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Education from the "Bottom" Up: Black Women Navigating the Community College Transfer Experience

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EDUCATION FROM THE "BOTTOM" UP: BLACK WOMEN NAVIGATING THE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER EXPERIENCE

by

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B.A., Central Washington University, 2007
M.S. Ed., Southern Illinois University, 2010

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctorate of Philosophy in Educational Administration
with a Concentration in Higher Education

Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education
in the Graduate School
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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in the field of Educational Administration

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

KRISTIN BRIANNE DADE, for the Doctor of Philosophy in EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION, presented on OCTOBER 28, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: EDUCATION FROM THE "BOTTOM" UP: BLACK WOMEN NAVIGATING THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER EXPERIENCE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Saran Donahoo

This study looks at the experiences of 11 Black women as they transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions. This study employs Black Feminist Thought to help analyze the experiences of Black women who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions. This framework is particularly applicable to this study because Black Feminist Thought recognizes the varied experiences that women encounter based on their intersecting identities (such as race and gender). Although Black women share some common racial and gender experiences, Black Feminist Thought acknowledges the fact that each woman ultimately has her own narrative, which influences how she perceives and negotiates her way through life. Utilizing the narratives of Black women will allow us to develop an authentic perspective of the lives of marginalized individuals.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful, intelligent, independent and strong-willed

daughter, Journey who has shown me the importance of seeing a project through to the end.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not exist without the help of the following individuals:

Dr. Saran Donahoo, my friend, mentor, committee chair, advisor and confidant. Saran put up with me calling all hours of the day/night via multiple modes of communication, showing up unannounced at her house or office. Saran embodies all of the qualities of an advisor that I to strive to become. Saran pushed me forward even when I wanted to quit.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have lived in the shadows of four-year institutions. Indeed, popular media depictions of community colleges frequently cast them as easy institutions that accept anyone without offering any serious academics (Bourke, Major, & Harris, 2009). However, there is more to community colleges than just college preparatory courses and/or technical training. For some individuals, community colleges serve as pathways to a four-year institution. For example, in his 2012 State of the Union address, U.S. President Barack Obama (2012) mentioned that community colleges would serve as key facilities in the nation's economic and educational future. In his address, President Obama stated, "Now you need to give more community colleges the resources they need to become community career centers – places that teach people skills that local businesses are looking for right now, from data management to high-tech manufacturing" (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2012, para. 3). While job preparation remains an important feature of two-year institutions, these institutions contribute more to the higher education landscape.

Notably, community colleges are the gateway for many minority students seeking to transfer to a four-year institution (AACC, 2008). According to the AACC (2008), community college enrollments consist of 48% female students and 13% African Americans students. As determined by Melguizo and Dowd (2006), low-income community college students who transfer complete bachelor's degrees at higher rates than low-income students who begin their postsecondary enrollment at four-year institutions. While not all African American women fall into this category, women account for 59.4% of all low-income college students of which 52.6% are African American (Center for Women Policy Studies, 2004).

Black women make up a large portion of the community college population, yet they represent a disproportionately low number of transfer students. While many of these women may enter the community college with a desire to go on to earn a four-year degree, they are much less likely to do so. Most of these women come from a lower socioeconomic class and have weak academic preparation, which complicate the transfer process (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Problem Statement

While community colleges have helped to make higher education more accessible especially for female and racial minority students, members of these populations are still less likely to matriculate into four-year institutions or earn bachelor's degrees (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Cohen and Brawer (2008) combine the numbers of African American male and female community college participants so it is difficult to distinguish between the figures. Overall, the numbers state that minorities who attend community college are less likely to transfer to a university because of "lower academic ability and aspirations and are from a lower socioeconomic class" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 57). Expanding research could help institutions and professionals devise ways of promoting community college transfer especially for female and racial minority students.

According to a study conducted by Gándara, Alvarado, Driscoll, and Orfield (2012) on the University of California (UC) institutions, African Americans chose not to transfer to a UC because they did not feel welcome at the institution. The researchers also found that "the UCs were working hard to motivate, inform, and prepare students to transfer from a community college to selective tier I research institutions…these efforts were likely only received by students who were already on the fast track to transfer" (Gándara et al., 2012, p. 97). When

scholars combine the experiences of Black males and females, it negates the individual lived experiences of my specific population. As scholars, we should be interested in learning about the individual experiences of Black women because they make up a large portion of the community college population. Scholars such as Delgado Bernal (2002) posit that "although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings" (p. 106). By focusing on the narratives of Black women, it is my hope that my research will both illuminate and value these women and their knowledge regarding the college transfer process.

When I speak of transfer experiences, I am referring to the campus resources, if any were used in aiding in the move from one institution to another. In addition, which specific individuals hindered or helped in the transition process of Black women. For example, did they have academic advisors that shared pertinent information about the necessary courses they needed to take in order to successfully complete their associates? If not, did they themselves utilize the necessary college catalogues to ensure they were completing all of the prerequisite courses? Moreover, did their families play a role in their success? Ultimately, what happened both positive and negative that allowed these women to successfully complete their associate degree and move onto their four-year institution?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of Black women who have transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. Based on the enrollment data presented by CWPS (2004), the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, and the Civil Rights Project (Gándara, et al., 2012; Melguizo & Dowd, 2006), Black women who attend community college

enrollment experience low four-year transfer rates. While transferring may not be an educational goal for all of these women, learning more about the experiences of Black women transfer students can help to improve the process for those women and other students who desire to do so.

As such, it is important to learn more about the factors and experiences that allow some women to successfully matriculate from community college to a four-year institution even as so many others do not. I believe that gathering individual stories from members of this population will provide insights into the information, services, and issues that make four-year transfers achievable for Black women.

Research Questions

1. How do the intersections of race and gender influence the transfer experience of Black women?

2. What institutional services, opportunities, and supports do these women utilize during their transfer experience?

Brief Description of Research Design

Historically, the snippets of information that pertain to Black women in higher education come from individuals who do not identify as a member of this population (Dyson, 1996; Horowitz, 1984; McAdam, 1982; West, 1994). For example, "As a student doing research in the United States, I was amazed by the small amount of information on Black South African women, and shocked that only a minuscule amount was actually written by Black women themselves" (Collins, 2009, p. 5). In addition, the information presented about Black women usually appears as an aside with the trials and tribulations of Black men or White women. As Collins (2009) notes, focusing on Black women as an aside to others overlooks and devalues the unique experiences of Black women as influenced by both race and gender.

Hearing the voices of Black women could lead to a plethora of new information about their experiences within the realm of higher education. I am using the term *Black* to encompass the identities of my participants because blackness is a politically laden term historically rooted in negative stereotypes (Harris-Perry, 2011). Viewing blackness under the guise of a negative stereotype causes individuals to look past them as relevant. If others do not view the term *blackness* as relevant, will people ever really consider the experiences of those that identify as Black? In an effort to reclaim blackness as a positive image, I am "talking back" (hooks, 1989) to the dominant society. By "talking back" (hooks, 1989), my aim is for my participants to "*stand up* and *be heard*" [emphasis original] (Jarmon, 2003, p. xiii).

This study utilizes qualitative methods to learn more about the transfer experiences of Black women as they make their way from the community college to a four-year institution. This study functions as a loosely structured case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002) focusing on the various factors that influence one common academic experience for all of the study participants - transferring from a community college to pursue a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. This is a qualitative study because it is focusing on learning about the individual experiences and resources that assisted these students in the transfer process. Indeed, qualitative methods are highly applicable to this study since this approach will allow me to examine and interpret the experiences identified by each individual participant without erroneously presuming that all of these women endure the same process simply because they share a common race, gender, and academic background.

Black feminist thinkers urge women of color to continue to speak for themselves even when at times we fail to receive recognition (Collins, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1989).

The lack of voice and recognition that plague Black women is why I chose to write about Black women in community college.

Significance of Study

My study is significant for two reasons. First, examining the transfer process provides an opportunity to learn more about what Black female community college students need to successfully transition to a four-year institution. Second, focusing on women of the African Diaspora allows me to concentrate specifically on their experiences as a population that remains significantly underrepresented among community college transfer students. Supporting the findings presented by Melguizo and Dowd (2006), Black women initiated trends of academic success during their enrollment at the community college which they carried with them to the next level as they worked to complete four-year degrees. Focusing on the experiences of these successful Black female transfer students will help to improve the transfer process for future students.

Definitions

Various terms will appear throughout the study to both identify and understand the transfer experiences of Black women. These terms include: *Black*, *African Diaspora*, *community college*, *two-year colleges*, *four-year institution*, *transfer, intersectionality and G.R.I.T.*

Black

As Audre Lorde states (1984), "Black people are not some standardly digestible quantity" (p. 136). Accordingly, I understand Black as "varied and diverse in their particular natures" (Lorde, 1984, p. 136) and that is why I am using this term as a fluid concept that will encompass all of my participants. I define Black as any woman belonging to the African Diaspora, which is "composed of 'people of African origin living outside of the continent irrespective of their

citizenship and nationality'" (Experience Africa, 2014, para. 5). The use of these terms along with many of the other "racial" definitions helps me to remain vigilant in my effort to be inclusive within my study. I want to make sure that I am referencing all of my participants in the way they would refer to themselves. I by no means want my study to further silence the voices of this population.

Community College

I will use the terms *community college* and *two-year college* to describe the introductory/welcoming phase of the higher education system. Cohen and Brawer (2008) define "Community college as any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree. That definition includes the comprehensive two-year college as well as many technical institutes, both public and private" (p. 5). Common features of these institutions include open enrollment for all students, associate degree, General Educational Development (GED), or certificate. According to Random House Dictionary (2016), an associate degree is "a degree granted especially by junior colleges after completion of two years of study" (para. 1). The two years of study often encompasses the prerequisite courses of a four-year degree. If a student wanted to transfer to a four-year institution, she/he will essentially complete freshman and sophomore years by obtaining an associate degree.

A GED, or Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) in New York, is the new high school equivalency assessment (New York State Education Department, 2015). High school students or people that have not completed their secondary education can take the TASC and upon successful completion, will possess proof of a high school education. Students interested in pursuing an associate or four-year degree(s) must complete some form of secondary education, be it a high school diploma or TASC.

A certificate is a program that offers students the opportunity to take courses towards specializing in a certain field (e.g. Phlebotomy).

I will also use the term four-year institution to refer to a university and this definition describes a place where students go to obtain a bachelor's degree. My participants will have previously attended a community college and are now enrolled in their first year at a four-year institution. Some community colleges now offer four-year degrees (Koseff, 2014); however, I am focusing exclusively on women who transferred to complete a four-year degree since that is the most common option open to this population. My definition of *transfer* stems from the concept of how a student progresses and/or moves from one institution of higher education to another. This process involves receiving a degree from a community college or a two-year college and moving onto a four-year institution.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), brings awareness to the multiple identities of Black women and how both their gender and race need to be considered in antiracist and sexist discourse.

G.R.I.T. = Genuine Resolve with Intellect and Tenacity

Duckworth (2016) defined the term grit as "a combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special" (p. 15).

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Limitations and Delimitations

</div>

Focusing on rendering the voices of Black women who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions into audible conversations about higher education, I used face-to-face interviews as my primary data collection method. Although this approach centralized the population in my study and the narratives that they provided, it also prevented me from gathering

generalizable information about this population. Instead, this approach enabled me to personalize and localize the experiences of these women.

Their self-reported nature of the data is another limitation that will affect this study. The information that I obtained regarding the backgrounds and academic preparation of these women will come from the participants themselves as they recall and reflect on their college experiences. While authentic, this information will provide me with a skewed view of the transfer circumstances of these students that may or may not account for the institutional mechanisms or support opportunities.

Delimitations

Delimitations for this study include my choice of geographical area. I only recruited participants who live in the state of New York. I selected this geographic area due to personal connections that I have with higher education professionals, thus providing me with opportunities to recruit a convenience sample (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) that fits within the characteristics of my population.

Background characteristics also delimit this study. While these women share common intersections on the basis of race and gender, the population is not homogeneous when it comes to age, marital status, parenting status, socio-economics, academic preparation, college attendance, career plans, or life goals. Combined with race and gender, all of these factors help to influence who these women are, how they navigated through the community college, and their experiences as transfer students.

Positionality

At the outset, I must admit that I am a member of the study population. I am both a proud graduate of a community college as well as a bi-racial Black woman. I attended a

community college after dropping out of a four-year private university. Before attending the four-year university, I was "advised" to attend a community college. I was appalled at this notion and decided to continue onto a four-year university. When I was failing to complete the standard requirements for class, I dropped out. I took a year off school and worked as an administrative assistant for a university. During my tenure as an Administrative Assistant, I realized that I longed to go back to school. My dream was to be the person giving the orders, not the person taking them. I needed to change every aspect of my life, so I left the only life I knew in California, and moved to Washington. I enrolled in local community college, Skagit Valley College, and to this day, I thank that "advisor" for her suggestion. Community college is definitely a place for individuals who are unsure of the direction they should take in life.

My transfer process was not without its challenges. I actually saw three different advisors while a student at my community college. I did not receive the advice that I thought was necessary for me to complete my degree. Neither of my first two advisors were particularly helpful. Both showed up late to all of my appointments and constantly forgot that we had an appointment. Both asked for copies of my program of study, which I spent hours working on with no assistance.

Needless to say, I almost quit. I assumed then I would complete my academic career without outside advisement. It was my desire to study abroad that helped me find the advisor I needed. There was a flyer advertising a study abroad trip to Spain and Portugal, so I attended the information sessions. The professor running the session was Dr. Barbara (Barb) Moburg. Barb was an advisor as well as a professor so I scheduled an advising appointment with her so we could establish a relationship. I provided her with a detailed outline of the classes I planned to take and she gave me the necessary advice to successfully complete these classes. Moreover,

Barb helped me choose a transfer school, write my admissions essay, and plan a party for my graduation.

Once I left Skagit Valley College, I continuously sought out the advice of Barb because she was the one constant throughout my academic career. Even though some of the other advisors-who were geographically closer-they fell short in the attempt to guide or encourage me. I planned my program of study, had Barb check over the classes, and proceeded to complete my bachelors in two years. Going to school my second time around was much more seamless than the first because I had an advisor that actually listened to me and helped me choose the right college preparatory classes rather than registering me for a class that I was not academically prepared to accomplish. Had I known that I needed college preparatory English the first time I attended college, I would have known to check the requirements for an advanced level class rather than assuming that I could handle the workload.

My journey towards completing my bachelor's degree helped inspire me to learn more about how other Black women faired when going through this process. I eventually received the type of assistance that I needed to successfully navigate through the community college and transferred to a university. As such, I would like to learn if, how, and through what means other Black woman accomplished the same goal.

I identify as a Bi-racial Black woman. Growing up in the southwest, I realized how sheltered I was to injustice. I knew that racism existed, but I never experienced it. Perhaps, I was unaware (which is very likely), but I still never experienced racism or prejudice. When I decided to attend graduate school at Southern Illinois University, this is when my whole world came crashing down. This might seem cliché, but this is exactly how I felt whenever I walked into a room and people stared or when people refused to serve me. When I moved to the south, I

knew I was different and I started to feel lost. I wanted to know that I was not alone; I wanted to

know if other people, other Black women, felt the way I did/do. I started searching for ways to

find myself, my true self. It took many years, but I finally found a class that spoke to me entitled

Black Feminist Thought.

Before jumping into Black Feminist Thought, I had explored Renn's (2008) Biracial

Identity Development theory and found that she poses an interesting perspective on the lives of

biracial and multiracial individuals, but I was unable to relate to her theories. I needed

something more; I needed to know how the perceptions of race and gender intersect on my body

and voice. I needed to be moved by theory the way that I was when I first read Patricia Hill

Collins, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, or Gloria Anzuldúa. I am comforted to know that other female

scholars of color know my struggles. I have only taken one course on Black Feminist Thought

and therefore recognize my limitations, but as Rachel Griffin (personal communication, January

29, 2014) said, if I want to know more I have to self-educate by reading narratives of women of

color.

Overview of Study

The remaining chapters delved deeper into my study on the transfer experiences of Black

women. Following this Introduction, Chapter II provided an overview of literature relevant to

my study. This literature included research on the broader population of students who transfer

from community colleges to four-year institutions with close attention to college women,

minority students, and individuals from low-income families.

Next, Chapter III described the methods that I used to recruit participants, collect data,

and analyze the information to learn more about the transfer experiences of Black female college

students. Additionally, this chapter included a discussion of Black Feminist Thought, which I

used in devising my research methods, drafting my interview protocol, and planning my analysis for the narratives provided by my participants.

The remaining chapters presented the data, analyzed their meaning, and discerned related implications that these data offer in easing and improving the matriculation process for Black women. The study concluded with data analysis and participant narratives in order to offer suggestions and policies regarding how future researchers and higher education administrators might apply my results to their work with these and other transferring students in both two-year and four-year institutions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is much…[*that*] black people—must speak about, much that is private that must be

openly shared, if we are to heal our wounds (hurts caused by domination and exploitation

and oppression), if we are to recover and realize ourselves. (hooks, 1989, p. 3)

As a bi-racial Black woman, I was unaware of the "hurts caused by domination and exploitation

and oppression" until I began graduate school. I have realized that I want to share my story with

fellow women of color because when I read some of their stories, I was able to begin the

recovery process. Conversations about our individual or shared experiences moves us in the

direction of healing because without this dialogue others are left to guess, misinterpret or

misconstrue our lived experiences.

Black women are individuals with varied backgrounds and experiences; my study will

bring these experiences together to create a community. This community that will allow Black

women to continue the healing process through their narratives and their own unique voices.

Before delving into the unique voices, I will provide a background on the institutions that these

women attended at one point in their lives: the community college. The areas of literature I

discuss in this chapter concentrate on community colleges. This includes the development and

various uses of these institutions in addition to community college transfers.

Development and Purpose of Community Colleges

The purpose of junior colleges derived from the desire to have a more educated work

force that was able to compete with the demand for skilled laborers (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Junior colleges were a way for students, specifically White male students in the early years, to

complete their freshman and sophomore years of college while still being under the watchful

eyes of their parents (Thelin, 2004). The institutional mission and purpose of junior/community

colleges stemmed from jobs requiring more than a high school diploma, so students returned to school to obtain an associate degree (Thelin, 2004). There was a need for expanding educational opportunities for those students that were not academically prepared to leave high school and jump into a four-year institution (Thelin, 2004).

The 21st century witnessed a new purpose for community colleges. There was an increase in female attendance; an increase in minority student attendance; the President's open endorsement of the notion of community colleges; the encouragement of community colleges to create a sense of community by developing partnerships (AACC, 2016); and a new perspective—instead of being seen as an extension of high school, community colleges are now a way to complete prerequisites and move into junior status at a four-year institution (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges [SBCTC], 2006).

The Founding of Junior Colleges

The history of community colleges goes back to the 1920s where they donned the title junior college. They did not inherit the name "community college" until the 1970s (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Cohen and Brawer (2008) define a community college as "any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (p. 5). Their role as well as their name has changed over the years to include junior colleges, technical institutes, vocational institutions, and/or community colleges. According to Beach (2011), the term "junior college seemed to have been the sole creation of [William Rainey] Harper who used it 'for lack of a better term, to cover the work of the freshman and sophomore years'" (p. 5). As envisioned by Harper, one purpose of the community college was to help students transition into higher education by completing their foundational college academic work in institutions that strongly emulated secondary schools.

According to Cohen and Brawer (2008), the establishment of community colleges came from

the need for workers trained to operate the nation's expanding industries; the lengthened period of adolescence, which mandated custodial care of the young for a longer period of time (*in loco parentis*); and a drive for social equality, which supposedly would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education. (p. 1)

These societal influences were a product of the early twentieth century when there was a high demand for skilled laborers and routine emphasis on improving one's social and economic standing.

Institutional Mission and Purpose

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, four influential university presidents contributed to the notion of junior colleges. William Rainey Harper (University of Chicago 1891-1905) created the first community college, Joliet Junior College. Harper was a bit of a radical during his time. He wanted institutions to offer education to women, so he saw fit to ensure that his institution offered an education to both sexes (Thelin, 2004). He also built a state of the art football stadium, implemented an athletics department, and hired the Yale football coach to train the team (Thelin, 2004). In addition to the ingenuity of Harper came three more presidents with similar views of a new kind of education. Henry Tappan (University of Michigan, 1852-1863), William Mitchell (University of Georgia, 1859-1869), and William Folwell (University of Minnesota, 1869-1884) were presidents of various universities during the mid to late 1800s who wanted the freshman and sophomore years of universities to move to a different type of institution, the junior college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). They proclaimed "universities would not become true research and professional development centers until they

relinquished their lower-division preparatory work" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 7). William Rainey Harper suggested that the United States adopt the European model of teaching students general and vocational studies during their first two years of education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Ultimately, community colleges became buffer institutions for the students and academic programs that did not fit the elite mold of a four-year institution.

While college presidents often expressed elitist reasons for promoting the use of community colleges, the population who used these institutions also came to appreciate their existence. One reason why more people expressed interests in community colleges was the increase in high school attendance (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Throughout the twentieth century, changes in the labor and economic systems in the U.S. made education after high school both attractive and increasingly necessary to obtain employment that paid a living wage (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As the industrial economy of the early 20th century shifted to the knowledge economy of the late 20th century, many students entered community colleges to prepare for jobs and careers that simply would not hire individuals who merely possessed high school credentials (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Related specifically to career preparation, community colleges also offer technical and vocational training. In this way, these institutions support the needs of industry by helping to supply new workers who already possess basic preparation for specific fields and careers (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This has helped community colleges carve out a niche for themselves in the higher education marketplace by offering courses that secondary schools cannot afford and four-year institutions choose not to provide (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Community colleges, on the whole, suffer from a lack of prestige in the higher education realm and society itself. According to Maeroff (2005):

> Community colleges, which 40 percent of first-year undergraduates attend, have open
>
> admission. Yet daily newspapers act as if the nation's more than one thousand
>
> community colleges barely exist, seldom noting their open admissions and low tuition
>
> policies, and barely mentioning their academic programs. (p. 14)

Similarly, Zamani-Gallaher and Bazile (2011) note, in their study on multicultural student

services at community colleges, that "given the common neglect of community colleges, they are

often viewed from a deficit model and frequently stigmatized by misinformed public perceptions

that do not illuminate the true value of this tier of higher education" (p. 155). The negative

images of community colleges that society perpetuates do not seem to have a direct impact on

enrollment for students of color.

　　While often presented as champions of social mobility by helping people move beyond

the socio-economic status of their birth, community colleges do not always promote an upward

trajectory. According to Cohen and Brawer (2008), community colleges actually help "to keep

poor people in their place by diverting them to programs leading to low-pay occupational

positions" (p. 10). If a student is planning on obtaining a degree at a community college, they

must take a placement test (Dutchess Community College, 2014). Unfortunately, students of

color tend to perform poorly on standardized tests so that institutions place them into remedial

Math and English courses (Ford & Moore, 2004). This placement can be discouraging and

pigeon holes students into majoring in programs that will lead to lower paying jobs.

Expanding Educational Opportunity

　　Community colleges serve multiple purposes for multiple people. Community colleges

help to bridge the gap from secondary schools into higher education. Indeed, it was Clark Kerr's

inclusion of community colleges in the California Master Plan that helped to permanently

establish these institutions as key elements in promoting mass access to higher education (Thelin, 2004).

Devised by Clark Kerr, the California Master Plan is a multi-layered educational plan (Thelin, 2004). Essentially, there are three hierarchical tiers of higher education within the plan. The top tier represents the research universities that are responsible for educating only the very elite of students, provide a full range of professional and graduate degrees, and utilize selective admissions procedures to limit access. The second tier includes the state universities that serve a larger portion of the eligible student population, but still have rigorous admission requirements and offer only a few post-baccalaureate degrees. Students that attend state institutions have the greater potential of funneling upward toward research institutions, but are more likely to remain in the state program (Thelin, 2004). And, finally, the bottom tier are the community colleges that have open access for all students, could potentially assist those seeking to attend state institutions, and initially, offered only certificates and associate's (two-year) degrees (Thelin, 2004). As utilized in the California Master Plan, community colleges promote mass access to higher education by making it possible for many people to attend college who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

Community Colleges in the 21st Century

As research demonstrates, there are certain populations of students that benefit from community college, yet never see the inside of a four-year institution. According to the American Association of Community Colleges [AACC] (2008), "community colleges enroll more than 50% of all African-American students and more than two-thirds of all Latino students. 39% are the first in their families to attend college" (p. 4). Individuals that attend community college in the 21st century make up "50% of all the new Registered Nurses, 80% of all first

responders (police officers, fire fighters, paramedics, and EMTs), and play a critical role in the K-12 teacher training pipeline" (AACC, 2008, p. 4). Cohen and Brawer (2008) mention that there are half a million international students needing English language proficiency courses before they can enroll in four-year colleges and universities in the United States. Santa Monica College in California and Houston Community College in Texas enroll the most international students in the nation (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). President Obama's initiative, as outlined below, addresses the public's perceptions about community colleges. The President's initiative is helping change the perceptions about community colleges.

President Obama initiated an $8 billion Community College Career Fund with the goal of "training two million workers from well-paying jobs in high-demand industries" (Lewin, 2012, para. 3). The President's goal was an attempt to bring a nation facing hard economic times together. The White House Summit on Community Colleges (2010) stated:

> Now is the time to build a firmer, stronger foundation for growth that will not only withstand future economic storms, but one that helps us thrive and compete in a global economy. It's time to reform our community colleges so that they provide Americans of all ages a chance to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to compete for the jobs of the future. (p. 1)

I argue that there are more to community colleges than just technical training facilities; however, I can see why this initiative is important to the President as well as for the rest of society. The poor economy is affecting people in many negative ways including, but not limited to, the decrease in the middle class (Clark, 2014), the increased dependence upon public assistance (Holland, 2015), and "job loss…can force families to delay or forgo a college education for their children" (Irons, 2009, para. 2). If this initiative helps increase a student's desire to learn while

at the same time employs a significant number of individuals, this initiative is two-fold.

President Obama stated:

> Join me in a national commitment to train 2 million Americans with skills that will lead
> directly to a job…. Now you need to give more community colleges the resources they
> need to become community career centers – places that teach people skills that local
> businesses are looking for right now, from data management to high-tech manufacturing.
> (AACC, 2012, p. 30)

Community colleges are dynamic institutions of higher education. They have the ability to change and adapt with societal needs. President Obama's initiative expects community colleges to do as they always have throughout the years--remain fluid. There are going to be many enhancements in the upcoming years, but community colleges will continue to flourish and in the end, they will reach the President's goal of five million new graduates. Five million new graduates will lead to an increase in skilled workers.

Community colleges "feature affordable tuition, open admission policies, flexible course schedules, and convenient locations, and they are particularly important for students who are older, working, or need remedial classes" (The White House Summit on Community Colleges, 2010, p. 1). In order to succeed at achieving President Obama's goal, community colleges will need assistance from policy makers and four-year institutions. They also need money to improve their facilities for the growing number of community college students. As Brandon (2009) stated, community colleges will be responsible for:

- Graduating 5 million more students by the year 2020
- "Building partnerships with businesses and the workforce investment system to create career pathways where worker can earn new credentials and promotions step-by-step,

worksite education programs to build basic skills, and curriculum coordinated with internship and job placements" (Brandon, 2009, para. 1).

- "Expand course offerings and offer dual enrollment at high schools and universities, promote the transfer of credit among colleges, and align graduation and entrance requirements of high schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities" (Brandon, 2009, para. 2).

- "Improve remedial and adult education programs, accelerating students' progress and integrating developmental classes into academic and vocational classes" (Brandon, 2009, para. 3).

- "Offer their students more than just a course catalog, through comprehensive, personalized services to help them plan their careers and stay in school" (Brandon, 2009, p. 2)

If all of these suggested additions take place, by the year 2020, "the President's plan will also improve college access and increase completion by supporting programs and activities designed to boost college persistence and increase graduation rates" (The White House Summit on Community Colleges, 2010, p. 2). The increase in graduation rates means more students will transfer to four-year institutions, which in turn increases their cultural capital.

The primary purpose of the community college was to assist high school students in obtaining an associate degree, "provide them with general education an introductory collegiate studies, and send them on to senior institutions for the baccalaureate" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 369). A student that obtained an associate degree "usually qualifies" for junior standing at a university, but Cohen and Brawer (2008) find that there was a discrepancy between the sending institutions (community colleges) and the receiving institution (universities). The discrepancy

stems from the acceptance of credits. Certain credits did not count towards a students' junior status, so these students have to take more courses at the four-year institution before progressing into their major department.

Community College Transfers

State transfers and institutional transfers detail the partnership agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions. These agreements allow students to complete their prerequisites at a community college and move directly into junior status at the four-year institution (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges [SBCTC], 2006). These agreements aid in the smooth transition for many students, but every institution has different requirements as outlined in their partnership agreements. Indeed, institutional partnership agreements are just one of the many factors that influence the transfer process for Black women. The subsection on Black women in college addresses the intersections of race and gender, and family.

State Transfers and Institutional Partnerships

Transfer partnerships are agreements that exist between community colleges and four-year institutions. These agreements can help students save money by taking courses at low cost institutions before transferring these credits to more expensive four-year institutions. Various states and institutions employ multiple versions of partnership agreements to help streamline the transfer process.

Transfer and educational partnerships in New York State vary based on geographic region and institution. Every institution in the state of New York has specific articulation agreements with certain community colleges. These agreements vary based on the two public

university systems – the State Universities of New York (SUNY) and the City Universities of New York (CUNY).

Located in various parts of the state, SUNY campuses tend to establish and maintain partnerships with nearby community colleges. For instance, the State University of New York at New Paltz [SUNY New Paltz] (n.d.) has articulation agreements with "Columbia-Green, Dutchess Community College, Hudson Valley, Nassau, Orange, Rockland, Suffolk, Sullivan and Ulster" (para. 1). Similarly, the State University of New York at Albany [U Albany] (2014) has agreements with "Adirondack Community College, Broome Community College, SUNY Cobleskill, Columbia-Green, Corning, Cyprus, Dutchess, Fulton-Montgomery Herkimer, Hudson, Intercollege, Mohawk Valley, Monroe, Nassau, Onondaga, Orange, Po Leung Kuk, Rockland, Schenectady, Seoul National University of Technology, Suffolk, Sullivan, and Ulster" (para. 1). These articulations agreements help the SUNY campuses to better serve local students by making community college transfer easier for this population.

While the SUNY system has campuses throughout the state, CUNY campuses concentrate on providing public higher education access within New York City. Clustered in the same geographic area, partnership and transfer agreements within the CUNY system vary based on academic offerings. Utilizing an academic approach, Hunter College (2014) has agreements with "Spanish Translation at LaGuardia Community College, Graphic Information Science at BMCC, Urban Studies at Guttman Community College, and New York City College of Technology" (para. 2). However, unlike the SUNY campuses, four-year CUNY campuses do not generally maintain broad transfer and articulation agreements with community colleges. At present, the CUNY system is in the process of making changes to their articulation agreements

that may include the development of broader institutional transfer policies (Hunter College,

2014).

Black Women in College

The transfer partnerships that exist at many community colleges allow individuals to

make a seamless transition from one institution of higher education to another. What happens to

Black women once they reach that next level of higher education? What does not happen?

Black female students, at minimum, experience racism and sexism at the intersections of their

raced and gendered marginalized identities (Collins, 2009).

> Feminist and civil rights thinkers have treated Black women in ways that deny both the
>
> unique compoundedness of their situation and the centrality of their experiences to the
>
> larger classes of women and Blacks. Black women are regarded either as too much like
>
> women or Blacks, and the compounded nature of their experience is absorbed into the
>
> collective experiences of either group. (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 29)

The intersections of race and gender play a role in how Black women experience the world. This

concept stems from interdependent characteristics thus creating systemic oppression (Collins,

2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1983). As soon as the academic community

realizes the importance of combining each identity marker this will have an effect on the specific

educational experiences of individuals within this group and the group as a whole. As a bi-racial

Black woman who embodies intersectionality, who simultaneously and successfully lives in both

groups, I resist when the academic community values one descriptor at the expense of the other.

"Black feminist thought's core themes of work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political

activism rely on paradigms that emphasize the importance of interesting oppressions in shaping

the U.S. matrix of domination" (Collins, 2009, p. 269). Intersectionality, a term coined by

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), brings awareness to the multiple identities of Black women and how both their gender and race need to be considered in antiracist and sexist discourse. Crenshaw (1989) goes on to describe intersectionality within the legal context.

> In race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women. This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination. I suggest further that this focus on otherwise-privileged group members creates a distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140)

When I think about the intersections that make up different individuals, I reflect on the work of Lorde (1983) in "There is No Hierarchy of Oppression," where she argued that all of her identities were equally important and therefore, she did not have a desire to prioritize one above the other. Lorde identified as a "Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two including one boy and a member of an interracial couple" (1984, p. 9). She wanted people of color, women, and lesbians to stop fighting over who is more oppressed. Her ability to self-identify allowed her to speak back to how dominant society labeled her body; if she did it first, then this would allow her to resist the power and domination that they had over her. Lorde's (1984) notion of "no hierarchy of oppression" (p. 1), leads me to examine how being Black and female plays out in educational settings.

With the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, institutions of higher education would think there would be a change within academia. Unfortunately, not much has

changed in the way of racial segregation. If anything, our schools display more segregation now than they were during the 1950s (Orfield & Yun, 1999). The mandated law did nothing but put a bunch of different races in one place at a time; to be more specific, we went from overt racism to covert racism. Overt racism is directed at people of color by White people; it is systemic and used with a specific goal in mind. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) provide a suitable description of covert racism:

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. (p. 50)

Covert racism leaves individuals feeling as though they are not worthy of being recognized or having their voices heard (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The racial climate within higher education institutions has witnessed small changes over the past seventy years; however, the numbers of Black women attending college have steadily increased. These women are fighting against the educational system that seeks to stifle their spirits, and even in spite of this, they are inspiring and stimulating themselves to conquer all that they want to accomplish in life. The shame that stems from not measuring up to the educational standards is an area of concern that has deep historical roots.

Furthermore, as Harris-Perry (2011) states:

> The Jim Crow system forced constant shame on African Americans. In the decades following the end of slavery, white political majorities crafted a social structure to ensure

that African Americans would have little opportunity for social, political, or economic

equality. (p. 53)

Black women work within and against the social, political or economic systems that find them

not measuring up. Racial inequality and gender bias are some of the many issues surrounding

formalized education in the United States. The intersections of race and gender increase the

scrutiny directed at Black women on college campuses.

Black women in formal educational settings are in a constant fight to belong. This notion

of belonging often manifests as working harder to "prove" we deserve to attend institutions of

higher education. Our need to work harder stems from the lack of recognition that we receive in

schools. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995)

Issues of gender bias also figure in inequitable schooling. Females receive less attention

from teachers, are counseled away from or out of advanced mathematics and science

courses, and although they receive better grades than their male counterparts, their grades

do not translate into advantages in college admission and/or the work place. (p. 51)

Women receiving less attention from teachers miss out on opportunities that could help them

attain a higher education. Women that are "counseled away" (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995)

from the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields are more likely not

to pursue an education in these areas. As someone who advises women in the STEM fields, I see

firsthand how women of color fight for a spot within these fields. Moreover, I am also acutely

aware of the lack of support these women are experiencing. Young Black women who strive to

achieve success in male dominated fields like STEM have daily reminders of a system that

perpetuates invisibility.

According to Williams (2001), "the relative absence of Black women scholars on campus…can lead to the erroneous belief that Black women are not qualified to be scholars, professors, administrators, or even doctoral students" (p. 94). The lack of "role models, supportive peer culture, and mentorship" (Crisp, 2010, p. 39) affects the success and retention of U.S. Black women in higher education institutions (Collins, 2001). Crisp (2010) conducted research on the benefits of mentoring for community college students. She found that women receive academic and psychological mentoring that aids in their successful completion of a community college degree. If Black women are unable to find a mentor they can relate to, their ability to achieve their academic goals may suffer.

Mentoring, although important, is not the only factor that Black women need from their institutions to persist and complete a college degree. Opp (2001) found six recruitment and retention strategies for keeping students and faculty of color in community colleges. The six strategies involved enrichment programs, mentoring programs, dual-enrollment programs, school partnerships, corporate partnerships, and other programs geared toward recruitment and retention (Opp, 2001). Related to mentoring, Opp argues that the active recruiting and retaining of faculty of color will staff institutions with personnel that students of color can forge relationships with that can help to retain these students. The need for faculty and staff of color is one area of improvement at colleges and universities.

More often than not, Black women are the only guardians for younger members of their family, which often determines the economic cost as well as the geographic location of their ideal institutions (Niu, 2015). Therefore, community colleges which are in closer proximity and cheaper than four-year institutions allow women to stay closer to home during the first two years of education. This will help not only around the home front, but it will help women find a

networking group at the college that may be able to provide care when they do transfer to a four-year. Reyes (2011) maintains that women of color are usually the first members of their families to attend college but are still responsible for family responsibilities. If a woman is far away from her family and there are no faculty or staff of color at her host institution, she may actually, like many other degree-seeking individuals, at times lose her motivation to continue pursuing an education. Some scholars would argue that women of color lose more than they gain when they select a four-year university away from home (Reyes, 2011; Sims, 2008). This is added weight for women of color as they assess which institution to attend. Black women will gain an education, but not without the emotional and physical cost of having to continually reevaluate their responsibilities to their family members (Niu, 2015).

Family commitment and responsibilities are an integral part of a minority student's consideration of attending college. Covarrubias and Fryberg's (2015) study on ethnic minority first-generation students details the "guilt" students suffer from when and if they decide to pursue a college education. They go on to share that these ethnic minority and first-generation students also experience "family achievement guilt" because they are the first ones in their family to attend college. The authors conclude their article by discussing the programs on college campuses that help bridge the gap between first-generation students and college, but these programs do not "address the negative feelings associated with surpassing the achievements of one's family" (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015, p. 427). Black women that find themselves "surpassing" their family members may experience this need to either stay home or continue with their education.

Upward Mobility

Within the context of community colleges, upward mobility refers to the notion of access and equality (Shaw, Valadez, & Rhoads, 1999). Community colleges are said to provide access to society and equality within said establishment, but some critics argue that this is not the case when students of color are involved (Shaw, Valadez, & Rhoads, 1999). As Black women make their way through the community college, they have multiple factors to consider (e.g. graduation, completion of courses, final exams). In addition, (if they are interested), they have to consider the next step…transferring to a four-year institution. Handel (2007) posits that community colleges, while being the destination for a large population of underrepresented students, still fall short in successfully transferring students. Handel (2007) further argues for the importance of "building a transfer bridge" for two reasons:

> First, the number of high-school graduates whom colleges and universities will need to educate without appreciable greater resources will grow significantly throughout this decade. Second, community colleges disproportionately enroll students from groups that have been underrepresented in higher education and that are poised to grow dramatically in the next two decades. (p. 39)

The underrepresented groups that are attending these community colleges are at a disadvantage in terms of admissions to universities because they are not aware of the ins and outs of the application process (Holland, 2015). As Holland (2015) describes, minority and low-income students are less likely to complete the application process because they do not have access to the resources that will aid in this process. I understand the importance of a transfer bridge among community colleges and four-year institutions.

Black Feminist Thought

I will utilize Black Feminist Thought as the conceptual framework to analyze the data collected from this study. Coined by Patricia Hill Collins (2009) and influenced by numerous other women of color scholars (Cooper, 1892; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1978; hooks, 1981, 1984; Hurston, 1937; Lorde, 1982; Morrison, 1970; Ransby & Matthews, 1993; Smith, 1982; Walker, 1970; Wallace, 1978), Black Feminist Thought describes a way of thinking that emphasizes the perspectives of Black women. This conceptual framework recognizes the intersections, at a minimum, of race and gender in the lives of Black women. As females, Black women share some social limitations with White women, yet their experiences diverge when it comes to issues of race. As people of color, Black women share some common experiences with Black men, but also encounter additional oppression on the basis of gender. Black Feminist Thought does not assume that we all come from the same place just because we have the same gender or skin color (Lorde, 1984).

Black Feminist Thought recognizes the varied experiences that women of color encounter based on their intersecting identities (such as race and gender). Although Black women share some common racial and gender experiences, Black Feminist Thought acknowledges that each woman ultimately has her own narrative, which influences how she perceives and negotiates her way through life. Utilizing the narratives of Black women will allow us to develop an authentic perspective of the lives of marginalized individuals. Likewise, the use of narratives further supports the foundation of Black Feminist Thought by allowing these women to speak for themselves. Echoing Alcoff (1991), the use of narratives supports the idea that "where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says" (p. 6). Only members of this population have the experiential knowledge required to discuss their lived experiences.

One way to discuss lived experiences is through qualitative research. Creswell (2003) finds that qualitative researchers use theory as "an *explanation* for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs, and hypotheses" [emphasis in original] (p. 131). A theory is "a set of well-developed categories (e.g., themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social, psychological, educational, nursing, or other phenomena" (Strauss, & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). Qualitative researchers use theory "to guide their study and raise the questions of gender, class, and race (or some combination) they would like to address" (Creswell, 2003, p. 131), which coincides with my use of my conceptual choice, Black Feminist Thought. A conceptual framework will allow me to describe systems of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). In addition, a conceptual framework describes the conduct and origin of a study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). My study utilizes Black Feminist Thought to examine the college transfer experiences of Black women. Black Feminist Thought provides a theoretical foundation for considering the multiple identities and contextual factors that influence the lives of Black women. As hooks (1984) explains, the intersection of race and gender make it difficult to examine the experiences of Black women in the same vein as those of either White women or Black men. Hooks (1984) states

> As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower that that of any other group. Occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist, and classist oppression. At the same time, we are the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized "other" that we can exploit or oppress….This lived experience may

shape our consciousness in such a way that our world view differs from those who have a

degree of privilege (however relative within the existing system). (p. 16)

As hooks posits, Black women experience their own forms of oppression due to the intersections

of race, gender, and other factors.

Similar to the experiences of Black women, definitions of Black Feminist Thought,

womanism and Black feminism vary. According to Walker (1983), a "womanist was a black

feminist or a feminist of color" (p. xi). Omolade (1994) pointed out that "black feminism is

sometimes referred to as a womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism

and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community's efforts to achieve

equity and liberty" (p. xx). Cleage (1993) defines feminism as "the belief that women are full

human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities –

intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic" (p. 28). In addition, Ogunyemi

(1985) shares that a womanist "will recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual

issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into

her philosophy" (p. 64). As Collins (1996) points out, "while these African American women

physically resemble one another and may even occupy the same space, their words remain

decidedly different" (p. 7). The aforementioned women by no means address all of the potential

definitions of Black Feminist Thought, nor do they encompass all of the possible voices of Black

women. They are but a few voices that add to this discussion. Collins (2009) illustrates her six

tenets of Black Feminist Thought that will help guide my research.

As described by Collins (2009), Black Feminist Thought has six features that help to

outline common experiences that affect Black women. The first feature establishes the need for

Black Feminist Thought in the wider context of popular discourse. The second feature explains

that not all Black women have the same experiences. The third feature identifies the experiential differences of U.S. Black women; women are unique individuals that should have the option to voice their own personal experiences. The fourth tenet outlines the inclusion of Black women as intellectuals. The fifth tenet highlights the need for fluidity and change as a social justice concept. The sixth and final tenet calls for unity amongst all oppressed groups. I will focus on three of the six tenets within my study: the second tenet experiences across the diaspora, the third tenet no singular national experience, and the fourth tenet Black women as intellectuals.

Black Feminist Thought incorporates perspectives championed by scholars and public intellectuals such as Sojourner Truth (Guy-Sheftall, 1986); bell hooks (1981; 1984); Alice Walker (1970); Zora Neale Hurston (1937); Anna Julia Cooper (1892); Toni Morrison (1970); Angela Davis (1978); Michelle Wallace (1978); Barbara Ransby and Tracye Matthews (1993); Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991); Audre Lorde (1982); Barbara Smith (1982); and Patricia Hill Collins (2009). This list is by no means comprehensive, but demonstrates the amount of Black women involved with Black Feminist thinking. According to Collins (2009), Black Feminist Thought:

> aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice by intersecting oppressions. Since Black women cannot be fully empowered unless intersecting oppressions themselves are eliminated, Black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that transcend U.S. Black women's particular needs. (p. 25-26)

As a conceptual framework, Black Feminist Thought seeks inclusion with other social justice efforts by advocating for equality for all humans.

Black Feminist Thought derived from a necessity for the voices of Black women to receive recognition in the larger scheme of things. During the Feminist and Civil Rights Movements, Black women found that they had to choose between standing up for their rights as women or as members of the Black community (hooks, 1981). Black feminist thinkers established the notion of intersectionality (Collins, 2009). Black women are both Black and women simultaneously so it is impossible for them to distinguish between these two characteristics (Lorde, 1983). Having to choose which "cause" benefited them more was a difficult process especially since neither cause was actually considering the rights for Black women (hooks, 1981). Black Feminist Though has provided a means for the rights and needs of Black women to be at the forefront of the discussion (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1981).

Experiences across the Diaspora

"The African diaspora is based upon a globalized notion of blackness-the African diaspora as community and identity" (University of Virginia, n.d., p. 1). Diaspora, for the purposes of my study, situates multiple races and ethnicities under the umbrella identity Black. The second tenet speaks to the idea that all Black women have the same experiences and ideas. African-American women may have experienced common political, social, and economic challenges, but this does not mean "that individual African-American women have all had the same experiences nor that we agree on the significance of our varying experiences" (Collins, 2009, p. 29). Black women experience racism individually, yet also share common narratives related to how race and gender affect their college attendance, success, and transfer process. Black women's experiences are both/and rather than either/or.

This tenet is key to my study of Black women who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions. While these women share common background characteristics related to

race, gender, and community college transfer, the existence of these commonalities does not mean that all of their experiences are same. Gathering narratives from Black women about their transfer experiences will help me to illustrate these differences. Lorde (1984) exclaims, "I HAVE COME to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" [emphasis in original] (p. 40). From my perspective, Black women sharing our experiences, even if we are misunderstood, is better than not speaking at all. If we remain silent, we risk having other people tell our stories.

No Singular National Experience

The third tenet deals with the "connections between U.S. Black women's experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint" (Collins, 2009, p. 33). Standpoint theory refers to Black women having a specific understanding of their oppressive situations (Alexander-Floyd & Simien, 2006; Collins, 2009). Standpoint theory contends that every Black woman is an individual, so the oppressive experiences they have may differ drastically for each woman. While life in the U.S. provides uniting cultural and national contexts, Black women experience these contexts as individuals (Collins, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011). As Collins (2009) posits, "it is equally important to recognize that U.S. Black women also encounter the same challenges (and correspondingly different expressions) as women of African descent within a Black diasporic context" (p. 32). Standpoint theory distinguishes one woman's experience from another. Black women who have transferred from a community college to a four-year institution, may have the same degree aspirations, but their path to obtaining these degrees differs from one woman to another.

Black Women as Intellectuals

The fourth tenet deals with the "essential contributions of African-American women intellectuals" (Collins, 2009, p. 37). African-American intellectuals, once they recognize their "social location" (Collins, 2009, p. 37), their position of power, will be able to utilize their knowledge to help fellow African-American women. Social location refers to intellectual Black women understanding that they have privilege because of their education. Once Black female intellectuals realize that they too have the ability to oppress their fellow sisters, albeit in a different way, they will understand how they need to enact change. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) recognize that

> In schooling, the absolute right to exclude was demonstrated initially by denying blacks access to schooling altogether. Later, it was demonstrated by the creation and maintenance of separate schools. More recently it has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence on vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by resegregation via tracking. (p. 60)

Black women as intellectuals have a desire to pursue a college education in order to achieve and/or obtain personal goals. These goals fluctuate between each individual woman. Some women may seek an associate degree, whereas others strive to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Applying Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought is essential to my study in various ways. First, applying Black Feminist Thought to my study will allow me gather, interpret, and represent the voices of my participants authentically. As Dixson and Rousseau (2005) argue

the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system

… Without authentic voices of people of color it is doubtful that we can say or know

anything useful about education in their communities. (p. 13)

Dixon and Rousseau are reiterating the need for individual voices of color. Similarly, Black Feminist Thought requests the same unique conversation. Rather than search for one true representation of the Black woman transfer experience, Black Feminist Thought serves as a mechanism for identifying and sharing various examples of how Black women experienced the community college transfer process. My study focuses on the individual stories of Black women.

I mentioned six tenets of Black Feminist Thought, but I will focus mainly on Black women as intellectuals, no singular national experience, and experiences across the diaspora. Black Feminist Thought keeps me grounded in my desire to seek knowledge in that it is helping me stay focused on the individual. In my interviews, I asked questions that do not assume that all of my participants have the same experiences. Black Feminist Thought keeps me mindful that to allow for the varied experiences and welcome what information came from these interviews. Black Feminist Thought affected my conclusions by adding to the conversations about Black women to understand that not all experiences are the same. It is my expressed desire that by incorporating more Black female voices into the discussion of Black women's transfer experiences, I aim to be able to provide more information to the masses.

I used Black women as intellectuals to contribute to the scholarly work about Black women in academia. No singular national experience allows me to delve deeper into the diverse educational experiences of Black women. I individualized their experiences rather than inadvertently supporting the assumption that their common race and gender leads them to the

same transfer process. Experiences across the diaspora aids in my ability to contribute to the conversation about coalition building between women of color.

My study is all about the individual experiences of Black women transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. We all have a unique voice that I want to share with the higher education community. These tenets provide a foundation for the reasoning behind my desire to share these unique voices.

Summary

The literature I provided in this chapter dealt with the history, development, missions and purpose of community colleges, the transfer partnership agreements from New York, and the intersections of race and gender as they pertain to Black women in college. The history, development, missions, and purposes of community colleges stem from the desire to educate the masses. Administrators were looking for a way to provide higher education to everyone no matter what their background. They wanted to distinguish between the levels of higher education to bring awareness to the overall structure and rigorous demands of different institutional types. The demands for varying types of educational institutions were never thought of because the vision for higher education was available to all individuals. This was not because of lack of desire to seek a higher education; it was because of access. Women and people of color were excluded from the idea of a higher education because they were viewed as lesser beings. However, if these individuals were to seek a higher education degree, they were relegated to what was deemed a lower echelon institution, the community college.

The community college gained some clout and those in power began to see the benefits of this type of institution. Administrators at four-year institutions realized that there was a use for community colleges, so they established transfer partnership agreements. These agreements

(depending on the state) allow students to begin their education at a community college then transfer into a four-year institution with credits earned towards their bachelor's degree. These agreements address the course requirements for transfer, but they do not address the individual's reasons behind seeking a transfer degree.

Existing literature on the Black female transfer process excludes the personal narratives of Black women and their experiences moving from a two-year institution. Thus this lack of narrative establishes a constant invisibility. I challenge this within my interview because the narratives of these women creates a community. My study explicitly addresses the individual lived experiences of Black women transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions. As the research discussed in this chapter shows, there is a large population of underrepresented students attending colleges and universities, so breaking down the data plus the inclusion of the narratives has the potential to create useful information for higher education institutions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is to explore Black women's perceptions of their transfer experiences from a community college to a four-year institution and understand what resources assisted in their transition. In order to understand who I sampled, I must first describe why I chose to examine Black women. Black Feminist Thought influenced my sample construction and selection in that it helped me situate the experiences of said population within the contexts of race and gender. To conduct my study, I interviewed 11 self-identified Black women about their path from one institution of higher education to another. I originally wanted 10 participants because I thought that 10 voices would be a sufficient number of participants. I knew that time was of the essence with my completing my dissertation, so I was willing to take no less than 10 participants. Ultimately, I ended up with 11 participants which was a surprise. The responses these women provided brought awareness to the challenges, struggles, and successes of Black women maneuvering throughout the transfer process. This chapter includes information about qualitative research and my reasoning behind my use of snowball sampling (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

In this chapter, I will address the specific methods utilized within my study. I will outline the necessary steps that I plan to apply in order to collect and analyze data about Black women who have transferred from a community college to a four-year institution.

The chapter provides a better understanding of the specific population I intend to recruit and study. It also recognizes the importance of employing Black Feminist Thought to speak with the experiences of Black women transferring from community college to a four-year institution. The use of a conceptual framework such as Black Feminist Thought will allow me to create dialogue, which allows Black female students to have a "new-found" voice (which they have

always had). This voice will permeate the walls of the academy in a way because they come

from the women whom live within these walls. As argued by Collins (2001):

> Black women appear to have a voice, and with this new-found voice comes a new series
>
> of concerns…we must be attentive to the seductive absorption of black women's voices
>
> in classrooms of higher education where black women's texts are still much more
>
> welcomed than black women ourselves. (p. 9)

My goal is to share the voices of Black women because "those who have experienced

discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005,

p. 10). Historically, we have not listened. This silencing has had a direct impact on the bodies

of Black women. I want to bring awareness to how our bodies move within the walls of higher

education.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the main categories of qualitative research

include data, procedures, and written and verbal reports. The data that I collected is in the form

of interviews, which aided in my ability to contribute to the conversations of Black women.

Procedures consist of how to analyze and organize the data. Themes emerge from the coded

data. Written and verbal reports consist of "articles in scientific journals, in talks (e.g.,

conferences), or in books" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). Employing qualitative method

allowed me to utilize documents such as observation notes as a way to dig deeper into the

transfer experiences of Black women. This method also allowed me to speak with my

participants in their natural setting (e.g. university campus), which made them more comfortable

and willing to participate in my study. Merriam (2009) discusses how qualitative researchers

exist in the world because they want to understand "the meaning people have constructed, that is,

how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 13).

Qualitative researchers want to understand people and all they have to offer.

Methodological Approach

I used qualitative interviews (Merriam, 2009) to share the stories of Black women as they

transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. The stories of Black women were

an integral part of my study because individual voices matter. I interviewed participants via

telephone or as Creswell (2003) states, "researcher interviews by phone" (p. 186). My

interviews were semi-structured and consisted of 10 open-ended questions with the intention of

eliciting "views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 188).

Black Feminist Thought encourages the importance of individual voices. Oliver (1999)

reaffirms the importance of personal narratives when she conducted research on body image in

adolescent girls. She found that hearing their narratives helped determine what these young girls

viewed as "normal" body image, and the implications behind such a concept.

> These stories show us whose voices are heard, and whose are silenced; whose histories
>
> are valued and whose are devalued. Stories connect us with others, and with our own
>
> histories, through time, place, character, and advice on how we might live our lives.
>
> Stories bring our past together with our present, and offer visions of possible futures.
>
> (Oliver, 1999. p. 223)

The stories that connect us help us realize that we are not alone in our experiences. The Black

women that I interviewed have no singular transfer experience, but they will have stories that

will be shared with future generations of Black women transferring from a community college to

a four-year university.

Structural Approach

Black Feminist Thought allows me to focus on the specific stories (Merriam, 2009) of Black women that successfully transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. I measure success by a student's ability to graduate from their respective community college and move onto their four-year with the intent of graduating. In addition, I believe a student's ability to garner the information necessary to survive in a four-year institution is a measure of success. I analyzed the narratives of Black women for the sake of highlighting the experiences of Black women. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state, "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives. Whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them" (p. 2). The narratives I collected included profiles of each woman (age, race/ethnic, family status, major, time at the community college, year of transfer to four-year, educational and professional goals), and the description of their educational histories.

Procedures and Methods

This portion of my methodology chapter focuses on how I recruited participants, my open-ended protocol questions, data collection, triangulation, and the foundation of my coding procedures. Data collection details how I protected, analyzed, and critiqued the information I obtained from my participant interviews. Participant recruitment outlines how I located and vetted my participants. I interviewed 11 women who transferred from a community college, and are currently attending a four-year institution located in New York. One of my participants started her education at a New York State Community College, but transferred to a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in a different state.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

I enlisted the assistance of the transfer office at a public state university to recruit participants. I contacted the transfer office via email. In the email I sent to the transfer office, I specifically requested the names, email address and phone numbers of women that identified as Black and transferred from a community college. Once I received the list of names, I emailed each woman, informed them about my study and asked if they would be willing to participate. When I received emails back from the participants, I asked them if they transferred from a community college. Many of the women on the list did not transfer or they only attended one semester at the community college. I thanked them for replying, but said they do not meet the criteria of my study. When I told these women that I wanted Black women that graduated from a community college and are now at a four-year university, the women gave me names of friends that met that criteria. I emailed their friends and from the second set of emails, I was able to recruit my interview participants.

In addition, I sought the help of faculty members who currently work at the aforementioned institution, to put me in contact with other academic/resource departments that might be willing to help me with my study. They put me in contact with the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). Once I obtain participant information from these offices, I contacted the women via phone and email to schedule a phone interview. I sent two emails to the women whose names appeared on my lists of potential participants. I only received a response from two women. One woman did not match the requirements for my study so we ceased further communication. However, she knew of a woman that did match my criteria so she put me in contact with her. I reached out to this woman and we made an appointment to speak. After we completed our interview, I asked her if she knew of any other women that

matched my requirements that might be interested in interviewing with me. She did have a woman in mind and shared her contact information with me. I started recruiting my participants via faculty assistance and the transfer office, but I ended up seeking ninety-percent of my participants through snowball sampling. Merriam (2009) states that snowball sampling "involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study. As you interview these key participants you ask each one to refer you to another participant" (p. 79). All of my participants were recruited via snowball sampling, which altered my original research plans, but in a good way nonetheless.

My work demands did not allow me to leave the office without ample notice so all of my interviews were conducted via phone. As an incentive to participate in my study, I offered each woman a $10 Starbucks coffee gift card. My participants and I talked on the phone for 45 minutes. As I mentioned earlier, my work requirements played a large role in my ability to travel far distances without ample notice. My participants were very accommodating and had no problem speaking over the phone rather than traveling to an alternate location. I believe this allowed them to speak more candidly about their experiences. In retrospect, when I think back to the phone interviews, I wish they happened in person because sometimes it was difficult to get the women to open up and if we would have been sitting in front of each other it might have been easier to maneuver through this difficult time.

Although I recruited participants from a four-year institution located in the state of New York, my snowball sampling ultimately revealed one participant from an Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and one student from a private school in New York City.

The reasoning behind the decision to focus on one institution was accessibility. If I needed clarification on any information that a participant gave to me or if I needed to obtain

additional information, I would only have to travel to one institution to obtain the necessary information. This would ensure that I accurately reflected the voices of my participants. I recruited participants that identified as Black women via email and phone calls after I received their contact information from the transfer services department.

Data Collection

I purposefully selected (Creswell, 2003) 11 Black women that transferred from a community college and are now attending a four-year institution.   My interview protocol consisted of the following questions:

1. Tell me about yourself. What do you consider the most important things that help present or explain you to others?)

2. How do you identify racially? Can you think of any pivotal moments when you felt different because you were a woman of color in a higher education setting? How if at all have you felt moments of exclusion?

3. Describe your educational background.

4. What motivated you to pursue a degree in higher education?

5. What was your major? What are your career goals? What do you hope to do once you complete your current degree program?

6. What moment did you feel that you wanted or needed to transfer? How long did you attend your community college?

7. What community college did you attend? Why did you decide on this particular institution?

8. What moment most clearly illustrates and represents your experience transferring from the community college to the four-year institution?

9. Were you a member of any academic assistance program at your community college? What made you decide to join this program? Are you a member or any program now? If you are a member of any programs, how if at all has this program helped you complete your educational goals?

10. Do you have any recommendations for future women of color transferring from a community college to a four-year institution?

I solicited participants who ranged from their first year at their four-year institution until their fourth year. At the conclusion of each interview, I saved the recording on Google Drive that only I have access to in order to protect the confidentiality of my participants. Google Drive is a secure computer database that requires a username and a password. The secure use of this system will further protect the integrity of my files. I hired a transcription company I found through a mutual scholar. I utilized Rev.com, a paid service, to transcribe all of my interviews. After the transcriptions were completed, I checked them for errors and made any necessary changes.

Once I completed my revisions, I sent the transcriptions to my participants, asked follow up questions, and offered them a chance to make any changes to their comments. Seeking the assistance of my participants, also known as member checking (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), allows them to review what I have "written as a check for accuracy and completeness" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). I received answers to my follow up questions from three participants, but no one made any changes to their comments. I saved the original copies of the transcriptions as well as the follow up remarks to Google Drive. As I read through my transcriptions, I made notes about follow up questions.

Coding

After reading through the transcriptions and making notes about follow up questions, I began looking through the data with an intention to find common words or phrases utilized by my participants. According to Saldana (2011), "a code in qualitative data analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 95-96). The words or short phrases that I noticed after reading through the data numerous times were stereotype, see, place, family, determination, and home. I utilized specific words within my transcriptions to form common themes within the data (image, belonging, determination). Each word needed to appear at least three times for me to qualify it as a theme. The themes that emerged were seeing yourself through the eyes of others, belonging, and genuine resolve with intellect and tenacity (GRIT). Belonging required some subcategories because it was a multifaceted concept. My participants had a need to belong within different spaces so the subcategories of needing to be near family, maintaining a cultural home, and finding a place on campus, helped me individualize these needs.

Summary and Next Steps

This chapter provided a description the framework and methods I used to conduct my study of Black women who transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. Building upon Black Feminist Thought, my study will use narratives gathered from face-to-face interviews with members of this population. Recognizing and supporting the individual nature of these experiences, my study will seek to identify common themes as shared by my participants.

Following this methodology chapter, Chapter IV will introduce the women who participate in my study. This information will include profiles describing each woman, her reasons for transferring, her motivations for pursuing higher education, and other information unique to each participant. Building on the foundation that I will establish in Chapter IV, subsequent chapters will present the data provided my participants, describe the themes that I see across the data, and offer some analysis of these themes as they relate to the lives of these women, transfer processes, and the institutional mechanisms that affect these women as students, aspiring professionals, mothers, etc.

CHAPTER IV

DATA AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will introduce the participants and the themes that emerged from the interviews. The information will include profiles describing each woman, her reasons for transferring, and her motivations for pursuing a higher education and other information unique to each participant.

The Women

I interviewed 11 women of color from various educational institutions. Two women are attending a private four-year institution; one is attending a for-profit institution, one is attending a City University of New York (CUNY) institution; one is attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU); and six are attending a State University of New York institution. The women identify as Nigerian, Black, Jamaican, Dominican, African American, Bi-racial (half-black and half-white), Ecuadorian, and Black American. Nine out of 11 participants were members of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

There was no notable difference between the experiences of women that were members of EOP and non-EOP members. The participants focused more on their racial and gender distinctions rather than their economic differences. The student that ended up at an HBCU rather than a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) was the result of my convenience sampling. This was a woman willing and available to participate in my study, therefore I did not pursue these differences. The information obtained from the woman that attended an HBCU differed slightly from the participants that attended a PWI, but not so much that the results skewed my data. This participants experiences, as I mention in later on in this chapter, coincides with the overarching themes of this study. Table 1 provides details about each participant.

Table 1. | *Interview Participants and Characteristics*

Pseudonym	First Generation & EOP	Racial/Ethnic Identity	College Major	Community College	Four-Year University
Abi	Y/Y	Nigerian	Nursing	SUNY	Private Four-Year
Catherine	Y/Y	Black African American	Nursing	SUNY	Private Four-Year
Esmeralda	Y/N	Dominican	Public Health	For-profit	For-Profit Private
Brieanna	Y/Y	African American	Criminal Justice	SUNY	CUNY
Dani	Y/Y	African American	Journalism Mass Communications	SUNY	HBCU
Kendall	Y/Y	Bi-racial Black and White	Liberal Arts	SUNY	SUNY
Kimberly	Y/Y	Dominican	Psychology	SUNY	SUNY
Kishara	Y/Y	African American Jamaican	Philosophy Politics and Law	SUNY	SUNY
Olivia	Y/Y	Ecuadorian	Finance	SUNY	SUNY
Melissa	Y/Y	Dominican	Sociology	SUNY	SUNY
Sade	Y/N	Black American	Art	SUNY	SUNY

Note: Pseudonyms were selected by each participant.

Abi

  Abi identifies a Nigerian woman that is in her senior year at a four-year private

institution. Abi is currently seeking a bachelor's degree in Nursing. She began her community

college experience as an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) student. Abi was a student

that needed some assistance in college in order to succeed, so EOP was there to serve her needs. Abi became interested in the field of nursing because her mother was a nurse. Abi's mother passed away when she was young. She knew that she wanted to become a nurse because she wanted to do something that would make her mother proud. Abi began her prerequisite nursing courses at her community college then once she completed them, she said to herself, "okay, it's time for me to jump in." Unfortunately, Abi had to stay at her community college for an additional semester before she could transfer because the nursing program she wanted to join was full.

Abi is not completely sure what area of nursing she wants to go into. She mentioned becoming a "psych nurse or working with the elderly…like geriatrics and stuff like that," but ultimately, she said that once she begins her clinical exams she will have a better idea of what area of nursing she will be pursuing.

Once Abi transitioned to her current institution, she realized the benefit of being an EOP student.

> You don't know the value of it until you go into a four-year school so you know the impact, like it will help you financially. Apart from there at (community college), the EOP program was kind of like my support system, anytime I need them there, it (EOP) was there for me.

Catherine

Catherine identifies as a Black, African American woman. She attended a community college where she obtained the prerequisite courses to transfer into a nursing program. She is now entering her senior year at a private four-year institution and is working on obtaining a bachelor's degree in Nursing.

Catherine is a first-generation college student that is completing her degree because she wants to make her family proud. She chose to attend her community college for two main reasons: the financial aid package and its proximity to home. The same decisions lead her to choose her private four-year institutions, but with one addition, it was a nursing school.

Esmeralda

Esmeralda identifies as a Dominican woman. She is in her sophomore year at a for-profit private institution and is a first-generation student. She is the eldest child and she said "I have to stay in my line." She was referring to setting a good example for her younger siblings by going to college and completing her degree. Esmeralda received her associate's degree in Medical Assisting and is currently obtaining a bachelor's degree in Public Health. The institution she is currently attending has a program that allows students to obtain an associate's degree then move into a bachelor's program. She never technically left the institution, but her program and experience is still relevant because she is taking a non-traditional track to obtain her degree. Esmeralda was not a member of any educational assistance programs and was working full time to pay for school. Esmeralda ultimately wants to obtain a master's degree in Social Work. She said:

> I like it, because I know a lot of people that work in that field, and most of my professors work in that field, and they told me how good it is. I've always liked to help people, listen to other people's problems, try to help them, someway, somehow.

Brieanna

Brieanna describes herself as an African American woman that is currently in her senior year at a CUNY institution and is majoring in Criminal Justice. She is more interested in majoring in Communication, but since she only has two more semesters before she completes

her degree, she thinks it is smart to finish this degree first. She is considering a minor in Film, but needs to speak with her advisor before she makes that move.

Brieanna was an EOP student at her community college and when she transferred to CUNY she became a SEEK member. SEEK is the "Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge. It is a higher education program at the senior (four year) CUNY colleges" (The City University of New York, 2016, para. 1). These two programs offer the same assistance to students, but EOP receives funding from the state and SEEK receives support from the city of New York. Brieanna reflected on her transfer process when we spoke about the different programs her community college offered compared to her four-year institution.

I actually didn't want to transfer. I knew I had to because my mom… she suggested

going to a different school. At first, I was a little scared. At first, no, I didn't want to

transfer because I was really attached to [the] (community college) and the faculty there.

After Brieanna made the jump, she was comfortable with her decision to leave her community college. Brieanna still has connections at her community college because her dad and cousin work for the institution. These individuals made it a comfortable place to attend yet a difficult place to leave as well.

Dani

Dani identifies as an African American woman that is currently attending an HBCU. She is majoring in Journalism and Mass Communications with a concentration in Public Relations and is entering her senior year. Her ultimate goal is to go into International Marketing and live abroad. Dani originally attended a community college in New York State and was a member of EOP, but wanted to make a change, which has proven to be a great decision for her. Dani's mother passed away during her last year at her community college. Dani stated:

They [family] were all excited for me to go (to an HBCU), but before my mom actually

passed away, my mom didn't want me to go far [away to school] at all. She wanted me

to stay close. I'm sure she would have supported it [going away to school] too had she

known where I was going to go.

Dani decided to pursue her dreams, by leaving her grandmother and younger siblings behind. "I

didn't agree with anyone telling me not to follow where I wanted to be." She decided to stand up

for what she wanted.

Kendall

Kendall identifies as a bi-racial Black and White woman. She mentioned that

"sometimes I will put Black, specifically just because, like on forms, I am a person of color, but

usually most things you can't choose 2 options even though I need to be able to choose 2

options." Kendall was an EOP student at her community college and recently graduated from

her SUNY institution.

When we conducted our interview, she was one week away from graduating with her

bachelor's in Psychology. She hopes to attend graduate school, but is still looking for a specific

school. After Kendall graduated, she moved back home and now plans to find a job so she can

help contribute to the household finances.

Kimberly

Kimberly is a Dominican woman that is entering her junior year at her four-year SUNY

institution. Kimberly is majoring in Psychology and one day hopes to become a high school or

hospital counselor. Kimberly is a first-generation college student so the idea of attending an

institution for higher education was a little daunting for her. A friend told her about the

community college she attended and said it would be a starting point for her. A friend advised her to spend two years at the community college then see if she wants to transfer to a four-year.

Kimberly's cousin told her about EOP and suggested that she apply. Kimberly took her cousin's advice by applying to the college and EOP and she was so excited when she received acceptance into both. EOP helped Kimberly obtain employment at her community college, which lead to EOP becoming "more like a family" since she was away from her immediate family.

Kimberly was a peer mentor and a hard worker while at her community college. She knew she wanted to transfer after graduating, but when she realized that all of her friends/family were leaving sooner than she was, she needed to make a change. Kimberly decided to transfer to the SUNY institution before graduating from her community college, therefore, she had to take two extra classes upon arrival.

Kimberly had some difficulties acclimating to her four-year university because she was used to receiving assistance before having to ask for it. She quickly realized that she needed to find her own resources.

Kishara

Kishara identifies as an African American, Jamaican woman, to be specific. She was an EOP student at her community college. When I spoke with her, she was one week away from graduation. She majored in Philosophy Politics and Law at a SUNY institution and hopes to go to law school at some point in the future. Kishara needs a break from school for a while, but plans to enroll in law school within the next two years. After graduation, she planned to take a trip to London and Jamaica with a former roommate of hers. Kishara, as you will read later,

expressed a serious need to connect with her people, people that physically looked like her (i.e. Black).

Olivia

Olivia identifies as Ecuadorian. She was born in the states, but her parents are from Ecuador. Olivia wanted to go away to school and live in the dorms, but her parents thought she was too young so she took a year off after high school and went to cosmetology school. Olivia then moved away from home and started her educational journey at her community college. Olivia was a member of EOP and found out about the program once she arrived at her community college. Olivia is a rising senior majoring in Finance. Her ultimate goal is to

work in finance. I don't really want to work for a company in their finance department, I want to work for a company that specializes in finance and goes to different firm[s] and check out like, "'what is your budget for this year?'" More analytical stuff. Budget analysis.

Melissa

Melissa identifies as Dominican. She considers herself to be Hispanic. She is attending a SUNY institution and is entering her junior year. She is a majoring in Sociology with a concentration in Human Services. Melissa was an EOP student at her community college and found the program, its staff, and services very beneficial. Even though she is now at a SUNY institution, she is still in contact with her community college EOP counselor. She built a lifelong connection with this individual so whenever Melissa has questions about her academics she reaches out to her community college's EOP counselor.

Melissa's relationship with her EOP counselor has spurred her interest in becoming a counselor or EOP director once she completes her education. She wants "to be able to do the

same for future students" that her EOP counselors did for her. Melissa knew that when she entered her community college, she would one day transfer to her current SUNY institution. She said that attending (SUNY institution) was "always her dream."

Sade

Sade identifies as a Black American artist. She described herself and the steps it took for her to become what she is today.

> I'm an artist. I've always been an artist, ever since I was younger. I was always told, "'oh, you're going to be a starving artist.'" Always this, that, and the third. That changed my outlook on what I wanted to be when I got older. When I got to high school, I took a psychology course, and I really fell in love with it. In that course, I was introduced to art therapy. Ever since high school, I've been on this whole art therapy thing. I go to work with a lot of different populations, which was very helpful in me learning how to deal with the different emotions and the art making process. That was very helpful.

Sade was three days away from graduation when we interviewed. She was majoring in Visual Arts with a minor in Psychology. Sade plans to begin graduate school in the fall and plans to obtain a Masters of Professional Studies and Creative Arts Therapy.

The profiles of the women that participated in my program are just a glimpse into their experiences. Our conversations led us in different ways that allowed for this fluid dialogue to take place.

Themes

Three themes emerged from the data: 1) Seeing yourself through the eyes of others; 2) Belonging with the subcategories of needing to be near family, maintaining a cultural home and

finding a place on campus; and finally 3) G.R.I.T. = Genuine Resolve with Intellect and Tenacity.

Seeing Yourself through the Eyes of Others

The theme seeing yourself through the eyes of others emerged when the participants provided stories about their encounters with different individuals on both their community college and four-year university campuses. These encounters made being a woman of color even more visible because these individuals openly voiced their thoughts. The participants shared these encounters when prompted to answer the interview question [Can you think of any pivotal moments when you felt othered because you were a woman of color in a higher education setting]. It was difficult for the participants to understand the term *othered* so the word was changed to different.

Many of the women responded with a resounding "yes." Olivia reflects on her experience at her community college when someone told her that she did not fit within this notion of what a woman of color should look like.

> One day, I just had my blond hair and I wasn't wearing foundation and I was with my roommate and her group of friends. I remember one guy was like, "'wow, you're really starting to look white these days. Look at your hair, and look at your skin.'" That was like "'wow.'" I didn't even know how to respond to that because I didn't even know what to say, I was just in shock. I was like, "'I'm pale.'" They couldn't believe that that was my real skin color or that I had blond hair. They thought I was really trying to be like my roommate. I was trying to be white. I was trying to be like American.

Olivia is a proud Ecuadorian woman, and thought about her intersecting identities as a woman of color and a woman that is Ecuadorian with roots and parents not native to this country. This experience left her silent. Olivia continues by sharing:

> I remember another incident when I met another one of her friends and I told her I'm Ecuadorian, she's like, "'oh, I went there once. You know, in Mexico.'" I was like, "'no it's not in Mexico. There's a different continent.'" Like little things like that made me aware that we are seen differently or something.

Kimberly was also from another country so her experience was similar to that of Olivia. Kimberly was "scared they (other people) were going to judge" her because English was not her native language. She found that she was silencing herself by not speaking because she did not want to appear different.

Brieanna reflects on having to work harder because she is a woman of color. "I actually do feel like I have to work harder because there's a lot of stereotypes on Black people, as well as being a woman too. I recently got a 3.4, so I'm trying to work hard so I won't fall into that stereotype." The stereotype Brieanna was referring to was one of "people doubting African Americans and their ability to achieve goals." Similar to Brieanna, Catherine found herself performing for the masses in order to display a positive image of people of color.

Catherine wanted to display a positive image during her time on campus. "Of course, I want to display a positive image. I have to be outstanding and not live up to the stereotype that's among my race. I feel like I have to be outstanding in my performance and everything I do." In an effort to dispel any preconceived notions about Black people, Catherine made sure that she projects a positive image of herself.

Sade expressed her need to represent herself in a certain way in order to gain some respect. Sade ensured that she carried herself in a certain manner when dealing with other people. She said, "if I'm out here not being presentable, acting crazy when I'm trying to communicate with people, they're not going to take you seriously." Sade, too, wants to convey a positive image of herself because she does not want people to see her any differently.

Abi's concerns about her image intersect with her coming from a different country. She mentions having to act like other students and having "to try to stand out so that people will notice me." Even though Abi found herself trying to stand out, she also sought the company of people that looked like her. "I try to look for people my color so I don't say anything that's wrong or offensive or they won't say anything to me that will be wrong or I will find very offensive. I try to find someone that's my kind of complexion." Abi sought security in numbers because then she was not alone when she experienced any external encounters. Abi's need to find other people that were her "kind of complexion" was a similar desire among many of the participants. The theme belonging stemmed from this need.

Belonging

When the participants spoke about belonging they were refereeing to joining clubs or organizations as well as their family expectations, and their academic assistance programs, specifically the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

The theme of belonging is multifaceted. It encompasses needing to be near family, maintaining a cultural home, and finding a place on campus. Needing to be near family was a desire of some participants because they knew they needed that familial support to be successful in school. Maintaining a cultural home derives from this notion of the participants being true to

their roots. And finding a place on campus was a craving to be around people that look like you, know where you are coming from, and can sympathize with certain encounters.

Needing to Be Near Family

Catherine's decision on where to attend community college as well as four-year institution was based on proximity to her family. She chose both institutions because they were "really close to home." Catherine wanted to make her parents proud, so she pursued an education close to home, but at the same time, she needed the support of her parents in order to be successful.

Similarly, Sade decided to pass on an opportunity to attend a university right out of high school, so she decided on her community college, which was not only cheaper, but kept her close to her ailing grandmother.

> I wouldn't have been able to spend time with my grandmother. My mom, when my
> grandma passed away, it was really rough on her. I wanted to be kind of close to home
> so I could check in on her if need be.

Sade's connection with her family was more important than attending that prestigious four-year institution right after high school. "Home" and "family" have different contexts for some of the participants. Needing to be near family was an additional need for some of the participants. They wanted to make their families proud so they pursued their educational dreams or they needed their families support in order for them to keep on track. Abi's home was in a different country so her need to belong was more cultural than physical.

Maintaining a Cultural Home

Abi's need for belonging was heightened when she was surrounded by people that were not Nigerian. She states:

Like when you come from one country to another, so you're seeing different people that

you've never met before. The way I would act towards them would be quite different

than the way that I used to act. Trying to mix from my culture and mix with different

cultures makes me kind of feel different.

Abi wanted to find some sort of community in order to not feel alone. Abi reflects on her first

day in class at her four-year institution.

I remember the first day of class, I was the only black, so I was like, "'I don't know how

to talk to these people,'" because they already knew each other. I didn't know anyone, so

I just sat like a brand new person, so I had to look for someone that was darker, kind of

like my complexion. Then I think "'okay, I fit in,'" and we'll understand each

other…we're both minorities, so we'll both understand each other.

Abi's need for being around people that were Nigerian changed when she realized that might not

be an option based on where she was attending school. She found herself settling for people that

physically looked like her. When Abi thinks back on her community college belonging

experience she said "everyone was kind of the same, like I see more of my color. Now [at a

four-year institution] it's like I'm seeing more of not my color." Abi's community college

proved to offer a more diverse population of students, but now that she is at a four-year private

institution the population of students is different. Olivia's experience at her community college

offers a different look into how diversity is not just about the need for people of different racial

backgrounds, but diversity of thought as well. Olivia reflects on her arrival to her community

college:

I went to high school in the city. In the city, literally there's not one persons. There was

maybe two people that were white in the whole school that I can remember. At least

from my grade. I never felt different in high school. Then I went to [community college] and my roommate was white. I had two roommates, actually, they were both white. That really opened my eyes to like, "'wow. There's racism, these different things in the world that are going on.'" I didn't have any Hispanic friends at [community college], so the people that I was around, it really made me feel different. Really different.

Maintaining a cultural home was a theme that derived from the participants' need to be true to themselves. The participants wanted to make sure they never forgot their familiar heritage.

Finding a Place on Campus

The theme finding a place on campus came from a few participants that had this need to be around people that looked like them. They wanted to be around people that could understand what they were going through without having to explain. By seeking out clubs, organizations, and fellow EOP students, the participants were able to find a safe space to be themselves.

Upon arrival to her four-year institution, Kishara needed to find people that looked like her. She was on the hunt for Black people "it's weird, but I was on the hunt to find a place to fit in I guess." She continued by making light of the comment, but then realized that she was needing that connection among other people of color at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI).

I made jokes about it saying, "'I need to find my people,'" and when I found clubs like Black Student Union or the Caribbean student union, I am just like, I found my people. Although I was joking, it is true because mostly if you walk around campus it is just all Asians and you are just like, they sure do really hide the black people.

Kishara found "her people" when she joined the Black student union. "It [Black Student Union] was just a nice and cool place to hang out and feel relaxed and not feel different. It wasn't me being black wasn't an obvious thing because we were all actually black."

Kishara was very appreciative of EOP at her community college. She found herself questioning why she was not more involved with her EOP family at her four-year institution.

I don't know why I hung out I always go to EOP just for the hell of it at (community college). I didn't do that at (four-year institution). I honestly think it's something with four-years, and I don't know what exactly it is. It could be more students, I don't know what it is but there's something about (community college) where it's more chill and relaxed and I just want to come by just for the hell of it.

Kishara belonged to a family within her community college EOP and felt comfortable within that space.

Dani spoke about not having the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at her Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and how "that was pretty sad not having that. It did encourage me to become part of a lot of other clubs, and finding that kind of family feel in different organizations. It was a challenge, but it was beneficial." Finding a place on campus was important to the participants because they had a place where they felt comfortable enough to just be themselves. The participants expressed a loss when they did not have the same assistance programs at their new institutions. Belonging was an essential component for many participants, but ultimately their Genuine Resolve with Intellect and Tenacity (G.R.I.T.) is what kept them going, kept them pushing towards that goal to finish their education, kept them plugging along despite the barriers some of them faced.

G.R.I.T. = Genuine Resolve with Intellect and Tenacity

Genuine Resolve with Intellect and Tenacity (G.R.I.T.) is a new term, but not a new concept. Duckworth (2016) defined the term grit as "a combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special" (p. 15). I found that utilizing the acronym G.R.I.T. is more

powerful because it allowed me to overemphasize each word. I was able to really focus on every stage, through every letter, which ultimately lead to where these women are today. My interview participants are passionate, perseverant and high achieving. They have set goals for themselves that encourage them to push on even when they might face some resistance.

Melissa's experience at her community college was great because of the assistance she received from her advisors. This assistance has motivated her to become an EOP Advisor.

I actually want to work as a EOP advisor and possibly be a EOP Director, in the future. The reason behind me wanting to be an EOP Advisor or Director is because I want to be able to help students just like me who are financially in need. Also, I worked as a peer mentor when I attended (community college) which helped me make decisions for my future. I had such an amazing experience as a peer mentor. I was able to learn from my mentees and I believe that as an advisor it's good to learn from your student. My EOP advisors were so helpful with my educational journey. I want to be able to do the same for future students.

Melissa's G.R.I.T. is fostered by her desire to give back to future EOP students. She needs to achieve her goal of becoming an EOP Advisor so she can help future generations of people that come from a similar background. Brieanna speaks about her motivation for continuing her education. "I don't want to fall behind because some people doubt African Americans, and their ability to achieve goals…even though that's not true." Brieanna's G.R.I.T. comes from resisting this notion of African Americans being lazy. Kendall's G.R.I.T. stems from a childhood dream of becoming an artist.

Kendall knew that she needed to go to college in order to become an author (a profession she has since decided to leave) "I told myself, if you want to do this you have to go to college. I

just had to kind of be stern with myself." She knew that she "didn't really want to just stop at my associate's degree." Kendall did not see herself going to college.

Brieanna found her G.R.I.T. when she realized she was the only African American woman at her high school. She said that she "felt like an outcast in a way, but mainly got over it." Brieanna had "to get over" her feelings because she had to learn to compartmentalize her experiences in order to succeed.

Dani, on the other hand, realized that her G.R.I.T. was more about competing with herself rather than others. She stated, "At an HBCU I feel more in competition with myself as opposed to feeling like I have to compete to get to the top because there's not many people who look like me at the top at PWI."

Dani goes on to say:

> I set more goals for myself. For me, on my campus, it's like excellence all around. That's the standard. I realize that you can't compete with the person beside you. You have to be competing with who you are and what you're going to be good at. Everybody is not really focused on your flaws because that's sounds crazy. Sometimes when you're in upstate New York you can feel out of place because you're African American, but here [HBCU] everybody is focusing on pushing you to do better and challenging yourself. When I got that in my head, I was my only challenge. I just focused on what I can do next to be better than who I am right now.

Kishara's G.R.I.T. came from her determination to complete her degree within four-years. When she reflected on the exact moment that illustrates her transfer experience she said

> graduation only because from going to [community college] day one, I would get here at this point, I didn't know it would be this school but I knew four years from now I would

be walking across another stage at another school and [community college] is just the

first step.

Graduation had a resounding impact on Kishara's transfer experiences, whereas Olivia's

stemmed from her overall experience as an EOP student.

Olivia reflects on how EOP [at her community college] helped her achieve her goals. She states:

I feel like academically, they helped me a lot, but there's more that goes into academics.

A lot of people see a grade or see a GPA and they think that defines a person, and that's

what I used to believe. They [EOP] helped me see that that doesn't define you. I don't

know how to explain it, but your grade doesn't define you because…being an EOP

student, you go through a lot. Financially, it takes a toll on you. Your family, sometimes

your family can't support you so that takes a toll on you and that can take a toll on your

grade. They've [EOP] really helped me stay focused and have tunnel vision to the school

that you want to go to.

Olivia spoke about her community college helping her achieve her goals, but Esmeralda realized

that her motivation to achieve her goals came from a different place.

Esmeralda's determination to continue her education stems from this desire to be more

successful than her mom.

Yeah, because seeing my mom work so hard, and my grandmother, and they not get to

where they want to really go, that actually made me push myself a little bit harder to

become educated, and for the career stuff…Nobody can take an education away from

you!

Esmeralda also had a desire to be more independent and not rely so much on her parents.

I didn't want to depend on my mom and my dad sending me money. I was like "'okay, I'm going to go back home. I'm going to keep going to school, I'm going to get a job'" and that's what I did. I got a job in a clinic as a receptionist, and I was going to school full-time.

Esmeralda found her own job and was able to buy the things she wanted, but her ultimate goal after finishing her education is to leave the city.

I don't want to live all my life where I live now, doing the same thing my mom does. Work and home, work and home. Start a family. Maybe I want to do a little more, and go beyond. Get an education, move out the city, live well, and have a career, a job that I like to do.

Coming from a Hispanic family "we have to work hard for what we want. Other people have it easy, because they come from a wealthy family. They don't have to work as hard as colored people do, maybe." Working hard was motivation for Esmeralda. She knew what she wanted to do with her life and she knew what track she planned to take to achieve her goals.

Catherine's stamina comes from an uncomfortable situation when she entered her classroom. She recalls being the only Black person in her nursing classroom. "It's like ugh. You feel a little, you know. I still do what I have to do and I still try to make a statement." Catherine was troubled by the realization that she was the only Black woman in her classroom, but she was used to this because she was attending another Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Catherine's goal is to become a nurse so she will complete this goal no matter what.

Sade knew that in order to achieve her educational goals she had to have a plan. She said, "I've done everything that I could so that I could make sure I was on the right path to obtaining my degree and license and that." She mentioned that "advisors just lead you in the

right direction, but everything else is up to you." Sade knows that being a woman of color on a

PWI means that you have to put in more work.

Everything is more…you have to put in extra hours, because people are constantly going

to look at you like you're not enough. You have to put in extra hours, you have to study.

When you get called on in the classroom, you want to make sure that you know the

answer. If you don't know the answer you can have a good reason why you don't know

that answer. People will just look at you like, "'well, why don't you know?'" You

probably wouldn't know, either if someone called on you. It's putting in the work,

putting in the extra hours. You don't want to say that you have to prove yourself, but

essentially that's what we're doing out here. You got to put in the time.

Abi also experienced the pressure of being prepared or putting in more work when a

professor calls on her. She stated:

I kind of have to stand out, make sure my professor notices me. I talk more in class, or

stay after class so my professor will know who I am. I am not trying to hide at the back

of everyone that is the same color.

Abi wanted to defy the stereotype that Brieanna spoke about in an earlier quote. She wanted her

professors to know that she was a knowledgeable Nigerian woman. Some of the participants

offered some recommendations for future women of color transferring from a community college

to a four-year institution. Kimberly recommends:

First be themselves, don't try to change who they are just because they're trying to fit in a

group of people. Second of all, if they need help ask questions because you can't rely too

much in one department because you're not going to get nowhere. You have to look

around because this school is big enough to help you and even the students here (current

four-year institution), get involved on campus. That's something that I want to do more, get involved on campus because if you are involved on campus you know the faculty and teachers, you can get really far, find a job, internship and stuff like. To get out of their comfort zone.

Abi suggests:

For women of color, I would basically say, because it doesn't really matter to them whichever school…people are finally being able to blend in with people anywhere they go, their color doesn't matter, you're able to fit in just because you're able to adapt to the culture. But people like me who are kind of afraid, like "'I don't want people to judge me because of this. I don't want people to look at me as the color I am. Look at the black girl surrounded by all these people.'" I would say, look more at the schools that you think you fit in. Visit the school before you actually enter the school. Know the ratio of the blacks, or the women, or go to an all-black school if you think that's where you'll fit in.

Sade's recommendations stem from her specific program experiences.

Yeah. If you're going to be an art major, either really decide whether or not you want to be a BFA, because there is such differences that occur because of the different degree. Yes, we take all the same classes, but because you're not an actual BFA, because your degree won't say that, there is such a difference. The teachers don't spend as much time with you. Just be prepared for that, or you just have to be strong and deal with it like I did. I still got through it and my art is not any less than a BFA's art. They just don't get it because they're not a black student. Don't be afraid to make whatever you want. They're going to constantly tell them to change what they're making or they should have did it

this way, or that. Essentially you're not making art for them, you're making art for yourself and for the people you're trying to reach. The people in your classes may not be the people that you're trying to reach.

Sade continued by offering recommendations for her current four-year institution:

There's not a lot of Black students on this campus. They're working on that, but if you're looking for something with more people who look like you, then you might want to choose a different campus. Yet, there is a great sense of community among the Black community, but if you're looking for something more than just a predominately White school, then you might want to reevaluate that.

Catherine provided some motivational recommendations for women of color. "Don't give up, keep pushing, just do it, just be yourself and make friends and finally, don't limit yourself because you are a woman of color."

Esmeralda said:

Know how far they've come, and how fast it passed, like two years and a half that I've been in school. Most of my friends are colored, so they said, "'okay, if I did this in a year, I'll have a bachelor's in a year and a half. Then I'll continue to my master's,'" so they know the stuff, how…it was maybe a little bit of a struggle, but with that struggle, you get something at the end. Everything you go through takes you to a bigger position in life.

Olivia recommends:

Being a transfer student, just get to know your professors, get to know your EOP family as much as possible. They can guide you if you don't have anyone, it's so difficult to figure it out, like financially, like with classes. At (current institution), it's like, "'you

have to just do it on your own. You don't have a job? Figure it out. You didn't get into

that class? Figure it out.'" We didn't have that connections with them. I think that's the

biggest thing.

Brieanna suggests that future generations "focus on your studies. Don't care what people

think. Talk to your counselors if you are in programs. Have them encourage you. Encourage

yourself. You can do it!

Kendall recommends:

Seek out support. Talk to as many people as you can. Whether they're students or

alumni, advisors, professors, even the president or the deans of programs. Just get a feel

for the college. Definitely take a tour, whether it's with a tour group that has a specific

guide, or walk around the campus for yourself to get a feel, because if you blindly apply

to a school and get accepted and go, you might not like it at all. Definitely seek out all

the different programs that are available.

Dani suggested

Definitely stay true to yourself. Be open minded to all that is around you. Obviously, not

to put yourself in a box. I don't walk around considering myself a woman of color, just

be who you are and expect people to be who they are. Don't be quick to judge anybody

either. I know for a fact that when I first transferred, I just set high goals for myself, and

that works. It really worked because I didn't have any friends when I first got here. I

was really just kind of studying and that. If I would have failed my first year with no

friends, like good god. Just to stay focused. Stay focused and know that you are needed

and have a plan. You have no room to slack off. Find a good church to go to at your

school as well. That's really beneficial.

Kishara offered some recommendations for women of color possibly transferring to her four-year institution. "If you associate more with Haitian more than African you can choose both or one or the other, there's something for you and I think that helps a lot."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

When I began this study, I wanted to hear about the experiences of Black women as they transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. My goal was to provide answers to the following research questions: How do the intersections of race and gender influence the transfer experience of Black women? What institutional services, opportunities, and supports do these women utilize in the transfer experience? I wanted to showcase their individual experiences, but I found something more through my research, their collective need for support.

By utilizing Black Feminist Thought, I went directly to the source (Black women) to obtain the answers to my research questions. One of the tenets of Black Feminist Thought, no singular national experience, calls for hearing and listening to the individual stories of Black women. My participants offered up their life stories to me and wanted nothing in return. Actually, only three out of the 11 participants asked for their proffered Starbucks gift card after the interview.

No singular national experience also calls to our attention that even though these women identified in some way as Black they by no means had the same educational journey, life experiences, and/or oppressive situations. They are all individuals and standpoint theory, a component of no singular national experience, distinguishes one woman's experience from another (Alexander-Floyd & Simien, 2006; Collins, 2009). Some of my participants expressed their racist/oppressive encounters as conversations between friends that identified differently from themselves. Other women felt they had to perform certain ways in class because they did not want to reaffirm the stereotype of Black people as lazy. Collectively, the women that were members of EOP all commented on how beneficial this program was and how it helped them

find a comfortable space to call home. The women that were involved in EOP collectively

shared their appreciation for the program, its support and continuity.

Experiences across the diaspora addresses how my participants racially and ethnically

identify in varying ways, so this tenet brings awareness to their individual experiences. This

tenet allows the reader to conceptualize that even though all of my participants are Black this

does not mean that "African-American women have all had the same experiences nor that we

agree on the significance of our varying experiences" (Collins, 2009, p. 29).   Abi and Catherine

both wanted to find people like them when they entered their nursing classrooms, but their

reasons for seeking out other women of color were for different reasons. Olivia and Kimberly

were born into families that spoke Spanish as their native tongue. The encounters they had about

the heritage affected them differently.

President Obama is about to the leave office; in the eight years that he has been president

he has made some landmark changes for our nation. In his state of the union address he called

for five million new graduates and for community colleges to remain fluid (Brandon, 2009). The

11 women I interviewed benefited greatly by attending a community college because it allowed

them to find a home away from home and a place to embark on their educational journey. They

are all strong determined educated women that will contribute wonderfully to the world around

us. As Black women intellectuals they will give back to their communities, which is a huge

component of Black Feminist Thought.

The resources my participants needed were the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP),

family, friends, and their advisors. The women that spoke about the assistance they received

from their advisors were the same women that were members of the EOP. Their advisors helped

them navigate their transfer process and continued to have an advising relationship with them

today because they were there for them when they were at their most vulnerable. EOP requires that students submit tax information documenting the financial need of students. This is a very vulnerable time because not everyone is comfortable talking about their financial need to a complete stranger. This experience started these individuals on a path of trust and community. My participants did not say this outright, but having been in a similar situation with students, I am well aware how it is affecting them.

Why should anyone care about the experiences of Black women? Because Black women and their narratives have been historically silenced, underrepresented, and diluted. Until graduate school, I did not even know the language to describe that Black women's narrative and/or our representations were absent. This understanding of Black Feminist Thought created an awareness and allowed me to speak with women of color, and to speak back to systemic structures of power. My hope is that the undergraduate women I interviewed and other women of color transitioning from community college to four-year institutions will gain the skills to speak with each other and back to patriarchy. In addition, those that sit in positions of privilege should care about the narratives of Black women because exposure to different narratives and recognizing the value of that difference will create empathy and personal growth. This recognition decreases the possibility of othering individuals who are in opposition of you and therefore, we are less like to commit atrocities against them. Honoring narrative creates humanity.

Since 1965, 38 Black women have served in the United States Congress (History, Art & Archives, 2007). Many single family homes are headed up by Black women (DeGenova, 1997). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.) "in 2011, nearly one-half (45 percent) of Black families were maintained by women heads of household" (para. 3). They go on to mention that

Among mothers with children under the age of 18, Black women were more likely to be

in the labor force. In 2011, 79 percent of Black mothers with children ages 6 to 17

participated in the labor force, as did 71 percent of Black mothers with children under 6

and 68 percent of Black mothers with children under 3. (para. 4)

Black women are contributing to the labor force and the overall well-being of our economy, but

the support they are receiving in higher education is falling short.

Implications

As higher education professionals we are always looking for ways to better serve our

students. The information I presented in this dissertation offers ways to assist students from

perspective of the students themselves. They wanted and needed support programs, like EOP,

clubs, and organizations that offered a safe space for their bodies to be, and they needed their

family. The women I spoke with shared their recommendations for future women of color

transferring from a community college to a four year university. This information is vital

because we are utilizing the source (Black women and their experiences) to establish ways of

support. I knew that when I started my career I wanted to work with students and make policies

with students and this project has given me the opportunity to do so and for that I am forever

grateful.

Recommendations

As I noted in chapter four, the women provided their own recommendations for future

women of color transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. Their

recommendations called for touring campuses before committing, finding organizations where

they fit in, and utilizing the various resources on campus. Many of my participants were

members of the Educational Opportunity Program, so I will first provide a recommendation

based on this qualifying population. (See appendix C for history and foundations of EOP and TRiO programs).

Having worked for the Educational Opportunity Program and witnessing first-hand the benefits and support provided by the directors, counselors, students and the like, I would have to recommend this program be available to students outside of New York. There are similar programs like TRiO that offer services to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but the program is only serving 2,791 projects which equates to 758,352 students (U. S. Department of Education, 2014). I know for a fact that we have many more disadvantaged students within the United States that could benefit greatly from programs such as EOP and TRiO. I am well aware that the students receiving funding thus far are very fortunate, but there are many more that need assistance. If my participants found a home and a safe space to grow academically, emotionally, and socially via EOP, I would have to strongly recommend that we continue to offer programs such as EOP and TRiO.

My second recommendation is for institutions of higher education to offer programs that support blackness and women. EOP and other academic support programs are wonderful, but the academy also needs programs that are not limited to income. Many student groups offer programs like the Black Resource Center, or the Black Student Union, it is time for administrators to take a lesson from these students and universally offer programs such as this to Black women.

I did not actively seek out Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) participants, but my snowball sampling led me to recruit many women that fit into this program. This is a limitation of my study since even though this is a good program, this also shifts the study more to program participants not just the general structure on population. With that being said, EOP students

come with some embedded intersectionality with first-generation and low-income status, therefore, I would also recommend further research on the intersectionalities of race, gender, and class among Black women transferring.

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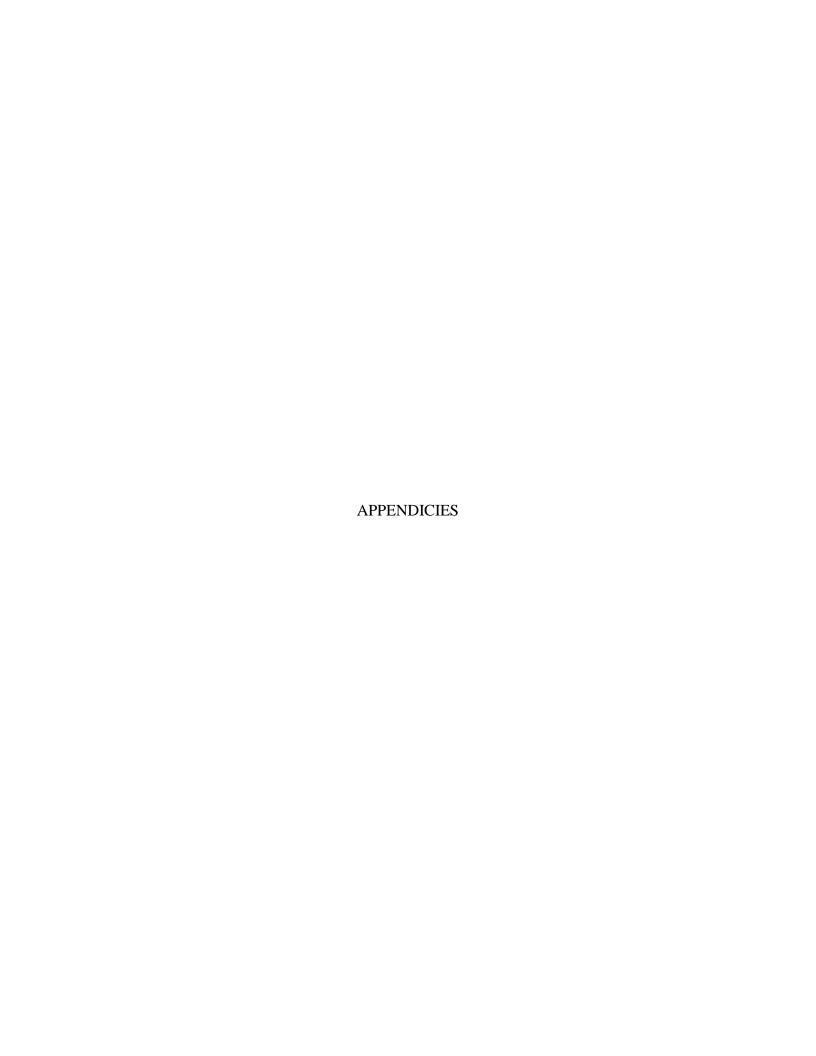   synthesis. *New Directions for Student Services, 123*, 13-21.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself. What do you consider the most important things that help present or explain you to others?)

2. How do you identify racially? Can you think of any pivotal moments when you felt different because you were a woman of color in a higher education setting? How if at all have you felt moments of exclusion?

3. Describe your educational background.

4. What motivated you to pursue a degree in higher education?

5. What was your major? What are your career goals? What do you hope to do once you complete your current degree program?

6. What moment did you feel that you wanted or needed to transfer? How long did you attend your community college?

7. What community college did you attend? Why did you decide on this particular institution?

8. What moment most clearly illustrates and represents your experience transferring from the community college to the four-year institution?

9. Were you a member of any academic assistance program at your community college? What made you decide to join this program? Are you a member or any program now? If you are a member of any programs, how if at all has this program helped you complete your educational goals?

10. Do you have any recommendations for future women of color transferring from a community college to a four-year institution?

APPENDIX B

Arthur O. Eve, who was a New York State Assemblymen in 1967, created The Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP/EOP) and according to the New York State Education Department (NYSED), Eve's mission was to "provide a broad range of services to New York State residents who, because of academic and economic circumstances, would otherwise be unable to attend a postsecondary educational institution" (NYSED, 2016, para. 1). Eve wanted to provide a higher education to students that did not have access. He was concerned about the higher education pursuits of students that came from disadvantaged populations.

The Upward Bound (UB) Program, the first Federal TRIO Program, was created under the authority of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, as amended. A year later, Talent Search (TS) was created as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to assist students applying for newly authorized federal financial aid for postsecondary education. The TRIO name itself was born four years later when the Higher Education Act of 1965 was amended in 1968 to include the Special Services for Disadvantaged Students program—what is now called Student Support Services (SSS). UB, TS and SSS formed a trio of Federal programs designed to foster increased educational opportunity and attainment.

Since 1968, the TRIO programs have been expanded to provide a wider range of services. Today, nine TRIO programs are included under the TRIO umbrella, seven of which provide direct services to students. The 1972 amendments to the Higher Education Act created Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) to help adults select a postsecondary education program and obtain financial aid. Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) was also initiated in the 1972 as part of the Upward Bound program to serve returning Vietnam veterans. Amendments in 1986 added the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program (McNair) to foster

doctoral degree attainment by students from underrepresented segments of society. In 1990, the

Upward Bound Math and Science (UBMS) program was initiated as part of the Upward Bound

program to address the need for specific instruction in the fields of mathematics and science.

TRIO also includes a training program for project directors and other staff of TRIO projects

(Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, which was authorized in 1976). The TRIO

programs are administered by the Student Service area of the Department's Office of

Postsecondary Education. (U.S. Department of Education, 2014)

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