and learning how to do that."

Anthony Smalls also admitted, "One of the biggest challenges I had to overcome was time management, managing my time better, being more professional and academic."

Lauren Marley spoke of overcoming her challenge in a different manner. She discussed gaining self-confidence. "I was actually really shy when I came to college. College kind of brought that out of me. Especially being a business student I had to speak a lot in class."

Deana Lewis also talked about gaining self-esteem. She commented,

I overcame myself. I think I let myself get in my way a lot as far as not believing in myself as much as I should have and that sometimes limited me... Just overcoming that... and just learning to be confident in myself and learning my self-worth. I have a little more confidence and started to come into myself since I started doing that.

Gianna Miller took the conversation in another direction by discussing the challenge of needing to be disciplined in order to graduate on time. Gianna mentioned challenges 7 times during her interview. She explained,

One of my major challenges was to graduate in four years. My scholarship only covers so much over a four-year span. Bumps in the road come up when you're in college. You may miss registering for a class when registration starts and then it's not offered at the time that you need. Or you push a class back or redo your entire schedule so that you can get the classes that you need...It was more so how I would arrange my time and manage my time so that I could graduate in four years and still kind of have a life...

Reynaldo Livingstone discussed joining his fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. "And you know, being able to be on line, taking a full load eighteen hours, and work a full time job forty hours a week. It was a juggle," he admitted. "I wanted to see the challenge to the end and become a member of the greatest fraternity, and after I crossed, I didn't fail one class, I didn't lose my job."

Olivia Grayson stated, "Responsibility. I think the biggest thing for me was learning how to fulfill my needs and my responsibilities and other things like responsibilities in my organization." She asserted, "Now none of those things went awry but there were definitely mistakes that have been made. Because who I was at 18 wasn't the same person that I was at 20."

Deana Lewis wished someone would have helped her be more disciplined. She said, "If someone asked me if I would go back, I would definitely go back. The only thing I will say about college, and it could have just been me, I wish that someone would have been a little harder on me. Because I was the first person in my family to go to college, I really didn't have anyone who knew a lot."

Independence

Coming to college can be a challenge for students because they have to learn to stand on their own two feet, to be adults, to be independent. Five of the 37 participants, from the HBCU, indicated this to be true for them. Independence was mentioned 10 times by the group. Shana Jenkins said,

I guess I had to overcome the challenge of not having my mother there to drag me to the things I needed to do and making sure I took care of my responsibilities. I had to learn how to do that on my own. It's easy when you're in high school and other people get you up for school even if you sleep through the alarm clock. I had to learn to do things on my own because I spent so much time with people taking care of me. And then they were like, 'okay this is you now. You have to take care of it.' And that was challenging at first.

"I think it was that I actually had to be independent because I was always very sheltered and under my mom and my dad," admitted Tia Summers. "I had to actually break away and start doing things for myself." She continued, "When I was in college I had to grow up and learn how to do things on my own: manage my money, balance my checkbook things I didn't have to do at home." She said, "I became more independent and I saw myself growing as an adult."

Participants spoke of their experience as out-of-state students. Alisha Thompson said, "I guess staying in school was always a major struggle. Every year that was the biggest deal because being an out-of-state student is not fun. You know just being able to stay in school."

Crawford Harris discussed the challenge of not having physical access to his support system since he attended school in a different state. He said, the challenge he had to overcome was,

...really the independence. A lot of people at [the HBCU] are from here or from surrounding states. There were very few people that were from Florida and that was my first time just being on my own. I didn't have the luxury of saying I am going home this weekend. I can't count the amount of holidays I spent in college without my family so that was a challenge. You have a support group when you are closer to your family. People would go home and wash their clothes. I didn't have those luxuries that other people had.

Esteem

Esteem was mentioned 36 times during the interviews. Seven of 37 participants, from the PWI, discussed a variety of issues related to esteem. Nicholas Harper said,

It definitely played a role in that I felt like I always had to be better than some of my peers, most of the time, all of the time I felt I had to be better in order to get the same grade.

Maurice Franklin and Austin Benson expressed the opposite perspective. Maurice said, "I definitely have a vivid memory of how I felt about being a minority student or Black student on a predominately White campus and how that encouraged me to conduct myself on a day-to-day basis." He added, "And sometimes it made me feel inferior because as a whole we weren't as prepared as our White peers."

Austin explained, “The biggest challenge that I overcame in college was the culture shock of not being able to blend and not feeling like I was inferior. Getting to a place where I didn’t feel like there was a handicap there or a barrier because of.”

Shanice Alexander and Shawn Griggs mentioned fear. Shanice said, “I didn’t always believe in myself or think I would do the best. I let my fear kind of stop me.”

Shawn admitted, “For me, I did not want to be a failure. My biggest fear was letting people down.”

Tyler Hampton said, “I was always a quiet, reserved person. I don’t think I could have made it through college being quiet and reserved. I wouldn’t talk in class or raise my hand. I had teachers who would talk to me and say, ‘I am going to pick on you today because I want you to speak up.’”

Anton Jackson confessed, “I can say, there were times in the classroom when I did feel intimidated because when I would say something in class people looked at me like, ‘what is he saying?’ because of my accent.” He added, “So it took me a while to gain the self-efficacy to feel like I had what it took academically.”

Injury

Five of 37 participants spoke about sustaining injuries, 20 times, while they were in college. Brandon White remarked, “I ran into some obstacles, my senior year, when I lost my scholarship when I got injured. I stayed until I could afford out of state tuition.”

Shawn Griggs expressed, “I think for me, my biggest challenge, because I was an athlete, was I got hurt. My identity shifted then from being like a star athlete to an okay athlete.” He

continued, “That whole, ‘I don’t want to be a failure, I don’t want to go home’ really started to hit home. So then there was even more of a need to perform academically.”

Austin Benson stated, “I dealt with sports injuries when I was playing football. I had a couple knee injuries that took me away from the game. I felt isolated. Because of the injury, I wasn’t traveling with the team, I wasn’t playing football.”

Kim Marshall and Shanice Alexander spoke about getting into car accidents. Kim said, “My mom was a big push when I would get discouraged and frustrated. I had a break in my college career because I had a car accident.”

Shanice told her story. She said,

I got into that car accident, right before I student taught so kind of like my last year, that sort of threatened things for me because I had a bi-lateral femur fracture. I broke both of my femurs. So I was in the hospital. I saw what happened with the other person who was in the car with me and how she was real messed up and had to take time off from school. Like I said, I couldn’t afford school on my own and I had scholarships and they were all like four years. So I was like, ‘I can’t take time off of school to get better...I can’t afford that.’ So I think that was a real challenge. And just that pressure of knowing that no matter what condition I am in physically, I have to get back in school. I have to start student teaching.

Homesick

Three of 37 participants from the PWI talked about being homesick, 9 times. Anton Jackson shared, “I knew I was at the right place even though I was home sick. I missed my parents. I think I had a girlfriend at the time but that didn’t last. It was long distance.”

Ashley Jacobs confessed, “I remember the day they dropped me off, I wanted to turn around. It was my grandma, my mom, my sister and my dad that came and they left me in that room and the walls were bare. And I just wanted to cry and go back home with them.”

Brandon White said,

...homesickness my freshman year. I struggled my freshman year in the fact that that there wasn't a lot of people who looked like me. And this was the first time where outside of the classroom environment, outside of the school environment, when I walked into the city on campus I didn't see a lot of people looking like me. You know, back home, I went to a school that was predominantly White and I learned how to hang out with everybody and how to relate; but gosh, when I went to the mall there was a thousand other people who looked like me.

In summary, the participants discussed challenges they faced during college. Academic challenges, finances, relationships, having a child, discipline/myself, independence, esteem, injury and being homesick were mentioned as challenges. Table 4 summarizes the challenges identified by participants in the chapter.

Table 7

Challenges Summary

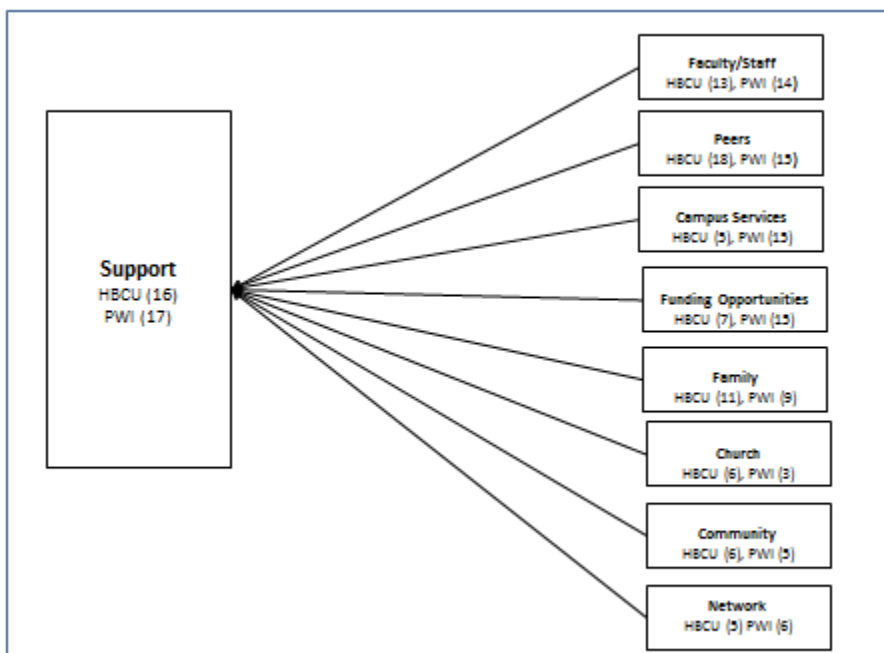
- Participants experienced academic struggles during the early part of their college careers because they did not know how to properly study for college.
- Financing college was a major concern. Participants selected their institution based on financial aid/scholarships they received.
- Being able to build relationships with faculty helped participants be engaged in class and feel comfortable asking for help if necessary.
- Participants struggled with discipline/overcoming self until they learned time management.
- Participants experienced being homesick when they were not connected to other African-American students on campus.

Chapter Six

Support

Support was the second largest theme. Support was mentioned 238 times between the two institutions. Eight sub-themes under the theme support were receiving support from faculty/staff, peers, campus services, funding opportunities, family, church, community, and network. Table 8, a map of the support theme, has been included to show the sub-themes and the number of participants who mentioned them during the interviews.

Table 8
Map of Support Theme



Faculty/Staff Support

Twenty-seven out of the 37 participants reported of receiving support from a professor while in college 220 times. Alisha Thompson spoke about a professor who contributed to her success in college. “I would definitely say one of my professors close to my senior year. She

was that person who wanted to have that relationship, to make sure that she gave you not just the book material but to make sure that she gave you life lessons.” She ended, “I can definitely say my professors were that support system you needed to be successful because they didn’t want you to fail.”

Tia Summers said, “It was hard for me because I had to sit out a semester to acquire more money. My advisor, at the time, let me know that I could get money for scholarship because I didn’t know.”

Sterling Bennett also appreciated her advisor. “I had a really great advisor... And not just my academic professors but I built relationships with other professors, not only in my department but also in other departments who were really motivated to see all students succeed.” She stated, “And that was very instrumental having support from professors and other faculty members as well as having the support of my parents.”

Shana Jenkins talked about the professor who really invested in her when she got on academic probation.

I thought, ‘well I will just take her class and then send my grades in.’ No, she made you sit down and talk about how you were doing and what strides you were making to improve and how she could help you achieve those goals. And so for the first time in my undergrad experience, someone was following up with me. So that made me stand up a little straighter in my program and look forward to being successful because I had someone to tell about it who could understand what I was going through.

Kesha Chanel mentioned her Criminal Justice professor. She said, “She was one of those professors you could tell cared about her students. She actually wrote one of my letters for graduate school.”

Participants mentioned professors in the Business Department. Rashad Patton talked about having professional mentors. He stated, “I did have a number of professors who took a special interest in me and my goals and the specific plans I have for my life. I was able to have mentors from a professional standpoint.” He continued, “Professors who are already doing business and knew that I wanted to be a businessman. They kind of motivated me and steered me in the right direction.”

Reynaldo Livingstone recalled influences that kept him in college. “I would say my teachers, my advisors. Because you hear horror stories of advisors that steer people on the wrong course and they take classes they didn't need. But you know, I had a good advisor in the College of Business.” He added, “And he laid it out to me straight as far as, take this, this, and this. You have to take these electives and I checked back with him periodically when grades came out. So, it was no issue.”

Nona Jefferson mentioned encouragement she received from her professors. “The majority of the teachers wanted to see the classroom do well,” she said. “Because I was a Business major, I don't want to say that they were so pro HBCU and that's why they wanted you to succeed, they just wanted you to succeed in the Business Program.”

Lauren Marley talked about people who influenced her. “...one of my marketing teachers, my husband, and my parents. There were a couple of professors, but specifically my marketing professor.”

Crawford Harris identified a professor who helped him build character. “There was a professor when I first got to the HBCU...I can’t remember her name.” He chuckled. “I was a freshmen and she just took it upon herself to talk to me about school and was like a mom away from home. She was influential in making sure I came to her class on time.”

Anthony Smalls commented, “The Professors. I had good professors at school. Basically, I would say the African Studies Department opened up a whole new world for me.” He added, “Next, my senior advisor who helped on my senior project which prepared me to go to law school. I graduated from college and went back to still work on my senior project.”

Sterling Bennett told her story. “I had a really great advisor. He knew that I was struggling in Organic Chemistry and he was like, you know, just kind of stick to it.” She said, “Not everybody succeeds in all parts of chemistry. Stick to your plan. Make sure you study hard. And you'll be fine. And he was right.”

Chase Daniels commented, “Teachers were of a pretty high caliber.” Jamaal Watson remembered a great professor he had. “Thinking back I had a speech teacher and I did extremely well in the class and I attribute that to the teacher we had. Because she just had a way...I just remember her impact.” He continued, “She really made you believe in yourself. The way she taught us, the way she prepared us, the way she encouraged us. Really went a long way.”

Olivia Grayson described an experience in the Psychology Department.

Well a couple of my instructors were very influential. One in particular stands out. The teaching assistant’s mode was to push me until I believed in my ability. So when I doubted my ability, I remember times when he would make me extremely nervous and I would sweat profusely, it was all in his efforts to help me understand psychology, and education and guided my own ability to believe in myself.

Participants mentioned the importance of having faculty and staff on campus who looked like them. Imani Shepard discussed the group she called the Brown Sugar Brigade. She said,

It was a lot of the Black faculty and staff women. They would get together on the weekend. They'd have a potluck; watch the game, tailgate or whatever. So a lot of time we would ask if we can break into their little party. We would hear them talk about challenges they had with students so we would say that is something we don't want to do; challenges of becoming tenured faculty or of being Black women in the Midwest. So it just was helpful to think about how you are modeling your own life. It was helpful to use them as a guide with that. And that had the greatest impact because as students you think it is very difficult for you, you have classes and all of that. You never really think about what it means for faculty to be there. And they're giving to us all of the time. So it was nice to see that they're just as vulnerable, they have similar challenges adjusting to the climate and stuff. But they do it anyway. And they do it happily because they want to make sure that you're successful.

Maurice Franklin commented on his INROADS support. He said, "I would say the director of the local INROADS affiliate and her partner. She stayed on me. He stayed on me. They would come to town to visit the students talk about grades, offer counseling and just coaching."

Scott Blackwell said, "There were two professors here. I emulated them and if I needed something I could go to them for advice or help and that was a great resource for me."

Miriam Belmont mentioned a professor who called to check on her. She said, “Well when I got to school, I had a three week long headache. So there was testing and changing of medication...and if you didn’t make it to class for them to call and say, ‘Are you alright?’ To me that was really cool.”

Erica Johnson remarked, “I think just the connections I made. My advisor, I knew that I could always go to him.”

Shawn Griggs said, “When I started getting involved with different organizations, my advisors naturally became people that I either looked up to or they looked out for me or whatever. They became very, very big in my life.”

Kenton Deshone mentioned a professor in his department. He said, “I got to know the only minority American faculty. And so I kind of took a liking to him...The stuff that he was doing in his laboratory was very interesting to me.”

Monica Iverson posited, “So I felt it [race] every day but I would try to find refuge in my friends or Black Student Government or faculty who looked like me and had my best interest at heart.”

Shanice Alexander said, “I think everyone in the advising office down there, my advisor.”

Phoebe Williams stated, “My professors were a huge, huge portion. I still retain relationships with them to this day.”

Nicholas Harper described his connection in Career Services. He identified his favorite Student Affairs professional on campus. He said, “I would talk to him all of the time. He was

always like ‘How is class going? Have you looked at your syllabus? When’s your first test? Have you been studying for your first test? When do you plan to study?’”

Kim Marshall added, “Lots of professors and lots of staff were encouraging when I was at the university.”

Tyler Hampton said, “Because of my position on the team I played 95% of the time. It took a toll on me and showed in the classroom. Professors worked with me and showed me what I had to do to pass the class.”

Anton Jackson said, “The advisors that I worked with. Even though they were tough, I knew it was more tough love...It really paid off because I got my degree before I even really got done playing football.”

Kenton Deshone said, “I definitely think mentors and people who kind of surrounded me or took an interest in me kind of helped too. You know, cause I felt kind of obligated to do well for them too.” He admitted, “And at the same time if you see them regularly it kind of reminds you why you’re here and kind of helps you stay on course.”

Phoebe Williams mentioned that she had “...mentors from different academic departments.”

Monica Iverson stated, “Having mentors or people in your corner when things got hard. I had a couple of ladies that I was really close with and they would keep me going when things would get difficult.”

Shawn Griggs said, “I’d like to emphasize the value that mentor relationships have whether it be from advisors, people in student affairs, professors like formal or informal those relationships mean something.” He asked pensively, “I think about if I didn’t have those, would

just the camaraderie of the students have helped? Would that have kept me strong enough to make it through? I can't say that it would have."

Participants discussed receiving support from faculty and staff on campus. In the next section, participants' comments about the importance of peers to their college experience are presented.

Peers

Peers were mentioned 73 times during the interviews. Thirty-three participants talked about their peers as resources. Alisha Thompson described her friends being resources for coursework. "As far as studying and paper writing that wasn't too big of an issue. Once I kind of got out of my shell and getting adjusted to college life that wasn't much of a struggle again because I had such a strong support system around me."

Olivia Grayson said, "I guess another one would be just interacting with other students. Like, being a part of the Psychology Club and other clubs on campus, and drawing from what works for other students. I think that is a great cause of a lot of fulfillment in college."

Rashad Patton appreciated interacting with his peers. "When I think of resources, I think of the human capital." He admitted, "Honestly, there were times when I was like, I don't want to stay here, I'm ready to leave but there were resources like resident hall assistants, classmates, dorm mates, roommates trying to get to the same place at the same time. I think maybe those people helped the situation."

Jamaal Watson had a similar experience. "I would say the people who had the biggest impact on me, who helped me out the most during my college experience were my fellow classmates who were also a part of the campus ministry." He stated, "They helped me a lot as

far developing my character, learning how to be a part of a team on a higher level, and to really, really focus on leadership...people resources.”

Crawford Harris said his peers contributed to his success in college. “I was in the honors program at the HBCU. So the peer group I was in was pretty motivated. You don’t want to be the last place person in that peer group.” He chuckled and said, “So when they are studying and they’re going to class you figure, ‘yes, I need to go to class.’ So that helped.”

Anthony Patton agreed. “I had a group of friends that did go to school, and I was doing the same things that they were, always on task.” Like Crawford, he said, “I didn’t want to be the person that could not be relied on, not always on task in our group.”

Kesha Chanel said, “Then another friend of mine who was maybe in her fourth year or third year at the HBCU, she had her own apartment and her son, we’d babysit and just get away sometimes.”

April Wiggins gave credit to her friends for being supportive. “I would definitely say friends because I have friends who have been there with me through it all.”

Deana Lewis stated, “Like I said, all of my best friends that I have now, I met them in college. We cried, we laughed, and we struggled together.”

Chase Daniels stated, “I had friends who I went to high school with or met in college that received their degrees and were almost like peer role models to me. Everything in my experience was positive and pushed me toward completion of that goal and that degree.”

Rashida Jackson’s friends were a resource to her as well. “My friends were my resources as well...just having your peers who can relate to you and they’re going through the same things trying to see like, okay, am I really on the right path and doing what I’m supposed to be doing?”

Jamaal Watson spoke about the type of relationships he built in college. “From a social standpoint, some of the relationships I was able to build while I was in college.” He continued, “Some of them still continue on to this day which I am very grateful for. To be able to build strong relationships that has been very positive. You can never have too many of those.”

The participants talked about meeting their best friends in college. Deana Lewis said, “I had some really good friends in college and I call us beauties with brains. All of us were valedictorians and salutatorians in high school so we all just pushed each other. Failure was not an option.”

Nona Jefferson and Shana Jenkins said, “I met some lifelong friends.”

Sterling Bennett told the following story. She said,

Being able to meet lifelong friends. Growing up my dad was in the military, so we would move around. We only stayed a place a year to eighteen months. So we didn't really develop a lot of, we didn't really develop any friendships. While we were always moving around, our friends were always moving around as well. So once I got to college, I was able to make friends and develop relationships that other people developed when they were in elementary school or middle school. Some of them had friends since they were five. I never had that. But my best friend now, I met her standing in line in orientation. You know, really good friends 'til today.

Participants talked about making friends in a more general manner. Rashad Patton said, “Well the reasons were primarily social. You watch TV and you see there is a lot of fun to be had in college. You make new friends and then on top of that everyone wants to make more money and stuff.”

Tia Summers said, “When I was on the basketball team my first year. I acquired more friends that way.”

Reynaldo Livingstone mentioned his classmates. “A lot of the class of '97 came in the HBCU in '92. Especially in our last year, we were in a lot of classes together: marketing, accounting and different classes like that,” he said. “So that was a motivational factor right there because, dude, we're all in the same boat.”

Aaron Foster told a story about meeting people from out of state.

Positive experiences...it would probably be linking up with people from...like I said coming from Memphis I never really travelled a lot. I never really met people from outside of Memphis. The positive thing would be making friends from around the country and seeing how they are and how they talk and how they move around. One of my best friends who played ball with me, he was from New York. I'd seen New York on TV and met people from New York; but, I had never sat down and made friends with a person from that far up north. But just seeing the way talked, the way he moved, the way he dressed, the way he spoke. It was just so different from what I was used to. But I got to see that at the end of the day, no matter where you are from, if you are a good person you will always be linked up with good people.

Participants talked about friends they made. Erica Johnson said, “I would say some of the friends I made. I was in the Student Education Association. I enjoyed that. I got to develop some different leadership skills that way too; and, I got to travel to a couple conferences with them.”

Shanice Alexander explained, “All of the friends I made along the way. We started out in the Summer Institute together and we really didn’t know each other but we became the best of friends.” She added, “We were in each other’s rooms studying helping each other get our work done, supporting one another, just holding each other down. My cousin Candi definitely. There was a girl I played rugby with, Crystal, that was more of the faith based part of college. She helped me really see that.”

Monica Iverson said, “Being surrounded by likeminded individuals. At [the PWI], there was a small African-American community. The friends I surrounded myself with were working towards degrees. They weren’t just there to be in school. They had goals. So we kept each other motivated.”

Ashley Jacobs explained, “I changed the group of friends I hung out with. I knew them in high school; but, we weren’t really friends. In college, they were focused. They were your “A” students; and, they were really making some differences.” She said, “I started doing study groups with them and trying to figure this thing out. ‘Like, you’re getting “A’s”, how can I get “A’s”?’ I really think changing the people I hung out with made a difference.”

Scott Blackwell stated, “When I got to college my freshmen year, I was able to room with a guy I knew. He was similar in ideas and interests.” Scott added, “He didn’t ever see himself flunking out and neither did I. There was a group of us who came in freshmen year and we all graduated and stayed close.”

Brandon White commented, “I enjoy meeting new people and the fact that I was one of the guys that walked around as a Black male and my friends looked like nobody else’s.” He continued, “You know I had Black guys, White guys, Asian guys you know, whatever. Just everybody was part of my spectrum. So that was fun for me.”

Imani Shepard said, "I think definitely working on campus keeps you in the loop of things also being in student organizations, having people you can connect with, your own peer mentors. Involvement on campus helps you graduate."

Anton Jackson remarked, "I will give some credit to my roommate because we kept each other accountable. Instead of going out on the weekends we studied." He said, "We made sure like 'if we are going to go to the league, we are going to have to work hard' and that includes eating right, sleeping right, doing our homework, staying out of trouble."

Austin Benson explained, "Margaret was one of the basketball students. She's a girl that came to college, similar background, similar first generation to college. I took her on as a friend." He said, "She was a great friend. She had her stuff together. She had a plan. Listening to her story made me feel like, if she can do it, I can do it."

Shawn Griggs posited, "My reality is that all the people that I associate with are doing something." He said, "I don't know many who don't have a master's or aren't pursuing it now or who aren't trying to start a business or trying to be the best in their industry, that rubs off."

Phoebe Williams explained, "A lot of times you do badly in school because you surround yourself with people who encourage you to do bad things." She confessed, "I really had a supportive group of friends. They were doing well academically and they were pushing me to do well academically and helping me when things got stressful or difficult. So that really helped a lot too."

Kenton Deshone expressed, "But I think determination to succeed was one of the reasons and as you got to that point you notice there were a much smaller group of your peers especially your racial peers who were like sticking in it together." He continued, "You know, helping each

other or encouraging each other to succeed to finish. So that was kind of the difference between the reasons at the beginning and those at the end.”

Maurice Franklin said, “I would say my girlfriend/fiancé, now wife. We were together in college. She would stay on me and try to help me get to where she was at. We were both marketing majors so we were learning the same stuff.”

Nicholas Harper stated, “Those resources were mostly my support system, my friends that were all in school when I was.”

Additionally, Kim Marshall said, “When you meet up with other students who are maybe experiencing similar problems or even similar successes as you, it helped motivate me to keep going and stay in school.”

The participants spoke about having peer support as a major influence in their academic careers. In the next section, the participants discussed campus services they used during college.

Campus Services

Twenty out of 37 participants made comments about using campus services. Lauren Marley talked about Career Services. “They had a lot of things that went on on-campus. Career days...They had a lot of different companies that would come up on campus...I really just remember the last two years because that is when I really took it seriously.” She said, “I remember being able to interact with the business side and be involved with that area.”

Shawn Griggs added, “The career services folks would come by, the multicultural center folks would come by to all these different groups so those resources were definitely useful.”

Olivia Grayson stated, “a main resource that helped me stay in school was the library, the labs, the teachers, and then having open office hours and for them to be open to me coming in no matter how many times it took.”

Participants mentioned offices that supported them. Austin Benson said, “Success was the support you get in the academic center [athletic department].”

Scott Blackwell said, “Student Support Services was a huge one. Just having people that have already either taken the classes that I went through or having a peer mentor or a mentor.”

Phoebe Williams listed the people and places that had a positive impact on her. “. . .the Office of Multicultural Affairs, even the Women’s Center which is where I did my work study. A lot of Student Affairs professionals are right up there with the professors I had.”

Maurice Franklin expressed, “I would say the Student Union was a resource. The fact they had a computer lab, fast food and an ATM there, all of the services a student union offers was something that helped me feel connected to campus.”

Participants mentioned taking advantage of different tutoring services on campus. Erica Johnson stated, “I want to say in math, I took advantage of some of the tutoring they had available. I think there was a writing center where they would help look at papers for you.”

Kim Marshall remarked, “The TRIO Program was immeasurable because I got free tutoring. That was huge because I had some classes where I required some tutoring and that was free.”

Kenton Deshone posited, “The tutoring from the Success Lab that the Culture Center offers, I did use that sometimes and that was useful. So free tutoring and the writing center were probably two of the most important academic resources that I used.”

Scott Blackwell added, “They got me free tutors in math or whatever I needed. That was pretty much the only subject I needed a tutor in because that was a difficult subject. Student Support Service offered a place where we could all come and congregate and feel like it was our place.”

Tyler Hampton, Shawn Griggs and Anton Jackson talked about tutoring through the athletic department. Tyler commented, “Being a student athlete we had tutors on hand to help. On campus, there are tutors to help; but playing basketball, I don’t think I could have gotten through college without tutors.”

Shawn Griggs noted, “From an athletic standpoint, we were very blessed with the stuff that we have and the resources available. So tutoring definitely helped. I not only had an athletic tutor; but, I also used one on campus a couple of times too.”

Anton Jackson said, “Just the resource of being in study hall and having access to tutors; even though I wanted to be a lawyer, I had to take classes that I hated like science, math, geology, and geography.”

Participants mentioned programs on campus. Miriam Belmont explained, “They had that program that helped first-time college students... I can’t remember the exact name of it. They had a freshman orientation class. They taught you how to study. They taught you how to form study groups.”

Maurice Franklin mentioned about INROADS as a support.

Austin Benson said, “There was a program called Your Degree First that was really positive. It kept me engaged and wanting to go to class because I knew someone was going to hold me accountable.”

The three outliers in this section were Kesha Chanel, April Wiggins, and Brandon White. Kesha stated, “You know that is funny because I don’t think I utilized any resources as far as like a counseling center, study sessions none of that. It was just like me and my roommates were each other’s support system. Made sure we ate at the same time, took a nap, woke up, and did our homework at the same time. I don’t think I went to anybody.”

April stated, “Academic wise, I never really had to go to a tutor or the academic center. But I could always talk to somebody [a peer], and they would say for this professor do this or for this professor do that.”

Brandon White admitted, “I didn’t fully take advantage of the resources. That’s one of the things that if I had to do over, I would.”

Participants discussed the importance of campus services to their college experience. The next section is about funding opportunities.

Funding Opportunities.

Scholarships were mentioned 24 times by 21 participants during the interviews. All 22 out of 37 of the participants stated that receiving a scholarship really determined their ability to attend college. Gianna Miller declared, “Well the top reason was that I received a scholarship, an academic scholarship, when I was in high school. That scholarship was the number one reason I went to college.”

Kesha Chanel stated, “I wanted to get out of the Midwest. [The HBCU] gave me an academic scholarship.”

Veronica Jones said, “Financially, I had a scholarship when I got to school.”

Aaron Foster remarked, “Resources that helped me stay in college. Let me think...I would probably say sports. I was on a Presidential Scholarship initially, then, I switched it over to a football scholarship.”

Jamaal Watson received several scholarships to pay for his college education. “Because of where my mother worked at, we were able to find resources to help out with tuition and things of that nature.” He also stated, “My family. We would have a family reunion every two years. We would have a scholarship fund that we would give a scholarship to all of the kids who were in school.”

Sterling Bennett also received several scholarships. She said, “So, I ended up choosing [the HBCU] and I went on a Presidential Scholarship. And by that time, I had Pell Grants, the Coke scholarships. So there was a lot of extra money that ended up in my pocket as a result.”

Crawford Harris talked about keeping his scholarship. “Well, I was on scholarship. So I had to keep a certain GPA to keep that scholarship so that was a main source of motivation. My parents don’t have the money to support this whole venture, so I need to keep my grades.”

Chase Daniels found comfort in receiving a scholarship. “Initially, I had an academic scholarship, which was great, to Florida A & M. So the first three years of my college experience was taken care of and that was great.”

Erica Johnson said, “One thing that made it is easier to go was the scholarships I received. My parents would have helped me with it; but it was nice that they didn’t have to worry about it.” She remembered, “Every week in senior home room, we got a sheet about scholarships; and, I applied for so many scholarships. But because of applying for them, I didn’t pay to go to college for my undergrad.”

Phoebe Williams added, “ Like I said, it [race] helped get me funding because I got scholarships for diversity and things like that. I also think that it helped me as far as resources that were available.”

Ashley Jacobs admitted, "I filled out my FAFSA and it was more scholarship money from [the PWI]. So it was like ‘this is where you are going’ because I didn’t want to come out with tons of loans that I couldn’t pay back.”

Shanice Alexander made a similar statement. She said, “It was real important having those scholarships and not having to worry about ‘Oh my gosh, I am accumulating so much debt! How am I ever going to pay it off?’ that really helped.”

Imani Shepard said, “Oh scholarship, being given a scholarship to be able to attend the university was the primary factor that I chose the institution that I went to initially.”

Monica Iverson said, “I was actually in a program geared toward minority students who were interested in medicine.” She continued, “So as long as you kept a certain GPA and kept up with the requirements of their program, they paid for your schooling. So that was extremely helpful and then you would be admitted into their five-year program.”

Kim Marshall explained, “I looked at the programs. I had my ideal college but ultimately it came down to how much scholarship money I got; and, how much I had to pay out of pocket which shaped which colleges I wanted to go to versus which ones I could actually attend.”

Scott Blackwell said, “I got an academic scholarship and so they were going to pay for everything.”

Brandon White added, “At [the PWI], it was free.”

Anton Jackson and Austin Benson talked about receiving football scholarships. Anton said, “When I went to [the PWI] and some of the things they told me like I have the potential to get a football scholarship. After that camp, other colleges were contacting me and were interested in me and stuff. It just really motivated me to work hard.”

Austin explained, “People asked me all the time, why did you choose [the PWI]? [The PWI] was the only school that guaranteed my scholarship. They told me if something happened and I couldn’t play football, they would still give me a five-year scholarship.”

Participants mentioned receiving money from different departments for activities. Monica Iverson said, “Student Services and their connection with Black Student Government and Student Involvement really helped put on the programming for African-American students and provided the platform that allowed them to bring different speakers or attend different conferences that would be of interest to them.”

Kim Marshall explained, “Even though they didn’t have a minority engineering program, they still paid for me to go to minority in engineering conferences and the National Society of Black Engineers Conference every year and then TRIO picked up the meals. My department paid for flight, registration, etc. and TRIO paid for meals to give me exposure to other Black engineers.”

Scott Blackwell agreed. He said, “Student Support Services before I joined the fraternity, they actually used to assist with travel. So going to the Big 12 Student Conference on Black Student Government and the National Society of Black Engineers conferences they helped pay for the trips.”

Receiving funding opportunities was an integral part of the participants' ability to stay in school. The next section is about the family support the participants received during college.

Family.

The sub-theme family was mentioned 153 times during the interviews. The section includes show me the way, care, inspiration, and family finances.

Show me the way.

Nineteen out of 37 participants discussed their parents and siblings as influences. Crawford Harris stated, "My father, my mother of course. All of my older siblings went to school and were successful there."

Chase Daniels said, "My parents are both college graduates. My sister is seven years my senior and she went to college and a lot of people in my family are college graduates. So it was just something I was going to do." He continued, "So I knew it was going to happen, there was never any alternative. And I didn't want the alternative... education was just engrained."

Participants spoke of being 'in awe of the experience' of being in college. For instance, Rashida Jackson told this story about taking her older sister to college. "...when [my sister] decided she was going to go to [the HBCU] she went up there for orientation when we dropped her off her freshmen year. And like, the whole crew of folks who do orientation they like, mobbed out and had on blue and white and were doing [the HBCU] chant in the parking lot of [the dorms] and I was sold! I was done. I was like, 'this is it!' This is real and this is real life A Different World. And I had to have my little [HBCU] shirt...I was ready."

Olivia Grayson said, "Seeing my older siblings, graduate from high school and go off to a 4-year institution" was an inspiration to her.

Participants expressed that going to college was a part of the climate in their family. It was just the next thing to do. However, this sentiment manifests itself differently in each household. Reynaldo Livingstone mentioned his parents in seven comments. He explained,

My parents. Those were my role models. My father, like I said, of course, went to college. Got his master's in education...So that right there and my mom, she didn't go to college. She decided to be a stay-at-home mom with me. I was the last one. The fact that she sacrificed to make sure I got my education and I had my head on straight. She was a role model I wanted to emulate when I was in school.

Shana Jenkins mentioned her family's positive influence six times during her interview. She said, "They influenced me because my parents were always scholars and so I kind of wanted to get in with the group. All of my aunts and uncles have gone to college and graduated on both sides." She added, "It was always a mandate in our house to attend college. That was just how it was going to be. Mom and Dad said, 'we went to college so you guys are going to college.'"

Kesha Chanel told her story. She reported,

I would say it started probably when I was really young. As a kid, I would go to school with my older cousin when I was nowhere near junior high age. I was like pre-k or something she would just...I would sit in on the classes. That was when I was younger. I also got an uncle who's a professor at Grambling, and an aunt who teaches elementary education. So it's kind of been instilled in the family I guess. My mom went to college and I went on a college tour. The Urban League College Tour I want to say it was from [my hometown] to visit maybe ten or eleven HBCUs. We started at Langston and made our way on down to my HBCU.

Anthony Smalls said,

Personally, it was my family. I always knew I would have to go to college. I never looked at it being whether I was going to college or not. Most of my family went to the same institution. When I was younger, they always asked me where you want to go to school. I don't think I ever made a choice; it was always you go to high school, and then you go to college. In my family that's what you do.

Jamaal Watson confessed, "Growing up, as a kid, I was raised in a single parent home and I saw my mother provided for us in a fashion that she could. She instilled in me at a very early age the need to have an education."

April Wiggins said, "Well, to be honest my family is education oriented. My grandparents didn't go to college but they sent my aunts, uncles, and parents on both sides of my family. So I guess it is kind of in me. It was never, will you go to college, it was where are you going to college?"

Sterling Bennett commented, "Both my parents went to college. And for us, growing up, college was never an option. It was always mandatory. We knew that after high school, college was the next thing. We necessarily didn't have to go to graduate school." She added, "But a four-year degree was the next step... Go to college and major in whatever it was you wanted to do. But you had to go to college and you had to finish."

Shanice Alexander remarked, "...just in my family, education was always really important. Even though my mom was a single parent, she still instilled in us that education was the first thing, after God of course." She added, "It was never kind of a question. It was more of a question of how am I going to pay for it because I knew that my mom couldn't assist at all."

Monica Iverson posited, "...choosing a college wasn't a big decision, it was just the next thing you do in my family. My grandmother was an educator. My mom was in corporate America. Both of them had master's degrees."

Erica Johnson's mother was her inspiration as well. "Honestly, I don't think it was an option not to go. My mom is a college grad. She has her bachelor's in elementary ed and her master's in speech pathology. I don't think it ever crossed my mind not to go to college."

Ashley Jacobs said, "So I guess growing up in a house where my mother always told me 'you are going to go to college.' Before I even knew what college was, it was kind of ingrained that we were going to go."

Shawn Griggs stated, "I'm the youngest of five and all my siblings at least went to college. Not all of them graduated right away, but at least going to college was an automatic. Both of my parents went to college...that was the norm." He also provided an alternative perspective because his desire to attend college was fueled by people who did not attend college. "I have some uncles and aunts and stuff who didn't go or...they would talk to me about their experiences, you know about not going but the conversation was, 'hey, just make sure you do it, 'cause I didn't do it.'"

Maurice Franklin, who was the youngest of four brothers, also discussed how he had observed his older siblings' decisions and mistakes in college as he was growing up. He said, "I always knew I was going to college. It was just the next thing to do. I chose to go to [the PWI] because it was far enough away from home; but, I could still go home today if I needed to."

Tyler Hampton talked about his mother. “Even though I grew up in a dysfunctional household, my mom instilled in us the importance of education. No fun before work. I still implemented it throughout college. Even though I was miles away, I lived by that in college.”

Kenton Deshone said, “My parents both went to college so I was always encouraged. It was always kind of like something I was supposed to do. It was almost like going to high school. So going to college was the obvious next step in my academics.” With a laugh he said, “Also, I kind of wanted to see what all of the fun was about. You hear a lot of cool stories. I have an older sister. Sometimes we would go see her on campus and it seemed like a pretty cool place.”

Imani Shepard spoke about her decision to go to college. “Oh, I don’t know if it was ever an option that I was going to go to college. I think because they had made sacrifices to make sure that we could get there. So the expectation was that we were going kind of laid a ground work for my desire to go.”

Care.

Sixteen out of 37 participants discussed how their families expressed care for them during college. Sterling Bennett described,

Generations of my family have gone to the HBCU. So it was like while I was away from home, I still had a support system or aunts or uncles. My grandparents lived in town. I had an aunt and uncle who stayed down the street from the HBCU. So if there was anything I thought I needed that my parents couldn't help me with, there was a support system there for me. That really made it a lot easier.

Olivia Grayson had a cheering section. She said, “I mean definitely having the support of my family who was always behind me saying, you know “I’m rooting for you” and “we definitely want you to make it.” And my mom saying, “You’re *gonna* make it! I spent my hard earned money, so you are going to make it.”

Tia Summers had a similar story. She explained,

I would say every time I came home for the holidays, whether it was Thanksgiving or Christmas, it was my family members saying we’re so proud of you. Even when I had hard times and came home down and out talking about I want to stay home, they would always say, ‘we’re proud of you.’ It was always encouragement.

Crawford Harris said, “I guess a factor again is just the support from my family.”

April Wiggins added, “And then family is always there for me. They were definitely a big support in the situation as well.”

Veronica Jones said, “Emotional and psychological resources would again be both my parents were really supportive. They pushed me to do my best.”

Shanice Alexander confessed, “My mom of course was a real big factor, the fact that I enjoyed school and I did well in school and I had goals that I wanted to pursue in college, that the career I wanted to pursue required a bachelor’s degree was definitely a factor. And just the fact that I had that support like mom supported me, my sister supported me.”

Scott Blackwell mentioned his mother as well. He chuckled as he spoke, “My mother was a strong catalyst in me excelling in school. If it wasn’t for her, I would probably be running the streets somewhere. She stayed in my behind so I always handled business.”

Anton Jackson, Tyler Hampton, and Miriam Belmont talked about their grandparents. Anton stated, "I would say starting with my grandparents always called to check on me. Wanted to make sure I had everything. They always sent care packages and stuff."

Tyler said, "My grandparents as well being who they were and stepping up to take care of me and brothers and sister. They helped take care of me and kept me grounded and kept us in the church."

Miriam talked about her grandmother cooking for midterms. She said, "My freshmen year, I will never forget, my grandmother made enough food for the entire floor and the basketball team. It was right before midterms and she called and said, 'Meet me at Denny's.' Meet you at Denny's?" She smiled as she spoke, "Yes. Tell your cousin and roommate to meet me too. We literally had enough food to fill up all three of our cars and it fed the entire floor and the basketball team."

Kim Marshall admitted, "My mom was a big push when I would get discouraged and frustrated because I had a break in my college career because I had a car accident."

Nicholas Harper said, "My brother watched my son sometimes when I was in class and his mom was in class. My dad watched my son so did my mom when we were in class."

Maurice Franklin credited his parents saying, "The support of my parents who allowed me to stay there."

Erica Johnson told a story about her mom encouraging her to do her school work. She said, "I could hear her saying, 'Erica, you need to get that done. Don't put it off.' And she'll still touch base even now. She'll be like, 'What's your work week look like?'" She continued, "And

when I talk to her she'll be like, 'Did you get some studying done?' I'll say, 'Yes mom.' So it's good."

Inspiration.

Eighteen out of 37 participants mentioned their desire to do well in college came from their family members telling them that they had to do better than they did. Deana Lewis stated, "My grandmother always instilled in me to do better. She always said the next generation should be better than the last. So having that, and my own personal motivation, to not follow in the footsteps of the women in my family."

Tia Summers said, "And when I got pushed to go because I was first generation there was always high expectations, like accomplish more than what I accomplished, this is what my mother and father were saying."

Olivia Grayson explained, "Growing up, my mom really, really, really stressed having education. My mom was actually a high school dropout, and had a baby really young. And she ended up going back when I was in high school." She added, "I have always been a role-model for my nieces and nephews."

Lauren Marley agreed with her sentiment. "I would say my parents. Well my mother because I was raised in a single-parent home. I would say my mother because she was there for me. She motivated me. She let me know that anything is possible."

Aaron Foster commented, "I would say my parents. They stayed on us. They pushed us... my dad. I just saw how he came up and how he raised us and he never made any excuses."

Anthony Smalls admitted, “I knew I could not play around in school. My family, my mom would kick my butt. I had to get in and do what I needed to do. It was the motivation of my family.”

Veronica Jones expressed, “I had certain things I anticipated doing with my life that required a college degree. I wanted to go to graduate school which would require a bachelor’s degree. And I think I wanted to make my parents proud of me.”

Nona Jefferson shared her story. She began,

My mother worked in a factory. My father worked in a factory. He worked for GM. I just did not see myself. My parents did make good money; but, I just thought the work they did was so hard. None of my family members have degrees. I am the first person in my family to have a college degree, a four-year degree. I wanted to be different.

Rashida Jackson expressed, “I was like, I have to go to college to get my bachelor’s degree and that will help me build a foundation to get my master’s degree,” she continued, “and if I want to get my PhD, I can do that. And it broke the barriers because if [my sister] can break the mold, I know I can.”

Gianna Miller was motivated by her siblings. She said,

Being the oldest of three children, I wanted to set that pace for my younger sister and brother that you can go to college and you can complete it. You don’t have to go and drop out like a lot of people do especially because I went off to college. I left Georgia to go to the HBCU to show them ‘hey, we can do it.’

Participants talked about how they became motivated to go to college. Monica Iverson talked about pressure as a motivation. “Pressures from home, my mom was like you can’t come

back home. It is not an option for you, so you better figure it out!” With a laugh she said, “So having that pressure but at the same time motivation, I gotta make my mom proud. I got make my grandma proud. So I have to finish the path that I started.”

Participants discussed being 1st generation college students. Miriam Belmont stated, “I was the first person in my family to attend college. From my grandfather as far back as I can remember.” She said, “My grandfather said that that was their dream for me to go. So I did my part with the good grades and volunteered and played sports so that I could get the scholarships.”

Scott Blackwell said, “Well, no one in my family ever graduated from college. So it was always a goal of mine...I mean out of all of my cousins and relatives I am the only one who went to college and graduated.”

Ashley Jacobs stated, “I was the first one on both sides to go to college; so it was very important for me to buckle down and get focused.”

Anton Jackson admitted, “I was first generation. I was raised by my grandparents and great-grandparents. Growing up, it was planted in my head that I wanted to go play pro football, basketball, or baseball. So going to college it was I guess secondary.”

When asked about his college exposure Brandon White said, “...to attend college, that was not a question it was what I was going to do from the time I was in kindergarten.” He continued, “I was one of the first males in my immediate family to go to college. I went to a college prep school. When I graduated we were on the cover of *Time* magazine as number one in the country.”

Tyler Hampton wanted to be a role model to his siblings. He said, “I was first in my family to attend college. My mom struggled in high school and my dad didn’t finish.” Tyler

added, "I'm the oldest of four children: two sisters and one brother. I grew up fast in Chicago. My first priority was to lead by example. So I had to go to college."

Shanice Alexander participated in a program. She said,

Before I started college, I got involved in the Summer Institute which is for incoming freshmen. First generation I believe. So that was real helpful. It showed me what college was going to be like. So it wasn't a big surprise. It was kind of a confidence booster too because I retook a calculus class and aced it.

Family Finances.

Four out of 37 participants talked about their families and being able to pay for school. Chase Daniels remarked, "Once I lost that scholarship, my mother was employed at the HBCU at the time. I was able to receive a discount on my tuition there which allowed me to pay for it out of my own pocket."

Veronica Jones added, "I had the financial support of my parents. They were always really supportive of me."

Maurice Franklin stated, "I would say definitely being pushed by my parents, knowing that they were sacrificing and giving up a lot for me to attend college."

Miriam Belmont explained, "My phone bill was atrocious. I think at one point I had an \$800 phone bill. My grandmother and mother were like, 'we're not paying that anymore.' I quickly reminded my mother that you are the reason that I am here so you have to help." This was before cell phones when you needed a calling card or you paid handsomely for long distance calls.

In summary, this section was a presentation of the various ways participants' families helped them during college. In the next section, the participants' discussion of the impact church and spirituality had on their college experience will be presented.

Church

Nine out of 37 participants mentioned the church 35 times during the interviews. Alisha Thompson spoke about her church family being a part of her positive experiences in college. "Definitely my church home. Oh I love Mt. Zion...people in church praying for you. You know. And being that resource that you need," she said. "Because there are so many times when you get so discouraged and you get like I am not sure I can do this. And to have those people as a resource spiritually was a huge help in getting me through [the HBCU]."

Gianna Miller mentioned church five times during her interview. She talked about being encouraged by the members of her church at home and how joining her church at school being a positive experience. "I would add a couple people from my church family who stayed on me about it. Every time they saw me, they would say how proud of me they were and to keep going and stay focused." She continued, "Positive experiences, one of them was becoming a member of Friendship because they are a tightly knit family. I didn't feel like they were judging me. I felt comfortable. I felt at home when I went to Friendship."

Jamaal Watson talked about people from church who were kind to him. "The first thought is about the people resources that I had, whether it was a married couple who had me over for dinner because I was struggling as a college student living off ramen noodles and things of that nature." He fondly remembered, "Lots of people blessed me in that way. Had me over, encouraged me, fed me, gave me words of advice."

Tia Summers was motivated by her friends at church. “My high school friends didn’t go to college so it would have been easy for me to say that I don’t want to do it,” she admitted. “But when I started attending the church, I saw people doing it. Then I wanted to graduate because I saw my friends at church were graduating. I became motivated to succeed because of the success around me.”

April Wiggins and Nona Jefferson spoke about prayer in their interviews. April expressed the following sentiment. “Oh man, prayer works. Prayer works. My motivation was definitely that I feel like God has a greater purpose for me.” She explained, “And in order to fulfill that purpose, I have to teach and better myself; and, better myself means to work toward what He wants me to do. It requires the education, getting familiar with my field, and what I want to do.”

Nona spoke about prayer and her success in college. “I guess me, I would be a contributing factor, and prayer too. Doors kept opening up for me. As far as financial aid, every year I would go there would be no money; and all of a sudden, money would become available and then I would continue.”

Shanice Alexander talked about being successful. She said, “The religious part of it too. Just knowing that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me; and, I was also involved in a women’s Bible study kind of thing here on campus. So all that helped me stay successful and be successful.”

Tyler Hampton mentioned God in relation to his hometown. He said, “I would say growing up in Chicago, even though it wasn’t the best environment, it molded me into the person I was. I wouldn’t have wished that lifestyle on anyone; but, I feel that God has a plan for everyone.”

Shawn Griggs mentioned that he had mentors from every area of his life. “They came in the form of people at church.”

Participants discussed how church participation, prayers and support from their church families impacted them in a positive manner. In the next section, the participants’ discussion of receiving support from the community will be presented.

Community

The community was mentioned 35 times by 11 out of 37 participants. Participants talked about their home community during their interviews. Kesha Chanel wanted to leave her community. She mentioned, “I wanted to get out of here. [The HBCU] gave me an academic scholarship. I didn’t have family there; but, I had family around the area so I knew I would be close to family. I just wanted to try something new.”

Alisha Thompson agreed. She said, “One, I didn’t want to stay in Indiana. I wanted to go somewhere where I could be free kind of but not too far that I couldn’t run back home if I needed to.”

Participants spoke about Memphis and the surrounding area. Aaron Foster talked about his community as a positive influence. He said,

My community. I’m from Orange Mound, Tennessee and I take pride in that. I don’t know if you know anything about Memphis; but, Orange Mound is an inner city and it’s a neighborhood in Memphis. You have your bad everywhere; but, the people in Orange Mound, they show a lot of support, very positive. It’s just the energy; and, everyone is so proud of Orange Mound. It is like a city within a city.

Rashida Jackson’s Memphis looked different than Aaron’s. She said,

Being from Memphis again, growing up in a majority Black neighborhood and going to a middle school, elementary/middle school and high school, that was a pretty good mix...you saw a lot of successful Black people in Memphis...but then you also saw a significant number of like shiftless Black people and a lot of them were my family...I was like, I'm not trying to be like them. I need to get my life together. I know Black people can be successful...

Sterling Bennett talked about experiencing culture shock in Memphis. She said,

In the military, it's very diverse. I would say 50% White and the rest is everything else whether it's Black or Asian or Mexican or whatever. I saw quite a bit of diversity growing up. So once my dad got out of the military and we moved to Memphis, it was a bit of a culture shock because I went from a mixed-race school to a predominantly Black school. Where out of 500 students, I think my school was a lot bigger than that, but out of five hundred students, there were probably two White kids and one Asian kid.

Olivia Grayson talked about her community in terms of why she decided to attend college. She explained,

I definitely had a very influential guidance counselor. I attended one of the high schools that was one of the worst in the state at one time. I was actually on a waiting list to try to get into a different high school; but, they had limited intake ability. So by the time I got into the school that I wanted to get into, I was already a senior at the school I was at. But our guidance counselor always drilled us about always moving forward. When I say 'we' I mean myself and some of the other students in my freshman class. And we were in what was called the International Baccalaureate program where it focuses on college-bound curriculum and advanced courses. And there was only one school besides my

school that was in the public school system that had that program. So we were kind of the testing group per se for our high school. So taking those courses really helped and my guidance counselor helped narrow down which direction I wanted to take and which track to take to get there.

Brandon White also spoke described his high school as it related to race. “I hung out with everybody. That’s how my high school was, it was very – shouldn’t say diverse, it was predominantly White but you know what, the kids that went there came from everywhere.” He continued, “...and were pretty focused on being successful and on their grades. So I learned to deal with everybody.”

Shawn Griggs, Austin Benson, and Anton Jackson, all from the South, described the uniqueness of going away to college. Shawn said, “Nobody ever went away for sports or anything like that. So in my community, in my town, all over Dallas...people knew okay, ‘this dude is the one who’s stepping out for me.’”

Austin stated, “Well, when I was growing up, there weren’t a lot of people from my neighborhood or my high school who went to college. At least not that I knew of. We had a magnet program; and, we had those kids going to college. But the regular students really weren’t going. They’d just start work.”

Anton Jackson talked about his home community. He said, “Had a few teachers that were supportive because it’s rare that you have someone from Pine Bluff go to an out-of-state school like the PWI. They wanted to see me succeed; and, they showed it to me with their actions.”

Tyler Hampton mentioned how his community pushed him toward college. He said, “Growing up in Chicago, being around gangs and drugs and having family involved in those activities pushed me in the opposite direction. Didn’t want the negativity around me.” He continued, “I always loved basketball and knew it was my meal ticket along with academics to go to college on a scholarship either academic or athletics.”

In this section, participants spoke about their home communities. In the next section, the participants’ discussion of networking during college is presented.

Network

Networking was mentioned 18 times by 11 participants during the interviews. Seven spoke about professional network and three spoke about having a personal network. Gianna Miller said, “I tried to surround myself with, I don’t want to sound selfish or anything, people who could benefit me in some way. It could have been a peer, it could have been a professor.” She admitted, “Not to get in good, but to be able to pick at their brain and know what they know to get the knowledge that I needed to keep going. When it came down to it, most had to do with the professors.”

Participants spoke about networking in a professional manner. Jamaal Watson said, “Another factor was the social experience that I got in college. I knew that relationships I was building, some of them would be lifelong relationships, and I learned that in order to make it once you do leave school, you have to have a network.”

April Wiggins said, “As far as academic wise, I remember networking with other people like friends. Like if I am taking a class, they can help you get a book or teach you how to study for this or explain something to you.”

Deana Lewis regretted that she did not use networking to its fullest. “I wish someone would have stayed on me and said, ‘hey, you need to do internships and you need to look for jobs in your field. You need to network more.’”

Brandon White talked about networking so that you do not get lost in the crowd. He commented,

You can get lost down there. When I was down there, it was 200 Black students that weren’t athletes; and, I’m talking about truly African American, United States born that weren’t athletes. So that’s a small piece of 25,000 people, that’s a small, small piece. We thought we were running things when we had parties and stuff – these people aren’t worried about us – you know as long as we don’t tear the place down they don’t care. You can get lost in the system there. It’s about networking. There’s no question about it. It’s about networking and finding your footing, you know. So your name gets to the top. Your paper gets to the top. So somebody sees it or your resume gets to the top, and have a relationship so somebody knows you.

Phoebe Williams said, “Getting involved on campus, that wasn’t really an issue for me; but, I think it helped too as far as networking and really feeling connected.”

Kim Marshall talked about professional networking. She said, “Positive experiences...so I got exposure to internships, networking opportunities, and this one is going to sound kind of crazy, but I learned how to matriculate in a corporate environment and still keep my authentic self.”

Imani Shepard mentioned the Big 12 Conference. She said, “It brought in speakers. It was a good way to network. There was a kind of business expo piece to it where different

employers would come to the conference, interview.” Imani added, “Different groups that were focused around students of color would have booths and stuff like National Society of Black Engineers and groups like that would come.”

Participants spoke about having a personal network. Rashida Jackson spoke about her network of friends. “I had a really strong support system, my family support system; but, it was my sister because she had been through it before and then it was great because she had already kind of laid a legacy in a sense at the HBCU,” she said. “So she was really pushing me on when I thought that I couldn’t; and, it was also the network of her friends who were there as like big sisters and big brothers for me any time that I needed them.”

Austin Benson remarked, “Football wasn’t necessarily a positive experience for me. I think most of it was networking. Learning how to network and talk to people. Connecting with people and learning how those connections can yield you results later on in life.”

Maurice Franklin discussed a benefit of being in a fraternity. “Another thing that I appreciate looking back is that it allowed me an opportunity to meet other African-American college men outside of the PWI via travel to the regional leadership conference all over the Big 12.” He added, “You establish camaraderie and feel like you have a network of people you know and learn from in other areas; and, when you are undergrad, that is important that is big.”

In summary, participants mentioned networking with people for personal and professional advancement.

To conclude, this chapter discussed the various ways the participants received support during college which included receiving support from faculty/staff, resources, funding

opportunities, family, church, community, and network. Table 9 provides a summary of the support theme.

Table 9
Support Summary

- Having a support system is a mandatory component of college completion.
- Funding provided by on campus entities allowed participants to attend conferences and explore other interests.
- Faculty and staff provided support and resources for participants on campus.
- On and off-campus opportunities enabled participants to build personal and professional networks.
- Families provided support to participants monetarily, by providing access to college, and offering encouragement to help participants do their best.

In the next chapter, the participants' discussion of the influence of race during their college experiences is presented.

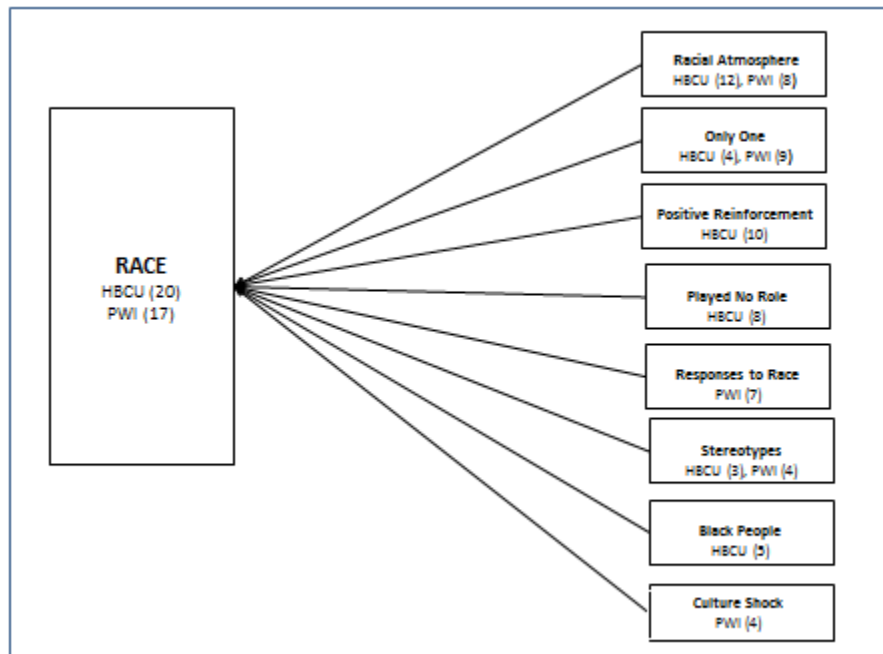
Chapter Seven

Race

Each of the 37 participants spoke about race. The sub-themes were racial atmosphere, only one, positive reinforcement, played no role, responses to race, stereotypes, Black people, and culture shock. Table 10, a map of the race theme, has been included to show the sub-themes and the number of participants who mentioned them during the interviews.

Table 10

Map of Race Theme



Racial Atmosphere

Ten out of 37 participants talked about a change in the racial atmosphere on campus.

Anthony Smalls recalled the atmosphere shifting after he left the HBCU.

I think it [race] played a big role after leaving [the HBCU], within [the HBCU] family. Some issues we were having with race while I was at the HBCU had to do with a law that passed that tried to make [the HBCU] 50/50 White and Black. It passed way back in '97-98 when [the HBCU] got the downtown campus. White high school kids with a 2.5 GPA and a 17 on the ACT could get a full scholarship to [the HBCU].

Reynaldo Livingstone mentioned this phenomenon in his interview. He said,

I would say race played a tremendous role in my experience. I attended a school that had a very diverse background. Granted it was an HBCU, however, there was a sprinkle or two of Caucasian students. And the time I was at [the HBCU], we went through this issue of the name being changed. And I was one of the students who marched from the dorm to the president's house on his lawn. It was something about that court case back in the day of the reasons that [the HBCU] had to have a certain amount of White students there to be accredited or something of that nature. It was a whole scenario about the name being changed and everybody was like that ain't going to happen. You know. At one point, they were the minority because it was an HBCU. But at some point in my time there, the face of [the HBCU] shifted, because then the incoming White students were now the minority. They were the ones getting the scholarships. If you had a 2.0, you got a dang on partial almost full ride at [the HBCU]. Only because they was White. Being of color we were like, 'Is that fair?' But like I said, it's a state school, supporting the school. So it is what it is.

Tyler Hampton recalled his teachers warning him about how [the PWI] was going to be prior to his arrival. “Being from Chicago and committing to come to [the PWI], the first thing my teachers expressed was the percentage of Black people in the state and the percentage of Black people at [the PWI]. It kind of prepared me to come here.” He confessed, “I didn’t look at it like that. You’re a minority everywhere. I grew up in a Caucasian/White neighborhood. My high school was diverse. I never experienced racism the way others defined it.”

Anton Jackson admitted, “Ya know, it was definitely something that made me nervous when I came to [the PWI] because what I heard was it was a lot of snow, a lot of corn and not a lot of people who looked like me.” He said with a chuckle, “But as soon as I stepped on campus when I was moving into the dorm for training camp, I saw a lot of players that looked like me; they sounded like me and that made me feel like I was okay.”

Kim Marshall, Maurice Franklin, and Imani Shepard described instances that negatively affected them related to race. Kim described a class project. She said, “We had an assignment and I was in an all-male group. We had to come up with a business plan and they wanted to have African-American strippers with big booties and they didn’t get paid.” She said, “I was like ‘alright, I just happened to be the only Black female in the group.’ That’s offensive and I handled it in a much more professional way instead of becoming very angry and belligerent and confrontational.”

Maurice mentioned the school newspaper. He said, “Every now and then, there would be a political cartoonist or an op-ed piece in the school newspaper, every now and then, there would be a stir up because someone would say something borderline racist.” He admitted, “For me, it was just another reminder of what the climate was, not just on campus, but in that city and that

state. Because somebody would inevitably say something ignorant a couple times a year that would get some traction.”

Imani told a story about the PWI/HBCU Program at her institution. She explained, “Prior to me going no student of color had attended, although it was an HBCU/PWI exchange. It had all been White students who had gone. I was the first Black student to attend an HBCU through that exchange program. And I thought, ‘what in the world is going on here?’ I think it was promoted, in a way, where more White students could access it. It wasn’t promoted at Black Student Government. It was promoted in the White Greek system as a way to get away; primarily for science majors.”

Monica Iverson said, “I was in the honors program; and my mentor, the girl who was assigned to me, did not help me. She wouldn’t help me figure out my classes, meet with me, or schedule with me.” She said, “We talked to the board about it; and, it was because I was Black and that was the first time I had ever dealt with anything that was in my face like that.”

Miriam Belmont mentioned interracial relationships. She expressed, “Interracial dating is a real issue on our campus. When you come to [the PWI], and these [Black] guys who were your friends, were only your friends if their White girl wasn’t around.” She continued, “I could say hi to you, and you act like I wasn’t there. When it got closer to the end [near graduation] they got bold. They would walk up to me and talk to him [her boyfriend] as if you weren’t there.”

Shawn Griggs said, “I never had a White person ask to feel my hair because they never experienced a Black person. That happened in my first semester, in my first week on campus,” he said. “They would say, ‘I’ve only seen Black people on TV’ or I had one person say, ‘Can I

touch you? Can I touch your hair? Can I like take a picture to give to my friends? That was crazy to me.”

In this section, participants discussed the racial atmosphere on their campuses. Participants’ experiences being the only one will be presented in the following section.

Only One

Thirteen out of 37 participants mentioned being the only one. Crawford Harris and Veronica Jones talked about being the only one in reference to their pre-college experiences. Crawford talked about an experience in school. “It [race] was a factor because I went to a predominantly White elementary school, middle school, high school. In my AP classes, I was the only African American in that class and I was representing all African Americans all the time.” He continued, “Then I go to [the HBCU] and I had never been around that many African Americans at one time ever. It was just eye opening. And as far as race, I think it really made my experience full circle.”

Veronica mentioned being the only one growing up. She said,

Going to be an HBCU was interesting for me. I didn’t really have that experience growing up. It was always obvious that I was a minority. The schools I went to were mostly White. The neighborhoods we lived in were mostly White. Even the churches we went to, for a chunk of time, were mostly White from what I remember. It was multiracial, but what I remember was that it was mostly White. I always remember that I was a minority. I felt that. I always felt different.

Sterling Bennett said she was the only one in the workforce. “But like I said, being at an HBCU helped me to build my confidence...the Black professors at [the HBCU] would stress that

the rest of the world doesn't look like this.” She explained, “The rest of the world is total opposite. Where you'll be the only Black person, or you'll be the only woman, or you'll be the only Black man. You've got to prove yourself.”

Kesha Chanel mentioned that she noticed that she was the only one when she went to graduate school. She said, “Here in grad school, I’m the minority. So it is different to be the only colored person in the classroom. After being here so long you get used to it, and it doesn’t bother me. But I’m aware of it.”

Participants talked about experiencing being the only one in a classroom setting. Kenton Deshone mentioned being the “only” four times during his interview. He said, “My friends wouldn’t be studying where I was studying because I was one of the only, and actually, I think I was the only Black person in most of my classes in the Engineering College.” He added, “Certainly the only Black American... you know it’s really discouraging being the only Black guy in your class. And only having a very few people to look to up, as far as people of color in your college too.”

Kim Marshall agreed, “Being a Black female in engineering, quite often I’m the only one in whatever I do.”

Shawn Griggs said, “When I got to be a sophomore or junior and I was taking those business classes, they made it clear I was ‘the Black guy’ in class, so then that became a certain level of pressure.”

Monica Iverson reported, “And in my classes I would be like, one of the only Black students. So coming from a diverse high school it was just a real different experience.”

Maurice Franklin stated, “It was not uncommon to be the only Black student in your class and one in a couple in a lecture hall.”

Anton Jackson talked about seeing African Americans on campus. His experience was unique because he was an athlete and admitted it was the norm to see African Americans in that area all of the time. Anton said, “When school started, I was the only African American in the classroom; but when I went to practice, I was around my own.” He added, “And then the more I went to other classes and walked on campus, I only saw sprinkles of me. But yeah because of other Blacks being on the football field, I was always around Blacks.”

Erica Johnson, Tyler Hampton, and Shanice Alexander were students in Teachers College. Erica explained, “In almost all of the things I did, I was the only person of color. Like, I rarely remember any African Americans being in my like methods classes and things like that.”

Tyler said, “I was aware of being the only Black person, the only male in class. Being an English Education major, there weren’t many males or Black males who wanted to be teachers.” He said, “I don’t think I had a Black teacher here; but, it didn’t negatively affect me. That kept me motivated and encouraged to stay in college as well.”

Shanice was the outlier in this section. She said,

Because I’m from [her hometown] and it is predominantly White. And growing up, I never really went to the schools that all of the Black kids went to because it just didn’t happen that way. So I was used to being around White people and so I was used to being that one or two or three Black people in your class. So I kind of feel like it is bad to say, but I was used to getting that attention and kind of standing out already because I am a different skin color than everyone else and so the teachers already noticed me; and then, I

was a good student too. So then, it was like, ‘hey, look at this good Black student.’ So I was used to that. So that made me kind of fearful when I started applying for college. I was like ‘man, it would be cool to go to an HBCU. But I’m used to standing out. If I go there, I’m not going to stand out anymore. I’m not going to be special. I’ll be just like everyone else...and it is actually the other way around that makes me uncomfortable because I feel like I shouldn’t be uncomfortable in those kinds of situations. So I’m still growing out of that.

In this section, participants discussed being the only one in different situations. HBCU participants’ experiences receiving positive reinforcement during college will be presented in the following section.

Positive Reinforcement

Ten out of 37 participants spoke about how attending an HBCU gave them positive reinforcement, built their confidence.

Rashad Patton said, “Going to an HBCU, it does instill a certain pride in your culture and in your race.”

Rashida Jackson said, “I’m confident enough in myself as a woman and specifically as a young Black woman going into the workforce; and, I’m confident that I can navigate any environment because I’m confident in myself and my blackness.”

Nona Jefferson and Shana Jenkins talked about how attending the HBCU instilled pride in them. “It made me proud as a Black female. I took more pride in my school. Without an HBCU, I don’t think I would have as much pride as I have, if I had gone to another school,” said Nona.

Shana explained, “Dr. X, when I was there was one of the chair people for the Business Department. And the way that he taught his class made you take a little more pride in the school itself.” She continued, “He made us learn the history of [the HBCU] and every class he made us stand up and sing all three verses to the alma mater and that was part of your grade.”

Reynaldo Livingstone beamed as he spoke his HBCU experience. He said, Positive experiences were just the whole HBCU experience. Sometimes words cannot begin to describe being at a historically Black college or university. The ambiance, the energy, the personalities. But the whole experience itself, like I said, the energy and people and the whole environment. It was just, I love it.

Chase Daniels stated,

In a sense, my racial identity was a big part of my experience because I went to a historically Black university. Because my role models were Black, my professors were mostly Black, my classmates were mostly Black, so I think it actually gave me a really great perspective over my whole life on Black people being scholars and having a propensity for education and knowledge which has stuck with me to this day. So even when I meet Black kids to this day it’s like ‘I’ve got to get you to college’ or ‘You’re going to college because you have that potential.’

Olivia Grayson spoke of wanting to have the “Black Experience.” She said,

...well you know [the HBCU] is in the south and I had the “Black experience.” I think it played a role in the terms of African American History I would say. Not just attending, but being surrounded by other HBCUs. Definitely, it also helped me branch out to understand the history of them more. I know that [the HBCU] also has like African American Studies courses and I took a couple of those to learn more about my culture.

But also, going to [the HBCU], race played a factor for me in that growing up I went to predominantly Caucasian schools until high school, when I had to go to public school. I think it was an eye-opener to me regarding race, to learn a lot about Black culture or African American Culture and the history of African Americans, and the history of education of African Americans.

Sterling Bennett was impressed by all of the smart Black people. She said,

I went to high school in the inner city... So the population of kids who were focused on school, focused on doing right was very small. And going to college, I was expecting it to be like my senior year in high school. But it turned out that it wasn't. And I was quite surprised to see all of these Black kids, all of these smart Black kids pretty much. I was like, 'whoa, whoa.' Well, everybody in here is smart; and, everybody in here is Black. I don't think I fully appreciated it until I started my PhD program.

Veronica Jones took pride in seeing African-American people in positions of power. She stated, "Going to an HBCU was an interesting experience because it gave me the opportunity to be the majority at an institution. And seeing people in leadership who were minorities." She confessed, "For me it was a positive experience and also an enlightening experience. It was something that I learned from experientially not just academically."

Race impacted Jamaal Watson's college experience in a profound way as a man and an African American. He commented,

I think race played a unique part in my experience in college for the simple fact that I went to an HBCU. It put me in touch with some of the things, that as a people, my race has gone through in terms of getting an education and things of that nature. But being at

college on a campus where it was predominately more females than males that was an eye opening experience; and also, realizing that as an African-American male, we were not represented as much on that level as we should be. You realize the importance of being in school, doing well in school and graduating from school so that you can play a bigger role in helping the race as a whole really focus in on education as a way to overcome some of the adversity and obstacles that have been up against us.

Participants from the HBCU described receiving positive reinforcement in this section. In the next section, HBCU participants will discuss why race played no role in their college experience.

Played No Role

Eight out of 37 participants said race played no role in their college experience because they attended a Historically Black College/University. Race did not play a role since they did not experience negativity or feel uncomfortable due to race. Chase Daniels said, “There were none of those racial motivations or racial detractors.”

Sterling Bennett commented, “Race wasn't something that I had to think about. Everybody looked like me. Everybody is on the same playing field. All you've got to do is come in and do your work. I didn't have that same experience going to a predominantly White school.”

April Wiggins posited, “Because it was an HBCU, it was totally different than going to a predominantly White university or some other university because there was never a big racial situation there.” She continued, “Yes, we had other races there and it was kind of like we embrace them. Like, ‘oh okay, we definitely know what program you are in’ because the

nursing program and the dental program were both predominately White. The other programs were like full of Black people, so there was never really a big racial situation there.”

Gianna Miller said that race did not play a role because she went to a Black school. Gianna said, “I was always around my own race and even when I was around other races it was never to a point to where it was uncomfortable to be around them.”

Kesha Chanel stated, “I don’t think race really played a part in my undergrad since the majority were the minorities.”

Alisha Thompson stated, “I can’t say that it really did to be honest. I mean even though I went to an HBCU, it wasn’t like we’re just a Black school or anything like that because we had so many backgrounds and cultures mixed in at [the HBCU].”

Deana Lewis interpreted race to mean racism. “Race...I did not experience a lot of racism in college. I mean I went to a historically Black university. I can’t think of anything off the top of my head where race played a part.”

Tia Summers had a similar interpretation, “it really didn’t play a role. Like, I went to an HBCU school and it was cool. Everybody looked like me. I was always accepted. I always felt accepted. That was that.”

In this section, HBCU participants discussed why they said race played no role in their college experience. Responses to race by participants from the PWI will be presented in the next section.

Responses to Race

Seven out of 37 participants from the PWI discussed how race impacted them in general. Nicholas Harper and Scott Blackwell said that race impacted everything. Nicholas talked about

his involvement in campus organization. He said, “So it [race] was a factor because all of the things that weren’t directly related to being a student of color. I got on there because they saw the need to have a student of color to be on there to help with program.”

Scott added, “Well race played a major role. I recognize over the years how I may have been looked at differently because of my race or because of the way I look.”

Shawn Griggs and Kenton Deshone learned about other races. Shawn learned, “One of the experiences was getting exposed to something beyond Black/White in Texas. I went to college and I was blown away by the diversity in college.”

Kenton reported the following story:

When you’re going through it, you don’t think race all the time; but when you look back, it impacted everything all of the time. Everything you went through, the friends you make, the friends you didn’t make, because of race...But what I didn’t realize when I got to college, was the majority of the non-colored people I was meeting in my classes were not the same people that were in my classes in K-12 and in high school. The reason I say that is because they were from a much smaller town, their perceptions of Black people were different; their interactions were much different because they never had the opportunity to do that before. It was kind of a learning experience, I guess you can say, distinguishing between well-learned White folk and not well-learned White folk. Originally, I was thinking, oh it’s just all the same, which is probably not good. But that’s kind of just the way I just always...“What do you mean I am the first Black person you met?” just kind of weird dynamics like that that you didn’t realize until after you kind of had your experience.

Brandon White and Imani Shepard stated that race afforded them opportunities. Brandon said, “I think it opened doors because it exposed me to so much more a) Here’s a Black male who is interested in figuring out what’s going on in this department; and b) He’s not afraid to go over here and do these different things.”

Imani said,

I think race worked both positively and negatively. I think being outgoing and being a young Black woman was a reason for people to come to me. So race was the motivating factor in expressing opportunity. I think it was also a factor in not providing opportunity at the same time. I think it was really pumped up that you do well as a Black student because there were very few Black students on campus. There are students that they look to as token students on campus. But also it has its challenges. It’s not utopia. It’s not without racism.

Erica Johnson was the outlier in this section. She stated, “I don’t ever remember it being a bad thing. It was just kind of there sometimes.”

Participants’ from the PWI described the responses they had to race in general. Stereotypes will be discussed in the next section.

Stereotypes

Seven out of 37 participants mentioned the stereotypes they experienced. Crawford Harris discussed his annoyance about what people say about HBCUs, specifically his HBCU. “If you go to Harvard and you don’t study and you don’t do your work, you aren’t going to do well. Same thing at [the HBCU].” He continued, “It’s not like [the HBCU] hands out college degrees.

Sometimes people think that is what happens. Definitely was challenging, I definitely learned a lot. I do wish that I had studied more and done a little better even though I had success there.

April Wiggins agreed. She said,

I went to a magnet school. So yeah, everybody was going to school in Alabama: University of Alabama or Auburn whatever. So I was one of the few who went to an HBCU. I was told by several of my classmates; ‘all you’re going to do is party.’ ‘You’re going to an HBCU y’all ain’t going to be doing nothing’ and all this other stuff. I need to be ready to not go back home but to push myself and to graduate. It was never an issue of my coming here to party. I came here for an education first and the partying came with it. So for me, I think it is important for people to know that just because you go to an HBCU doesn’t mean that all you do is party.

Anthony Smalls spoke about external differences that he noticed. “...looking at the disparities between the surroundings of [the HBCU] and White schools in the area. The White school always looked nice, it was a different place. The only thing that was recognizable at [the HBCU] was the fast food. They [the HBCU] invested a lot more in the gym.

Kim Marshall discussed an experience she had with generalizations. She said, “Whether intentional or unintentional, comments would be made that were offensive. Given my maturity at the time, I might not have addressed them in the most mature ways; but, I always addressed them.” She continued, “I had people be like ‘I know a Black person from [her hometown]. Do you know blah blah blah?’” And that was a trigger for me. “Really? So you think all Black people in [her hometown] know each other? So I would go left very quickly.”

Scott Blackwell and Anton Jackson shared similar sentiments. Scott said, “I recognized over the years, how I may have been looked at differently because of my race or the way I look. People tend to think you are not as smart as you are.” He added, “They tend to think you have something up your sleeve if they don’t know you period.”

Anton said, “The advisors that I worked with. Even though they were tough, I knew it was more tough love because as a football player there is more of the stereotype that you’re only here for football and you’re not as smart. But they wanted to beat that and so I am thankful for them being hard on me.”

Monica Iverson talked about intraracial and interracial stereotyping. “Well growing up, I knew it [race] existed but I didn’t really have a lot of hands on experience with it. Yeah I was the Black girl who was too White but not Black enough.” She continued, “But the Black girl around the White people was too Black and not White enough. I dealt with stuff like that; but, I had never really dealt with someone being blatantly racist to me.”

In this section, participants’ described encounters they experienced dealing with stereotypes during college. In the next section, the participants will discuss being around Black people.

Black People

The participants described the sub-theme Black People as an opportunity to be surrounded by and interacting with members of their race which provided comfort and support. The sub-theme was also described as the atmosphere of campus. The term was used 30 times by five of 37 participants from the HBCU.

Reynaldo Livingstone described the atmosphere at the HBCU with pride, “just being the fact that I was African American and I was among peers. And like I say, it was very diverse,” he said. “We had people that had different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities and places of culture. And it made my experience even more beautiful.”

Rashida Jackson said, “I knew I wanted to be around a whole bunch of Black people. I wanted to be around a lot of smart Black people who were...who their primary goal and focus was like, ‘I’m working toward something.’”

Shana Jenkins talked about the percentage of Black people on campus when she was there. “I had never gone to a school in my entire kindergarten to twelfth grade where there were more than 10% African-American students. Then I went to [the HBCU] and it was 70% African American so we were on the majority side.” Like Sterling Bennett, Shana said, “It was a little less stressful because you knew that you were not going to get into any racially-motivated conflict. So it helped you to breathe a little more easily because you knew you weren’t going to be judged based on your skin tone by faculty or students.”

Nona Jefferson said, “There were White people there. But Black people were definitely in the majority. It plays into my bias. It was a total difference from the high school I went to, I was in the minority definitely. It gave me confidence.”

Aaron Foster remarked, “When I went to [the HBCU], I always wanted to be around ‘my people’ so to speak. Going to [the HBCU], I wanted to see other African Americans doing well.” He added, “You go to other universities and you see other races but I wanted to see other African Americans who were going to class, who were business-minded, so that definitely played a big role.”

In this section, the participants discussed being around Black people. In the next section, participants' experiences with culture shock will be presented.

Culture Shock

Anton Jackson said, "My roommate he was from [my home state]. We shared the same cultural values. So even though we were in the Midwest, the whole culture shock, I felt okay because I was going through the experience with someone who was like me."

Austin Benton stated, "Race...I would say initially it was a huge culture shock. Where I came from, I had Black principal, Black teachers, Black students there were no Whites at all, to go from that dynamic to being the only Black person in the class." He expressed, "The first day I was in class, it was super overwhelming. I knew that if I didn't show up in class, even if it was a class of 100 people, they would know that I wasn't there."

Miriam Belmont and Scott Blackwell talked about their experience coming from [home]. Miriam said, "It was like culture shock going the 50 miles from [home to school]. That's why on the weekend, I had to go home even just for a couple of hours. I have dealt with crazy all week and I need some stability."

Scott explained, "When I got here, I was pretty much in culture shock. I was used to being in my neighborhood and people kicking it, people doing all kind of off the wall stuff." He continued, "So when I got here it was a little structured. People didn't look like me. We didn't have neighborhoods where you could go to and wild out I guess."

Anthony Smalls was the outlier on this sub-theme. He told a story about having a White roommate during his time in college. He did not feel that this was a negative experience just a different experience than he expected.

My first year at [the HBCU] as a freshman I stayed in the dorm and I had a White roommate. He was an upper classman. I went to a Black school. I would not have thought I drove all the way to [the HBCU] and have a White roommate. He was a cool guy. We always hung out. Everyone was always in our room. I don't know how he felt about that. I don't know if it was because he was White, or because he was a year ahead of us, but we hung out sometime. I am ashamed now, but we used to call him WB.

In summary, race was discussed in a variety of ways. PWI and HBCU participants discussed the racial atmosphere on campus, stereotyping, and being the only one. PWI participants discussed culture shock and responses to race in general. HBCU participants explained why race played no role in their college experience, Black people, and receiving positive reinforcement. Table 10 provides a summary of the race theme.

Table 11**Race Summary**

- Campus climate played a role in the African Americans interactions with others on campus.
- Participants took pride in their campus and race when encouraged by their professors.
- Participants mentioned being free to learn when racial issues were not present.

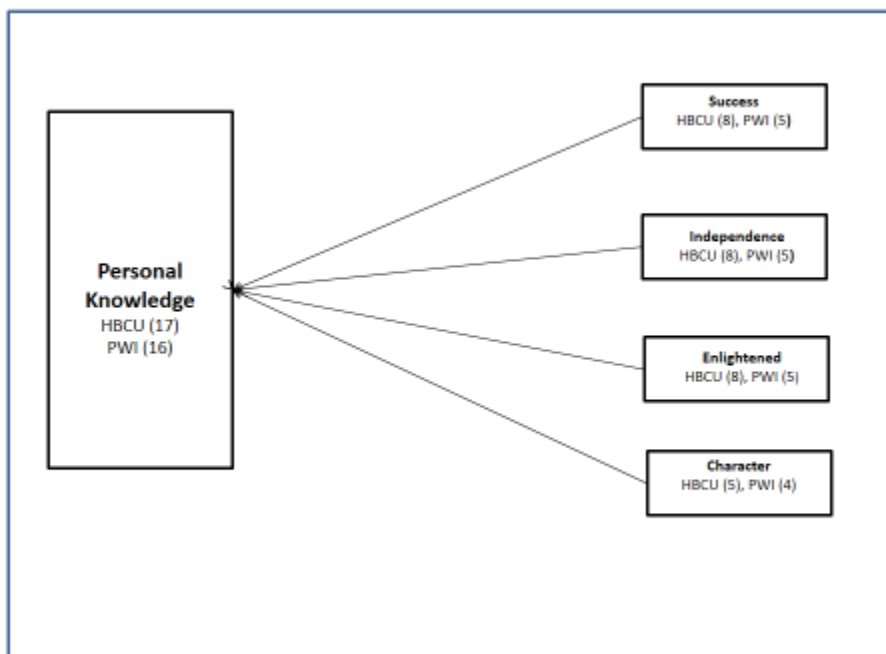
In the next chapter, the theme personal knowledge will be presented.

Chapter Eight

Personal Knowledge/Insight

Personal knowledge was mentioned 193 times by 33 out of 37 participants during the interviews. The chapter is divided into four sub-themes: success, independence, enlightenment, and character. Table 12, a map of the race theme, has been included to show the sub-themes and the number of participants who mentioned them during the interviews.

Table 12
Map of Personal Knowledge Theme



Success

Success was mentioned 57 times by 13 out of 37 participants. Veronica Jones said, “I mean I was motivated and ambitious. Knowing that I wanted to finish well. When I went on the job market and then later on to grad school.” She confessed, “My whole life, I was expected to

make good grades. Anything less than a “B” really was not acceptable. So I was a little bit more of a high achieving student.”

April Wiggins and Anthony Smalls spoke about academic success. April declared, “I did well my whole time at the HBCU. I graduated with a three point whatever it was [GPA]. I graduated magna cum laude and it’s wonderful but no one ever asks me that.”

Anthony stated, “I liked what I was doing, it was hard. What I thought was successful, I was on the Dean’s List every semester in college.”

Chase Daniels and Jamaal Watson reported finding the path to success in college. Chase said, “I think most of my success in college came toward the end of my career. And that just came from finally knowing what I wanted to do ultimately.” He was thoughtful as he answered, “When I decided I wanted to become a teacher, I had more clear cut motivation for the tougher parts of college which was doing the work. I connected more to the end goal and that made it more desirable and I was willing to work harder for it.”

Jamaal replied,

Also college on the social side being a part of the campus ministry and seeing other individuals, more than myself who were able to go through life and connecting, showed me things to help me on my path to success. People who were successful before me were able to share with me things that helped me to successfully divert the road blocks and things of that nature on my path to success.

Rashad Patton said, “In the community, I could see when you have a conversation as an HBCU student, it would be a little different if you were at a PWI, event and they were trying to

compare you to a PWI student. But I think it was a motivating factor because you wanted to be the cream of the crop so that you could hold a candle to students at those other schools.”

Tia Summers said, “I became motivated to succeed because of the success around me. It is always easier to go with the flow, even when the “flow” is bad influences. I had positive influences and enjoyed meeting the challenge of finishing school.”

Olivia Grayson answered, “Making sure I got a quality education was the driving force to my success. I’ve never really had an issue with grades. I’ve always been on the honor roll in high school. That was always natural...”

Participants talked about redefining their definition of success while in college. Austin Benson said, “So to me that is one of the things that I really overcame and that was the fear of making it. A lot of the Black community feels like if he don’t make it to the NBA he failed.” He admitted, “Now I have redefined making it. Making it is getting your degree, getting out of the house with your parents, having your own family and growing and being a professional.”

Shawn Griggs commented,

I never really paid attention to the impact people have had on my life or in my community. So then when I got involved, I started to feel a little bit of success in that sense. It was like, success for me became then I want to leave this place better than when I came not just for athletes, not just for Blacks, wherever I can I want to make it a better.

Maurice Franklin said, “I was that guy, I had to be up with the latest styles. But if you wanted to have that lifestyle and wear those types of things, college was the means to do that. The means to achieving the level of lifestyle you want to achieve.”

Kenton Deshone said, “I think I was somewhat academically prepared. And because I had taken enough language credits in high school I didn’t have to take the language in college which was a thorn in people’s sides.”

Brandon White told this story. “It was a big deal for me to go home and tell my mom, ‘hey, I got my degree.’ I mean to the point to where, when I graduated, there was no one up here.” He continued, “My family didn’t come up. They couldn’t afford to come up. So I graduated, walked across the stage, got my degree, called them, ‘hey, I did it.’”

The participants in this section spoke about success. In the following section, participants discussed how learning to be independent impacted their college experiences.

Independence

Independence was mentioned 42 times by 13 out of 37 participants during the interviews. “Since I was away, I became independent and more self-sufficient. I guess that would be considered positive. It gave me a certain kind of confidence,” said Nona Jefferson. “I wanted to go to school. Some friends had parents who made them go and they really did not want to be at school. I turned that into, I want to be here and I am willing to do what it takes to be here.”

April Wiggins stated, “ I would definitely say that I am an independent person and self-motivate myself so I see the goal; and, I have a hard time with being defeated by something I see. So I have to keep going, especially since I know that I walk in my purpose.”

Chase Daniels said college was positive for him “And the experience of a little bit of independence and your first taste of being an adult. I liked that a lot.”

Deana Lewis explained, "I enjoyed the HBCU experience. All of my best friends I met in college. It was me being out on my own and not really having to answer to anyone just exploring life and learning myself."

Gianna Lewis stated, "I'm probably the first female in my family in Georgia who actually went off to college. I have older male cousins that left home to go to college; but, I was the first female to leave and go to college."

Shana Jenkins also appreciated the independence she gained in college. She stated, "It gave me a soft entry into adulthood. Well I learned how to live as an adult without having to check in to make my decisions. I learned how to make executive decisions. I was on my own. I learned how to set my own schedule."

Olivia Grayson sought her independence because she wanted an opportunity to just be herself. "In my family, I've always been looked at as the responsible one, even though I am the youngest of five; and, I have always been a role-model for my nieces and nephews. So I wanted to go somewhere, that if I fell down and had to figure out how to get myself back up I could without everyone watching."

Alisha Thompson did not want to be too far from her family. She said, "One, I didn't want to stay in the Midwest. I wanted to go somewhere where I could be free kind of, but not too far that I couldn't run back home if I needed to."

Shawn Griggs said, "Nobody in my family ever left the state of Texas to go to school or anything like that, so I was the wild child in that sense."

Brandon White commented, “We didn’t come from an academic household; but, I knew that I wanted to get out of where I was at. I wanted to see the world. I knew there was more than the 5 mile radius that I grew up in.”

Ashley Jacobs and Anton Jackson both talked about wanting to be different. Ashley said, “Not only for my family but for myself, because if I quit, I would be like everyone else and I kind of wanted to be different and wanted something else for myself.”

Anton agreed. He shared, “I had other opportunities but the PWI felt natural to me because it was something different. Pine Bluff, Arkansas has a lot of crime, drugs. I knew I wanted to do something different. I wanted to go somewhere different.”

Maurice Franklin talked about his first taste of freedom. He explained, “After my 4th year, I took advantage of an internship with Disney. I did the Disney College Program where you go down to Orlando and you work down there.” He spoke excitedly, “I did the extended one which was 7 months which for me was equivalent to 3 semesters if I was going to take summer classes that year. So I put off three semesters of study to go to Orlando to live and work and I loved it!”

Participants described the ways being independent helped them grow and mature. In the next section, participants discussed being enlightened by experiences during college.

Enlightenment

Enlightenment was referred to as becoming more self-aware while in college. This sub-theme was mentioned 57 times by 13 out of 37 HBCU and PWI participants. Alisha Thompson discussed being excited about the newness of college. “It was a brand new experience for me. It was definitely the people that I met and having that time to grow as a person. And when I used

to go home for spring break, I'd be like, 'oh my God I can't wait to go back.'" She continued, "I cannot wait to go back to school. Because for me it was so exciting, it was new, every semester was something different."

Deana Lewis told her story,

I guess in high school, I was kind of quiet. I did a lot of things because my mother wanted me to do it. I didn't really know what I liked and what I disliked. I never really got to experience much. In high school, my mom kind of had a tight reign. So in college, I got to experience going out and having fun, meeting new people, figuring out my likes and dislikes in men, figuring out my own personal strength. I didn't know I was strong as I was until I got to college.

Veronica Jones spoke of her enlightenment by saying, "College was for me what high school was for some people. It was an opportunity for me to come into my own. It was that foundational experience where I made lots of friends and lots of positive memories."

Phoebe Williams said, "When I finished undergrad, I did not want to go back to school at all. But I did end up getting my master's degree. I was enrolled in a PhD program." She continued, "What was once going to school to get a job has now become a love for learning because I saw how I am getting better as a person and how I really enjoy just learning new things."

Brandon White said, "I learned a lot about myself as far as my character, my level of commitment, things that I would be willing to sacrifice in order to be successful."

Lauren Marley stated, "I had to learn a lot going to school. Finding out who I was as a person, trying not to let other people determine my success or what I wanted to do in life."

Gianna Miller provided some wisdom. “I mean I enjoyed my college experience. And I would absolutely encourage anyone to take that route as far as going to college.” She said, “Even though once you graduate you may not find a job primarily in your field but you gain so many other qualities. You learn a lot being around so many other different people. You learn a lot about yourself also.”

Participants talked about having their eyes opened to culture while in college. April Wiggins talked about being inspired. “Being able to experience new things, learning different cultures, stepping outside the box on some things,” she said. “Being from Birmingham, I love my city but it is very slow, so me being able to go to college and experience new things has opened my eyes to so much more. It gave me the drive to want to do more.”

Chase Daniels said,

Because my role models were Black, my professors were mostly Black, my classmates were mostly Black, so I think it actually gave me a really great perspective over my whole life on Black people being scholars and having a propensity for education and knowledge which has stuck with me to this day.

Olivia Grayson made similar remarks. “Going to [the HBCU], race played a factor for me in that growing up I went to predominantly Caucasian schools until high school, when I had to go to public school.” She added, “I think it was an eye-opener to me regarding race, to learn a lot about Black culture or African-American culture and the history of African Americans.”

Monica Iverson stated, “I think the activities I got involved with, student government, Black student government, leadership activities as a TA, those activities showed me that there

was more to life outside of academics.” She added, “so when I felt burnt out, I had something else to turn to.”

Kim Marshall became passionate about the STEM fields. “[What] motivated me to finish school was the lack of African-American females in math and science. And that has become a passion of mine. I am very involved in STEM, no matter where I am, whatever state I’m in.”

Ashley Jacobs said, “I can remember going to the Big 12 Student Government Conference which was eye opening to me...we dressed like professionals. We are gearing ourselves to be career folks which was different than what I was used to seeing at home.”

The participants learned about themselves during college. In the next section, the participants discussed building character during their college experiences.

Character

Character was mentioned 24 times by nine out of 37 participants during the interviews. Jamaal Watson built character as he figured out how to rebound after a sports injury. He said,

The major challenge I overcame while in college was finding the motivation to continue once basketball was taken out of the picture. Basketball was my sport; and, I just knew it was going to be my profession as a small kid. When that was taken away, I went through a depressed state where I didn’t know if I wanted to stay in college and get a degree. Because that was one of the things at an early age, I thought this was the route I had to take in order to make it to take care of my mom. And I had to realize that wasn’t the only way in order to make it. There are many other ways to make it that didn’t rely on your physical talent to separate you from everyone else.

Rashad Patton stated, "I had a great time and I learned a lot. I can honestly say, it was an investment. My college experience made me who I am today. If I had not gone to college, I would have been a completely different person."

April Wiggins learned through relationships she had in college. "So I had to overcome things like that people confusing my kindness for weakness. Realizing that everyone is not always out for your best interest. You can't count everyone as a friend. Everyone who smiles at you is not a friend."

Sterling Bennett added, "But I think the fact that I did go to an HBCU, helped me to build my confidence. Race wasn't something that I had to think about. Everybody looked like me. Everybody is on the same playing field. All you've got to do is come in and do your work."

Gianna Miller's character was built through circumstances she encountered. "Staying grounded is one thing. Actually remembering what I was in college for because there are a thousand distractions in college. You know parties, being pretty much completely on your own for the first time, things like that," she said. Gianna added, "Staying grounded, staying focused and remembering, 'hey, you're on scholarship and you can lose that scholarship' and go on academic probation; and, I just didn't want any of that to happen."

Tyler Hampton said, "I had teachers who would talk to me and say I am going to pick on you today because I want you to talk and speak up. My advisor really helped me in this." He stated, "I was an English education major; and, those classes made me have to speak up and become more social because we had to do presentations in class. There was no way that we weren't going to talk in those classes."

Scott Blackwell talked about skills he acquired. He mentioned, “I’d say my people skills. I participated in a program they used to have here called Leadershape.” He continued, “It was a great experience not only for myself but for them as well to erase stereotypes just to get to know how to work with people who don’t look like you.”

Brandon White and Anton Jackson spoke about gaining confidence. Brandon talked about an experience he had on campus. He said, “I wasn’t comfortable with the way that everybody else was doing things: the music and the way they danced. It taught me to be confident in who I am and present that to people; and, it’s taken me a long way.”

Anton commented, “I was involved with Black Student Government. I was in the choir singing. Did some other stuff and it really allowed me to get out of my shell. Naturally, I am an introvert; but, just being involved helped me see another side of me. Being involved on campus was a good experience.”

In summary, participants discussed gaining personal knowledge as part of their success in college. Table 13 provides a summary of the personal knowledge theme.

Table 13

Personal Knowledge Summary

- The participants’ definition of success was expanded during college.
- Participants experienced growth when provide opportunities to become more self-aware.
- Character was produced in the participants when they faced hardships.

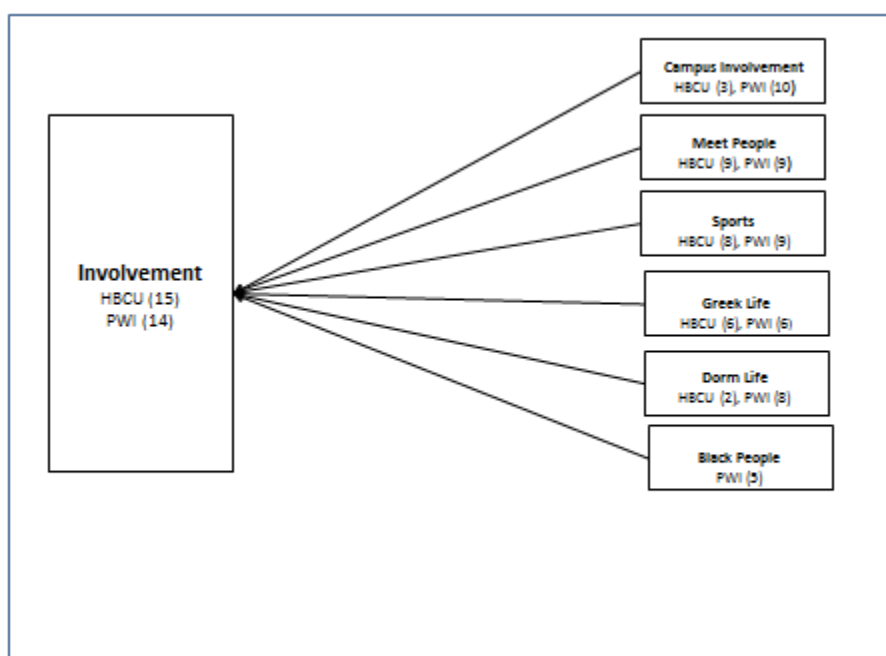
In the next chapter, the participants discussed the influence involvement had on their college experiences.

Chapter Nine

Involvement

Involvement was mentioned 109 times by 29 out of 37 participants. Ninety-seven comments were made by participants from the PWI. Table 14, a map of the involvement theme, has been included to show the six sub-themes: campus involvement, meet people, sports, Greek life, dorm life, and Black people; and the number of participants who mentioned them during the interviews.

Table 14
Involvement Theme Map



Campus Involvement

Thirteen out of 37 participants spoke about activities they were involved in on campus. Rashida Jackson listed the organizations she had friends in saying,

The relationships that I was able to make, like with my friends there, they were like in little pockets. Like, I had my friends in the honors program. I had my friends I took classes with. I had my friends who were part of the newspaper staff. I had my friends in NACWC. I had my friends in the First Ladies. I had my friends, well my line sisters. So, it was like all these little pockets of people who I was meeting and just loved and developed friendship with them. They were a strong support system.

Shana Jenkins said, "I sang with the New Directions Gospel Choir."

Olivia Grayson was active on campus. She said she was,

Inducted into the Golden Key Society, National Honors Society, I'm a founding member of Gamma Beta Phi – an honors organization. And joining my sorority, I'm a Sigma Gamma Rho. Our principles are founded on education and, in talking to my sorority sisters, they all want to get their masters. There's so many, I mean it's hard to narrow it down. I guess another one would be just interacting with other students. Like being a part of the psychology club and other clubs on campus, and drawing from what works for other students. I think that is a great cause of a lot of fulfillment in college.

Participants from the PWI talked about their campus involvement. Participants talked about joining Black student government, attending the Big 12 Conference on Black Student Government, and the importance of getting involved on campus. The table below displays the activities mentioned by the participants.

Table 15
PWI Campus Involvement
Activities
 Black Student Government
 National Black Society of Engineers
 Student Government
 Student of Color Advisory
 Committee
 INROADS
 McNair Program
 Future Educators of Color
 Chancellor's Committee for Students
 of Color
 Fellowship of Christian Athletes
 Leadershape
 Summer Institute
 TRIO Program

In the next section, the participants spoke about the various ways they met people while in college and how it impacted their college experience.

Meet People

Meeting people was mentioned 23 times by 18 out of 37 participants. This was an important part of the college experience because it helped the participants learn about other cultures, ways of living, and trends from different parts of the country.

Sterling Bennett said, “Another motivation was the friends that I made in college. I would meet people who were not necessarily in the same major or they didn't necessarily have the same major or the same goals.” She continued, “But their general goal was to stay. And that was also a motivation for me to meet young Black people, women, who wanted an education.”

Jamaal Watson made a similar comment. He said, “But also the people skills you learn when dealing with people from all walks of life. You're a young adult, you are meeting people.

You are working on those communication, interpersonal skills that I believe are the true keys to success once you leave college.”

Anthony Smalls reported, “I met a lot of great people. I never expected to meet so many people. I am from Mississippi. I knew about three people when I went there. Now when I go to [visit], I see people I recognize from [the HBCU]. The [HBCU] is a big family.”

Chase Daniels said, “The biggest positive experience that I can remember early on, was meeting so many people my same age and that had the same mind set but were so different and from so many places.”

Olivia Grayson commented, “I guess another one would be just interacting with other students. Like being a part of the Psychology Club and other clubs on campus, and drawing from what works for other students. I think that is a great cause of a lot of fulfillment in college.”

Alisha Thompson exclaimed, “It’s really definitely the people that kept me motivated because you see so many positive African-American women and men, especially our Miss HBCU Carla. I can’t remember what year that was. Just to see that type of example of someone so beautiful and educated just in purpose. It’s beautiful to me.”

April Wiggins said, “I would say meeting new people. Some of my best friends are from college. Being able to experience new things, learning different cultures, stepping outside the box on some things.”

Deana Lewis said, “So in college I got to experience going out and having fun, meeting new people, figuring out my likes and dislikes in men, figuring out my own personal strength.”

Rashida Jackson told this story,

The people that I met, the friends I was able to make, the experiences that I had, the organizations I was able to be involved in really helped to build the foundation for me becoming the woman that I always wanted to be that I didn't really think would be possible without what I knew was a missing piece which was going to school to like really further my education.

Meeting people was Brandon White's favorite thing about college. He mentioned it six times during his interview. He said, "You're going to find a common theme through all of my stuff: people, just the people." He admitted, "I talk to my four-year old about people – hey man, meet people. Be friendly, be outgoing, be confident in who you are, look them in the eyes, make good relationships."

Erica Johnson spoke in general about enjoying college. She said, "So I definitely think the people that I met. The professors that I met. I'm not as in touch with them now, but just knowing that they were there to support me as an undergrad was beneficial"

Kenton Deshone had a situation where he lost some friends. He said, "It actually turned out okay because I met some other people because of that that I wouldn't have met if I wasn't forced to really get outside of my own network. To this day we are lifetime friends."

Nicholas Harper met people through a Student Affairs professional. He commented, "During my first couple of weeks of college, I met a Student Affairs professional when I was leaving a late class that I had. She walked me over to the Culture Center and the Black Student Government was having a meeting. She said you need to go here and you need to get involved. So that was a really positive experience because I met a lot of really positive people there."

Monica Iverson stated, "I liked being surrounded by like-minded individuals. At the PWI, there was a small African-American community."

Kim Marshall said, "Dr. X took me to a National Society of Black Engineers Convention. She took me around other engineers who were in their careers. We had dinner and they shared professional experiences with me."

Anton Jackson said, "But yeah, because of other Blacks being on the football field, I was always around Blacks."

The following are statements related to involvement that do not suggest participation. Brandon White and Anton Jackson talked about getting involved to prevent feeling isolated as athletes on the PWI's campus. Brandon said, "I was a little bit isolated as an athlete. We had a lot of things accessible to us that way. So where I benefited from that was the fact that I got the chance to meet a lot more people." He admitted, "I didn't plug into things like the Black Student Government as well as I wish I would have now."

Anton stated, "I would say my involvement, believe it or not. Playing football or any athletics at the PWI, it can feel like you're segregated from the rest of campus because everything is all in one area: where you eat, where you work out, where you practice." He said, "But I actually took the time to meet 'normal students.' I was involved with Black Student Government."

Shanice Alexander told this story,

As far as interacting with my classmates, that was always kind of weird. I was always kind of over here in my classes. I never really felt a part of the group. In teacher education, it is mainly like White females. They would all be group fun... 'Oh my

sorority' or 'Oh I am getting married' and all this other stuff and I was always kind of over here. So I kind of always felt like an outsider in my classes but with the way I was raised I didn't let that hinder me.

The next section is about how sports impacted participants on both campuses.

Sports

Sports were mentioned 63 times by 17 out of 37 participants. Forty-six of those comments were made by PWI participants. Shana Jenkins said, "I marched in the marching band at [the HBCU]. That was a good experience."

Chase Daniels commented, "The whole university experience, you know football games, and really the camaraderie sticks out to me."

It was football that made Rashad Patton interested in college in the first place. He said, "It was actually the football Classic and Homecoming that got me interested, because I saw all the activities that were going on at this so-called university."

Crawford Harris remarked, "I just loved going to the games. I had never been around; I had been around it because my father went to [the HBCU] but nowhere to the magnitude that I was submersed in it. And just seeing the pageantry of HBCU games, the band and the people. That is probably one of my fondest memories of [the HBCU]."

Alisha Thompson went on her college visit during football season. She said, "...we went around [the HBCU]'s homecoming, so we got to see the band; and this was when they were still in the hole."

Participants talked about being athletes. Aaron Foster played football during his college career. He talked about sports and college success. "Me and my brother, we told ourselves that we couldn't go back [home]. Plus, we also played sports so that helped as well."

Jamaal Patton's passion was basketball; and, he had the opportunity to play in college.

He said,

From an athletic standpoint, to be able to play Division I college basketball is a dream that many men and boys have and aspire to but actually less than one percent of us actually get to experience that. So to be able to experience that, to play schools like the University of North Carolina was a dream as well. So those were positive experiences that I hold deep in my heart and carry with me as I go throughout life.

Tia Summers admitted, "When I was on the basketball team my first year. I acquired more friends that way."

Anton Jackson mentioned sports 23 times during his interview. Football was a big part of his life and impacted him in several ways. He explained,

School was hard, but I just think the structure that football gave me, even though I almost flunked out my first semester, it still allowed me to understand what it took to be successful. So I really give a lot of credit to the family concept that football team created for the players, particularly the players from out of state. So at training camp, we are around each other basically all day from 5:30 in the morning to nine o'clock at night. We practice twice a day. We watch film together. We eat together. So we spent all of our time together. So as much as we hated one another, because we were so tired and cranky, but yet we were all we had.

Austin Benson also played football. He admitted, "The football, being recruited. To be honest with you, the most exciting part of it for me was the feeling of being wanted. Being recruited after and the whole big ordeal that they made about wanting you to be at their school."

Tyler Hampton was a basketball player for [the PWI]. “Playing basketball allowed me to meet many people. It allowed me to become more social. I was always a quiet, reserved person. Sports allowed me to be more involved and active.”

Shanice Alexander commented, “I got involved with sports like I played rugby for [the PWI]. So I was really involved and connected and tied to [the PWI] so that helped me stay.”

Brandon White talked about race and sports at the PWI. “...it was a big role because people were inquisitive about the Black guy, the Black cheerleader, so they were wondering, you know, if I was gay or whatever,” he continued, “whatever the stereotypes that you could find about being a Black male and being a Black male cheerleader. I think it opened up doors of people wanting to know me and see what that was about...”

Participants talked about running track in college. Monica Iverson confessed, “I ran track for a second that was an interesting experience. I got to see the difficulties that student athletes have in maintaining their sport, their academics and trying to be involved on campus.”

Miriam Belmont added, “Being on the track team for that brief moment was fun.”

Shawn Griggs talked about [the PWI]’s athletic program and his decision to attend college. He said,

So being a college athlete, that of course, had an impact but for me the big deal was I could go play a sport anywhere in the country...I was trying to look for support systems that would help me be the best that I could be while I was there. So I looked at a lot of different institutions and, to me, [the PWI] really showed that they had a support system in place not just for athletes but for young men and also for young people of color...when I went to [the PWI] they didn’t talk about just athletics; and, they lead the nation in

Academic All-Americans. But they had all these different things; and, they said we're going to make sure that you get exposed and you grow beyond sports...

Participants mentioned their love of the game. Maurice Franklin commented, "From a social standpoint, I enjoyed being around the football. I'm a big college football fan. Being right in that was fun."

Miriam Belmont said she enjoyed, "watching my cousin play basketball and being able to talk crap about the football team. Going to those meetings [Big 12 Conference] and saying, 'what happen? We beat the crap out of y'all.'"

The participants spoke about how sports taught them discipline, introduced them to college life, provided an avenue for them to make friends, and united them with their school mates. In the next section, participants described the impact participation in a sorority or fraternity had on their lives.

Greek Life

Greek life was mentioned 35 times by 12 out of 37 participants. The participants from the PWI spoke solely about participation in traditionally African-American sororities and fraternities associated with the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). At the HBCU, the participants talked about NPHC organizations and music organizations.

The HBCU participants described their experiences with Greek life. Rashad Patton's fraternity had a profound impression on him. "It wasn't until I met members of my fraternity that I was able to be around positive male role model figures that it occurred to me that people actually graduate and graduate with good GPAs. So," he admitted, "my primary reason for staying in school was brothas from my fraternity which I would say were big motivating reasons

personally and socially because seeing other Black men doing well was definitely a motivating factor.”

Reynaldo Livingstone talked about how his fraternity intake process taught him time management. He said,

And the second one [challenge] was pledging Omega Psi Fraternity, Inc. And you know, being able to be online taking a full load eighteen hours and work a full time job forty hours a week. It was a juggle. It was decision I made because I wanted to do what I wanted to do. And I wanted to see the challenge to the end and become a member of the greatest fraternity, and after I crossed, I didn't fail one class, I didn't lose my job.

The HBCU women talked about the joys of sisterhood. Gianna Miller stated, “When I became a member of Sigma Alpha Iota Music Fraternity, when I became a member of that, they were just like sisters. So that was another positive experience.”

Alisha Thompson said, “And my sorority sisters and just being with a bunch of women...oh that was an experience.”

Tia Summers listed her participation in positive experiences. “The second one was I guess pledging being in a sorority was a lot of fun.”

Olivia Grayson’s sorority sisters are a motivation to her. “And joining my sorority, I’m a Sigma Gamma Rho. Our principles are founded on education; and in talking to my sorority sisters, they all wanted to get their masters.”

Scott Blackwell discussed his experience in terms of motivation to stay in school. “So when I joined my fraternity, I actually saw men who were excelling and getting graduate degrees and actually doing big things.” He said, “Two of the professors here at the university really

persuaded me to join the fraternity. Persuaded me, not like recruit, but seeing what they do and how they operated it basically solidified it for me.” It was important for him to clarify this statement because African-American Greek organizations do not recruit members in the same way the traditional fraternities and sororities do.

Kim Marshall said, “What also helped me stay in college and finish was I actually got involved. I actually joined a Greek letter organization as a freshman.”

Anton Jackson’s Greek experience helped him become a leader. He remarked, “Naturally I am an introvert, but just being involved helped me see another side of me. Being involved on campus was a good experience. I joined a fraternity. In order to do it, I had to go to another city; but, it allowed me to bring a different leadership to the PWI. That leadership led to other young men, including my roommate, joining the fraternity and that was a great experience.”

Brandon White was a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Brandon stated, “The importance of Greek Life. For me that was the cherry on top – that was the kicker for me. Once I joined my fraternity, as good as a time that I had, it opened up a whole different world to me and made me feel really secure in who I was and where I wanted to go. You know, to find a bunch of like-minded men who were moving forward in the way that I wanted to move forward.”

Miriam Belmont was a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. She said, “When I pledged, I was the only undergraduate AKA on the campus. The other AKAs were teachers, track coaches, administrators...so that kept me sane.” She added, “Not only was I the only one, I

got voted to be the president right after we crossed. It was like are you serious? I'm the only AKA in [my city].”

Maurice Franklin discussed his Greek life story in terms of race. He said,

I pledged Kappa Alpha Psi as a second semester freshmen. So from very early on in my undergraduate career, I was in the Greek system. I looked at my experience as a Greek compared to the White fraternities and sororities. They all had houses up and down the streets. They had a more formal approach to the lifestyle. And so I felt sometime when our membership numbers were lower or we were asked to do something, I felt that we were less than, because we didn't have the means, the money simply because we didn't have the numbers. The reason the Greek system reminds me of what that was like is because that was so much of my involvement. Because it was always in front of me what the other Greeks were doing. So that contributed to my identity as a student.

Participants from both campuses enjoyed the camaraderie of participating in a sorority or fraternity; but, membership taught tough lessons sometimes as well. In the next section participants' commented about living on campus.

Dorm Life

Dorm life was mentioned 24 times by 10 out of 37 participants during the interviews. Twenty-two of those comments came from PWI participants. Gianna Miller was one of two people from the HBCU who mentioned living in the dormitory. She said, “And actually just experiencing people. Like when I was a freshman and we lived in the freshmen dorm and all of that.” She said excitedly, “Then being able to keep my grades up enough to be able to move into

Wayt Hall, the co-ed dorm, it was just truly an awesome experience. My entire college experience was great."

Anthony Smalls said, "My first year at [the HBCU] as a freshman, I stayed in the dorm and I had a White roommate. He was an upper classman."

Brandon White really enjoyed his experience. He said, "I lived in the dorms that were open year around. So I stayed with a lot of foreign kids my freshman and sophomore year, people that weren't from here. So it was just amazing." He chuckled, "My wife and I, we would go out and this guy from Afghanistan would walk up to me and start talking to me; and, I would say that's Al from my freshman year."

Shanice Alexander spoke of the dorms as a resource. She said, "I think being in the dorms was a good resource because you are close to campus and you feel that connectedness. It's not like you have to leave and go home you feel disjointed. Plus, you don't have to worry about transportation."

Maurice Franklin enjoyed his dorm experience because of his fraternity brothers. He stated, "We had a ball because we all lived together. We lived on the same floor. We almost made the fourth floor the Kappa Alpha Psi floor. And it was fun, it was definitely a lot of fun."

Three participants were Residence Hall Assistants. Erica Johnson said, "So I think a lot of the Residence Life stuff was a positive experience and having my fellow RAs and friendships that I made. Some of my really good friends are girls we all lived on campus together."

Monica Iverson said, "Another thing I did to help myself out was that I was an RA. So that helped pay for school but it also gave me time to meet good people," she continued, "make some new friendships that I probably wouldn't have met otherwise, get introduced to

programming and how to reach a wide student population from various backgrounds and how to bring them together for common cause.”

Ashley Jacobs, who also worked, in the residence hall stated,

One thing that helped me stay I became an RA. I was an RA in Beaver and Jolly. So being there and getting my room and board paid was definitely a big help financially to keep up with tuition and everything like that. To meet new people on campus, getting to know folk, being an RA was a real resource. When you said you were an RA, people think you are responsible. It was like okay, okay, I'm making connections here.

Imani Shepard was not an RA but did work in the dorms. She expressed, “I worked as a summer conference assistance in the dorms that was a really good experience too. That gave me a different insight as a student into housing and different organizations that come on campus in the summer time. So that was fun.”

Miriam Belmont was the outlier in this section. Her experience with dorm life was not a good one. She remarked,

I absolutely hated it there. I will never forget the day we moved into the dorms because it was my sister's birthday. We went and got all of this stuff. The entire floor was White and there were two little Black girls: me and my roommate. She happened to be my best friend. We had a lot of stuff and nobody offered to help us with anything. Black guys all over the floor, they were helping the other girls. And we were like okay. Interesting. We are just going to go on and get this stuff in here so we can go on back home for my sister's celebration. So we thought that was a little bit odd, but were hopeful it would get better. It got progressively worse.

Living in the dormitory was another way for participants to be involved in campus life. In every instance, except one this proved to be another way to meet people on campus.

The next sub-theme includes participants' reports of how being around Black people impacted their campus activities.

Black People

When the participants talked about involvement, they included people who looked like them—Black people. The participants stated, they sought out activities to be involved in because it gave them opportunities to be around other African-American people. Erica Johnson and Kenton Deshone discussed seeing faculty/staff who looked like them. Erica said, “There was an African-American advisor in Teachers College. I think that was another thing, seeing someone who looked like me in Teachers College was nice. Even though he was a male, it was nice to see someone brown.”

Kenton said,

I think there was, more so then than now, there was a very small, but nice network of young but up and coming Black people on this campus. Whether it was faculty or staff. They had a close network; and, they took a keen interest in student leaders on the campus and that type of thing. So I got to interact with them a lot...there was just a number of people here who really made a positive impact on my life.

The following participants talked about being around their ‘brown’ peers. Shawn Griggs said, “Everybody at college seemed like they wanted to be something, whether they did it or not. You know, we’re all sitting around the table and everybody had a dream, everybody had a passion.”

Maurice Franklin mentioned, “I was accepted and participated in INROADS. So again, I was with my peers, other students of color who were thought to be somewhat exceptional students via their grades and aspirations.”

Ashley Jacobs said, “ I can remember going on trips to the Big 12 Student Government Conference which was eye-opening to me again because it was students who looked like me in business suits.”

The participants from the PWI described activities they participated in that allowed them to be around Black people, people who looked like them.

In this chapter, participants described ways they were involved on campus and how integral being involved was to their college experiences. Being around people who looked like them was important on both campuses. Being able to meet people from different backgrounds and cultures broadened their horizons. Dorm life, sports, and Greek life provided avenues for the participants to meet people on campus. On the predominantly White campus, participants mentioned feeling isolated in classroom settings and on campus in general.

Table 15

Involvement Summary

- Participants sought opportunities to be around other African-American people.
- Participation in Greek life provided participants with role models and helped them create friendship bonds.
- Participation in on campus activities kept the participants engaged and exposed them to new people and cultures.

Chapter Ten

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons that African-American alumni from a historically Black university (HBCU) and a predominantly White university (PWI) chose to attend, remain in, and graduate from college. The themes that emerged from the study include challenges, support, race, personal knowledge, and involvement.

The study contained four research questions. The following are responses to the research questions based on the findings. The first question was, what led African Americans to attend college? African Americans decided to attend college because (a) they received a scholarship; (b) they wanted a better life for themselves/their career of choice required a degree; (c) They wanted to be a role a model for their siblings and family members; and (d) They understood college to be the natural progression from high school. The findings of the study corroborate the research of Perna and Titus (2005); St. John, Paulsen, and Carter (2005); and Leach and Williams (2007).

The second question was, what led African Americans to remain in college? The participants in the study stayed in college when they were engaged in campus activities, had a good support system, and had meaningful relationships with faculty and staff on campus. Participants stated that peer and faculty/staff relationships, as well as campus involvement, were important to academic success. The importance of funding for college was highlighted by the participants. The findings align with literature from Guiffrida (2003); Flowers (2004); Herndon and Hirt (2004); Strayhorn (2008); and Smith and Fleming (2008).

The third research question was, what led African Americans to graduate from college? The findings indicated that a strong support system of peers, faculty/staff, and family as well as access to resources such as people, funding, and services were important. Additionally, participants' had to modify their definition of success as life changes occurred. The findings support previous literature by Leach and Williams (2007); Guiffrida (2003); Harper, Karini, Bridges, and Hayek (2004); Flowers (2004); Herndon and Hirt (2004); Strayhorn (2008); Smith and Fleming (2008); and Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor and Lewis-Cole (2006).

The final research question was how was race described by the participants? Participants said that race was an underlying factor in everything: the activities they were involved in, the friends they made, and their classroom experiences. Participants from the HBCU stated that there was a freedom to simply enjoy college and learn. There were no underlying tensions or stereotypes to debunk. This finding is supported by literature from Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire and Green (2008). Participants from the HBCU said that they took pride in their school and were encouraged to be great through their college experience. This finding was supported by research by Brown (2008). Participants discussed finding solace in people who looked like them in tough times, but did not share an overall pride in their school which is supported by Strayhorn (2008).

Kim and Conrad (2006) found that the likelihood of graduation for African Americans who attended a historically Black university or a predominantly White institution is similar. The findings from this study indicated that the experiences of African Americans who attend, remain in, and graduate from a historically Black college/university or a predominately White institution are similar. The racial challenges faced by African Americans at the two types of institutions differ.

The study adds to the body of literature available on African American academic success by providing a qualitative study that told the stories of African-American college graduates. The studies included in the literature review were quantitative in nature and used only undergraduate populations. Additionally, the study provides a composite picture of the African-American college students' experience. The studies identified in the literature review discussed specific issues faced by African-American students but did not discuss the total college experience.

Chapter Eleven

Future Research

Conducting this research was eye opening for me in several ways. As I analyzed the data, I was able to reflect on my own undergraduate experience, comparing and contrasting my experience with those of the participants. Based on the findings, I offer areas for future research. The findings showed that participants from the PWI mentioned utilizing student affairs resources as an integral part of their college experience. This was not the case for the participants from the HBCU. Additional research needs to be conducted on the student affairs services offered at HBCUs, and, how they are promoted.

The participants from the HBCU mentioned how the faculty, staff, and the total campus environment instilled in them a pride in their race and their school. However, none of the students at the PWI expressed feelings of pride in their university. A study on how HBCU alumni express pride in their institution would be worthwhile.

Additionally, a comparison study of how the giving patterns of African Americans who attended a predominantly White institution differ from the giving patterns of African Americans who attended a historically Black institution should be conducted.

A longitudinal study of African-American siblings should be conducted to examine the influence of older brothers or sisters on the younger siblings' college experiences.

An examination of the similarities or differences in the college experiences of African-American siblings would add to the information available on African-American students' college experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview #__

School: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the experiences that led to your desire to attend college.
2. Describe the reasons that contributed to your decision to attend to college.
3. Tell me a little about reasons that kept you motivated to remain in college.
4. Describe some of the reasons that contributed to your success in college.
5. Who were the people who positively influenced you?
6. What are some of the positive experiences you had in college?
7. Can you tell me a little bit about the resources that helped you stay in college?
8. What role did race play in your experience in college?
9. What major challenge did you overcome while in college?
10. Is there anything that I have not mentioned that you would like to share?