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Exploring The Lived Experience Of Doctoral Study In Counseling Psychology: A Phenomenological Approach

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EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF RURAL AFRICAN AMERICAN
MILLENNIALS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Corey Guyton

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Keywords: Rural, Millennials, African, American, PWIs

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and how they make meaning of these experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted with six students (graduate and undergraduate) who identified as being from a rural area, African American (or Black), and a Millennial.

Seven major themes emerged from the study: the presence of college aspirations, desire to attend a historically Black college or university (HBCU), experiencing culture shock, lack of academic preparation, experiencing microaggressions, lack of parental involvement, and no desire to return home after graduation. Some major themes had sub-themes. Leaving their rural hometowns and moving to a new location presented various challenges for the research participants. All of the participants had transitional issues with either their new cities or their new college environments. In their new cities, participants struggled with a number of challenges such as traffic and diversity, and on their college campuses they struggled to fit in with other students, were not academically prepared, and did not know how to deal with autonomy.

Recommendations for practice include intentional recruitment strategies designed specifically for rural African American Millennials, providing transitional resources for rural African American Millennials, and more training for faculty and staff about this student population.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

*Deep in the woods lies a family swamped in tradition
 Conservative by nature and functions only on intuition
 Spare the rod spoil the child was the message of choice
 "I'll knock your teeth down your throat" was the words coming from my mother's voice
 Tractors, vegetables, and animals; a farm in which it looked
 One day we would have a pet, the next day it would be cooked
 The chickens are gone, the pigs are missing, and I can't hear the cows moo
 "Mama, where did the animals go?" "Son, they were in last night's stew"
 Many memories have passed and many pictures were took
 You can find most of them still in my grandma's scrapbook
 The life of a little Black country boy!
 By: Corey Guyton*

Institutions of higher education have become heavily populated with a new generation of students known as Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). Millennials are individuals born after 1982. As a generation, they are defined by seven core traits that distinguish them from past generations: being special, sheltered, team-oriented, conventional, confident, achieving, and pressured. This unique cohort of students is also known for being culturally and racially diverse (J.L. Wilson, 2008).

As of 2008, racial and ethnic minorities make up 32.2% of students enrolled at degree granting institutions in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009b). African Americans make up 13.1% of students enrolled at degree granting institutions and have the highest enrollment among racial minority groups in the U.S. (NCES, 2009b).

Although African American students are the majority among minorities in terms of enrollment,

they are far fewer in number than their White counterparts, who make up 64.4% of students (NCES, 2009b).

African American students are generally less academically equipped and have lower grade point averages (GPA) than White students (Rowley, 2001). According to the NCES (2009a), African American students are graduating and receiving bachelor's degrees at a rate far lower than White students; for instance, in 2006-2007, White students earned 72.2% of bachelor's degrees, while African American students earned 9.2%.

In addition to graduating less frequently and being less academically equipped for college, African American students are more likely than White students to be first-generation students from low-income backgrounds (Horn & Nunez, 2000). First-generation students are enrolling in colleges and universities in the U.S. in increasing numbers (Orbe, 2004) and account for more than 40% of students in college (Gohn & Albin, 2006). Although the numbers are increasing, first-generation students must face and overcome academic, financial, and social obstacles in order to pursue a college education (Hottinger & Rose, 2006).

Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) found that during their first year, first-generation students are more likely to take at least one remedial course than students who are not first-generation college students. They also found that first-generation students generally have lower GPAs during their first year of college than students whose parents received a degree and that they are less likely to attain a degree or be enrolled continuously at their initial college or university. For the purposes of this study, their most interesting finding is that first-generation students are also more likely to be from small towns and rural areas.

The number of students from rural areas who attain college degrees is increasing; in 2000, 15.5% of all rural adults in the United States reported that they received a degree from a

four-year college compared to 12.8% in 1990 (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). Despite the increase, however, enrollment rates of students from rural areas are generally lower than those of students from different locales (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Many students from rural areas struggle to enroll due to the lack of resources in their communities. Rural communities often do not have the hallmarks of a “college culture” that are available in suburban and other affluent areas, such as regular college recruitment visits from postsecondary admissions representatives, access to information about scholarships and financial aid, proper funding for a sufficient number of postsecondary counselors, and opportunities for faraway campus visits (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

The largest difference between rural and non-rural students’ educational achievements is in college completion. Students from non-rural areas had college completion rates that were 11% higher than those of students from rural areas (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). Schultz (2004) suggested that

rural status clearly contributed to the students’ lack of experience with large towns, large campuses, and the diversity found in the college environment. Affective concepts of disconnectedness, lack of solitude, desire to “get back out in the country” from time to time, as well as pleasure, excitement, pride, and accomplishment are largely attributable to the condition of being a rural student in the first semester in college. (p. 50)

Hottinger and Rose (2006) suggested that all students enrolling in college “fall into at least one specific student population” (p. 115), but many students are part of multiple populations. Membership in a population defined by a particular ethnic, racial, sexual, age, ability, gender, or religious identity does not wipe away the reality of diversity among the

persons within that group (Stewart, 2009). African American students are one such student population that has enough heterogeneity to merit close study of its various subpopulations.

Statement of Problem

There is a body of research on the lived experiences of African American students, rural students, and Millennials. The challenges that influence their college experience are well documented for each of these populations. However, most students are part of multiple subgroups and therefore

should be afforded the opportunity to directly confront the ways in which their understandings and perceptions of the multiple, salient aspects of their identities impact the ways in which they articulate their identities when they are with different groups or in different settings. (Stewart, 2009, p. 267)

There has been no research on the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In this study, I sought to understand the experiences of a student who balances multiple identities (i.e., rural background, African American, and a part of the Millennial generation) while attending a PWI.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs. I sought to explore the students' experiences with transitioning from a rural background to a PWI and how they made meaning of these experiences.

Research Questions

This study was guided by two relevant questions which were significant to the experiences of African American Millennials from rural locations attending PWIs:

1. What are the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs?

2. How do these students make meaning of these experiences?

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it sheds light on the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs, a population of students that has not received much attention. The experiences described by these students give insight into the transition from their rural communities to college. In addition, the findings of this research provide the field of higher education with a better understanding of and additional research on rural African American Millennials attending PWIs and could help educate and guide college administrators to understand the challenges of this population. A better understanding of these students could lead administrators to allocate additional support and programs that better address their unique needs. More support could lead to better college experiences for these students, resulting in higher retention and graduation rates.

Personal Statement

My experience as an African American Millennial transitioning from a small rural area to an extremely diverse college campus was difficult. Prior to attending college I had a perception, mostly created from television, about what college life and moving to a new city would be like. After my transition, I realized my perception was much different from the reality of the new environment. At my undergraduate institution, others who had similar backgrounds faced many of the same challenges. The administrators did not seem to understand our unique challenges and there were few resources to aid in our transition.

As I progressed in higher education and began to navigate different colleges and universities, I realized that although I was in different geographical locations, students who were African American, Millennial, and from a rural area had the same challenges, and their

institutions were not addressing their needs. Many resources and research are available for assisting the transition of African American students and Millennials, but there appears to be a lack of knowledge about rural students, especially when the rural student is African American and a Millennial. This leads to the need for researching this student population.

Definition of Terms

Rural: any area other than a city with less than 50,000 residents that is not within 50 miles of a metropolitan area (Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, 2002).

Critical Race Theory “refers to the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination” (Matsuda, 1991, p. 1331).

First-generation college students are students whose parents had no more than a high school education and never attended college (Warburton et al., 2001).

Millennials are individuals born between the years 1982 and 2003 (Keeling, 2003).

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to rural African American Millennials at PWIs. Students possessing each of these variables (Millennial, African American, rural) have been thoroughly researched on college campuses, but when these variables are grouped together and are characteristics of one student, the research is very limited. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students attending PWIs who possessed all of these variables and how they made meaning of these experiences.

This study was influenced by my personal experiences of being a student who possessed each of these variables. The literature review in the next chapter will give a more in-depth

overview of previous research pertaining to each variable (Millennials, African American, rural) along with information on first-generation students.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials at PWIs. There is extensive research on African Americans attending PWIs (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fleming, 1984; Flowers & Pascarella, 2003; Strayhorn, 2007), Millennials going to college (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Raines, 2002; Wilson, 2008), and students from rural areas attending college (Abbott, 2006; Beeson & Strange, 2000; Grimard & Maddaus, 2004), but little on the lived experiences of students who possess all of these qualities. In this study, I was interested in understanding the lived experiences of these students and how they make meaning of their experiences. The literature review will address the topics of Millennials in college, African American students in college, rural students in college, and first-generation students in college.

Millennials

“For the first time in history, four different generations may be present in our classrooms, especially when you include faculty” (Pastorino, 2007, p. 16). These generations are the Silent Generation of individuals born between the years 1925 and 1942, Baby Boomers born between 1943 and 1960, Generation X-ers born between 1961 and 1981, and Millennials born between 1982 and 2003 (Keeling, 2003). The newest generation attending institutions of higher education is the Millennial Generation, often referred to as the “Millennials” (Pastorino, 2007).

Millennials comprise the bulk of today's college students. Millennials are also known as the Echo Boomers, the Boomlet, Nintendo Generation, Generation Y, the Digital Generation, Internet Generation, and the Sunshine Generation (Raines, 2002).

Toward the beginning of the Millennial generation in the early 1980s, there was a great emphasis and value put on children (Howe & Strauss, 2007). This change was drastic. Children of the previous generation, Generation X-ers, were considered to be latchkey kids who often did not receive a lot of attention from their parents. This new value on Millennials was shown in many different ways such as products ("Baby on Board" stickers), media (pro-child movies such as *Three Men and a Baby*), and child-oriented magazines. Child-oriented media moved away from television shows such as "Sesame Street," which highlighted uniqueness and individualism, to shows like "Barney and Friends," which highlighted commonalities and teamwork. Strong team instincts are therefore part of the core values for the Millennial generation: "This team nature was bred through many years of teamwork in the education system, starting with pre-school television programs like 'Barney' and 'Teletubbies' and continuing into high school sports and extra-curricular activities" (Hill, n.d., p. 4).

The Millennial generation is the most ethnically and racially diverse generation in U. S. history (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Furthermore, with the ongoing "browning" of the country, many Millennials are second-generation immigrants (Hill, n.d.). This increase in diversity has caused this generation to have a global view and attitude that allows them to be tolerant and inclusive of other races, sexual orientations, and religions (Raines, 2002). Their diverse views in conjunction with their exposure to concepts of teamwork have caused Millennials to be very inclusive of others and to make it a priority to leave nobody behind. This belief in inclusion has caused members of this generation to expect fair treatment for everyone; when they sense

unfairness, they will come together to fight against it. Volunteerism is also a part of the Millennial culture because they were raised to think beyond self and more about the greater good (Raines, 2002). Most high school students have volunteered and many are required to complete community service hours as a requirement for graduation (Raines, 2002).

Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) are leading researchers on the Millennial generation. In their research, they identified seven core traits of this generation, describing them as special, confident, conventional, achieving, pressured, team-oriented, and sheltered.

Millennials are characterized by Howe and Strauss (2007) as being special because this generation was taught that they dominate the nation's agenda. This caused Millennials to conclude that their problems are America's problems, that their future is America's future, and that the American people will be responsible for helping them solve any problems they face. They put their faith and trust in large national institutions, such as the government, expecting them to "do the right thing on their behalf" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 52). This feeling of specialness leads Millennials to be confident because they are very optimistic about their futures (Howe & Strauss, 2007). They believe that they will have better job opportunities and will make more money than previous generations. They also have a different outlook on success than previous generations, viewing the concept of balance as their measure of success. Instead of focusing on one life goal such as a successful career or successful marriage, they focus more on balancing academic life, work, family, and social life. Their focus on balance makes them more conventional than previous generations because they believe that standards and rules can make their lives easier.

The desire to achieve success and satisfaction drives Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Many members of this generation have written short- and long-term plans and expect to achieve

them. While in high school, they start thinking about paying for college, obtaining degrees, future salaries, and employment trends. Although they do not necessarily enjoy the process and hard work it takes to be successful, they put forth effort in school in hopes of succeeding. This desire to achieve can lead to a feeling of being pressured. Because test scores, attendance records, and transcripts play a major factor in college acceptance and obtaining a job, Millennials have an added pressure to achieve. They tend to not believe that they can rebound from failure, so they feel that planning and time management are critical to their success.

Howe and Strauss (2007) describe this generation as being team-oriented due to their high level of interconnectedness. They are more likely to socialize in groups than to socialize with two or three friends. The Internet has increased the level of connection for this generation, allowing them to maintain large networks of friends. However, in an era of technological advances, sexual predators, and easy access to firearms, the parents and guardians of this generation have invested an inordinate amount of time and money to shelter their Millennials. The security measures are manifested through premium security such as V-chips, school uniforms, identification cards, and metal detectors at schools.

Despite their parents' concerns about technological advancements, Millennials have an extensive knowledge of technology and are able to remain up-to-date with the current trends in technology (Carlson, 2005). For other generations the rate of change in technology can be overwhelming, but for Millennials this is their reality and is perceived as normal. Notable changes include camera phones evolving from basic cellular phones, MP3 players taking the place of CD players, and social networks such as Facebook and MySpace trumping instant messaging and e-mail. Raised in the midst of a barrage of information (Carlson, 2005), Millennials have developed the ability to juggle multiple tasks such as browsing the Internet,

participating in an instant message conversation, and listening to music all while reading a book for homework. Multitasking enables these students to speed up their learning (Sweeney, 2006).

Millennials on college campuses. Millennials may struggle with transitioning to college campuses because they are used to their lives being structured (M. Wilson, 2004). These students have an expectation that professors and administrators will explicitly describe every step needed to be successful in college by giving clear expectations of their classes, detailed instructions about homework assignments, and an explanation of everything that will be on tests. The problem with these expectations is that many college environments are very ambiguous, and professors and administrators often do not give step-by-step instructions to students. Many educators believe that growth, development, and learning require complex thinking, greater autonomy and reliance on self, and less reliance on authority. This creates disconnectedness between the demands of the students and the beliefs of the educators.

In addition to needing structure, Carlson (2005) characterized Millennials as being very impatient. Having grown up in a world of instant gratification, they expect institutions and individuals to respond to their demands in an unrealistically short amount of time (Tyler, 2007), such as expecting next-day feedback from their professors on assignments (Sweeney, 2006). When feedback is not constant or is delayed beyond their expectations, students of this generation will begin to perceive that the institution does not value their concerns or needs, and this causes them to become upset. This lack of patience coupled with their high demands may cause these students to fail to work through complex problems (Tyler, 2007).

Many parents of Millennials are highly involved in their children's college experiences (M. Wilson, 2004). Some Millennials consider their parents' involvement embarrassing, but most expect it. Some parents of Millennials can become too involved in their children's college

experience by being ultra-protective, unwilling to let go, and always hovering; Howe and Strauss (2000) labeled these parents as being helicopter parents. J. L. Wilson (2008) further described helicopter parents as being intrusive, over-involved, and protective, as illustrated when they constantly contact administrators and faculty at their children's college, asking "why their children aren't getting better grades, . . . defending their children and questioning what is going awry at the institution that would explain the trouble their children may be having there" (p. 3). As a result of the large increase in helicopter parents, many institutions have implemented programs that incorporate parents, such as parents' orientation, notification policies to parents about students' conduct, and the creation of offices for parent relations (M. Wilson, 2004).

J. L. Wilson (2008) described the Millennials as "a generation of contrasts—e.g., they are both team-oriented and narcissistic; they are said to be optimistic, yet also cynical; they do volunteer activities but the motives are unclear" (p. 5). In his 2005 convocation speech, President William Durden of Dickerson College gave his interpretation of the negative literature on the Millennial generation:

Collectively, these books reflect an emerging generalization of your generation that should disturb us all. You are increasingly perceived as a success-driven, people-pleasing, control-freak generation. Your age cohort is thought to be invested with a feeling of extreme "entitlement." You expect to live the "good life" without really having to put out the effort to secure it. You are judged to expect high grades without having to do any significant studying. You expect to receive acceptance to the graduate or professional school of your first choice, or a high-paying initial job merely by "showing up" at college for four years. And you are believed to be so emotionally fragile that you can't weather naturally even the most minor setbacks such as not getting into a

class of your choice, receiving a grade lower than an A, or not making the first cut on an interview. (Durden, 2005, para. 11)

African American Millennials. Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) and other researchers have given detailed descriptions of the Millennial generation that have been used by institutions to create resources and support for current college students. Nevertheless, even though these findings may be useful in setting procedures, policies, and programs, institutions should be careful not to over-generalize the Millennial generation because there are sub-populations within it (Vinson, 2007). Many critics believe that Howe and Strauss's research on Millennials has significant limitations. For instance, Reeves and Oh (2008) pointed out that their generalizations were made from data that only included high school students from Fairfax, Virginia, which is a very affluent suburb of Washington, DC. Hesel and May (2007) stated that "the traits Howe and Strauss attribute to Millennials are, in the case of their own study, the characteristics of a small set of teens who are, in our opinion, likely to be profoundly different from most high school students" (p. 18). In light of these criticisms, researchers have begun to examine individual populations of students within the Millennial generation. The research that is pertinent to this study is on African American Millennials, a student population that researchers are investigating to discover their behaviors, traits, and characteristics. Although there is not much information available about this population, the findings of a few researchers have challenged previous descriptions of Millennials.

Most important to this study is the finding that generalizations in the literature do not seem to apply to characteristics of African American Millennials. Marbley, Hull, Polydore, Bonner, and Burley (2007) discovered a few of these inconsistencies. For example, African American mothers who gave birth between 1983 and 1989 (years in which Millennials were

born) were significantly younger than White mothers; most White mothers were Baby Boomers, while most African American mothers were Generation X-ers. This is in contrast to Raines's (2002) report that Millennials were born to older parents averaging 27 years of age. There were significant effects as a result of the large age differences between White and Black mothers giving birth between 1983 and 1989 (Marbley et al., 2007). Specifically, younger African American mothers were not as established as older White mothers. This meant that White families were more likely to have multiple incomes and better jobs that allowed them to provide Internet access, better living conditions, and better schools for their children.

In a review of literature to determine if African American students had as much access to and were as savvy with technology as previous researchers had indicated about Millennials, Vinson (2007) found that there is a digital divide between different racial groups. African American Millennials, who are more likely than their White counterparts to be from a lower socioeconomic status, were found to be at a disadvantage because they could not afford Internet services and technology. As a result, they did not have the ability to conduct online research, communicate with others (instant message, e-mail, social networking), or shop online. Vinson explained that institutions of higher education should be aware that the inability to afford technology and the lack of experience with it may put African American students behind other student groups. This is a cause for concern because many institutions of higher education have high technological expectations for Millennials, and many African American Millennials are underprepared.

Strayhorn (2007) examined Black Millennials' college aspirations to determine whether they were different from those of White Millennials and also to test Howe and Strauss's (2007) notion that the college aspirations of the Millennial generation are higher than in previous

generations. Data were obtained from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), a national database sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The sample consisted of African American and White students who entered college after 2000 and were born after 1980. The final sample for this study included 2.5 million African American and 10.7 million White Millennial students. Additional data were collected from NPSAS 2004 and NPSAS 1996, which included data of both African American students from previous generations and African American Millennials. The final sample consisted of 560,000 African American Generation X-ers and 2.5 million Black Millennials. Strayhorn found that African American Millennials had significantly lower college aspirations than their White counterparts. These results suggest that the general Millennial framework that many scholars are using may not be suitable for understanding Black Millennials.

Strayhorn (2007) also found that Black Generation X-ers had higher college aspirations than Black Millennials. This was contrary to the findings that Howe and Strauss (2000) reported. Strayhorn suggested that this lack of college aspirations could be due to a number of reasons such as poor high school grades, non-academic and academic challenges completing K-12 education, or a dismissal of academic life. He further suggested that it may be that African American college students are afraid that their future will be restricted by the racial inequality, covert forms of discrimination, and apparent social fragmentation that continue to tarnish our society.

Summary. Millennials are the newest generation of students attending colleges. They are different from previous generations, bringing new characteristics that are causing institutions to restructure their services and offerings. For instance, Millennials are very technology savvy and have an expectation that institutions will use technology in their approach to providing

education. This causes institutions to make their schools more technology-based. In addition, their parents are more involved in their daily lives. This creates challenges for institutions of higher education because they are forced to deal with parents as well as students. As a result, institutions have created resources and support for parents.

The characteristics that many researchers ascribe to this generation have begun to come under scrutiny. Critics are challenging the methodologies used in studies on this population because their samples were not diverse and did not include certain student populations. Current research is focused on specific subgroups within the Millennial generation. Although there has been narrowly focused research on African American Millennials, there is room for growth. Within the African American group, there are subgroups, such as first-generation and rural African American Millennials, that could benefit from more specialized research. Information about subgroups would help keep institutions from over-generalizing the Millennial generation and challenge them to allocate resources that are focused on different subpopulations within the Millennial generation.

African American Students in College

African American students have attended PWIs since the early nineteenth century (Bryson, 2003), but these institutions were not created with the culture and needs of these students in mind (Conyers, 1999). The lack of consideration for African American students' needs puts them in danger of not fitting in at these institutions.

Historical perspective of African Americans in higher education. Prior to the Civil War, African Americans could not receive formal education in the southern states as a result of legislation passed between the years of 1800 and 1835 that prohibited the teaching of reading and writing to slaves. As a result, there were no educational institutions for African Americans

located in southern states before the end of the Civil War. Despite the laws and roadblocks hindering them from receiving formal education, many African Americans took the initiative to educate themselves.

The northern states were less prohibitive and allowed free African Americans the opportunity to receive formal education (Slater, 1994). Lucius Twilight, who received his degree from Middlebury College in 1823, is thought to be the first African American to receive a formal degree. A number of other African American men were afforded the opportunity to pursue formal education in the northern states during the early nineteenth century, but it was 40 years after Lucius Twilight received his degree that Lucy Ann Stanton at Oberlin College became the first African American woman to receive a college degree. Prior to the end of the Civil War, two institutions were specifically created for the education of African Americans: Cheyney University and Lincoln University, both founded in the northern state of Pennsylvania.

Once they were freed from slavery, African Americans in the South had a strong desire to become educated (Anderson, 1988) in order to be self-reliant and to have the ability to control and sustain educational institutions for themselves and their children. Education was a means for ex-slaves to distance themselves from slavery and their inferior status in society (Allen & Jewell, 2002). However, southern Whites felt that Black people were not capable of learning and strongly opposed formal education for them. Whites also felt that they would lose power and control if Blacks became educated.

The heavy opposition from Whites in the South caused northern missionaries affiliated with various churches to move south to help with the creation of educational opportunities for Blacks (Allen & Jewell, 2002). Due to lack of funds and a shortage of qualified teachers, many

Blacks had no choice but to accept the support from these missionaries. Black churches also aided in the creation of schools for African Americans.

Through the efforts of these organizations and the determination of ex-slaves to be educated, more than 100 colleges and universities were created specifically for African Americans by 1890 (Allen & Jewell, 2002). Many of these institutions were created and supported by White missionaries, but a number were controlled and operated by Blacks. One of the most prominent Black organizations was the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, which funded, operated, and controlled Black educational institutions (e.g., Wilberforce University, Allen University, and Morris Brown University) in the late nineteenth century.

Educational opportunities expanded for African Americans as Congress approved the Morrill Act of 1890 to create opportunities for the establishment of land-grant institutions in the southern states specifically for African Americans (Thelin, 2004). Institutions such as Alabama A & M, North Carolina A & T, and Tennessee A & I were state-supported and focused on industrial and technical training (Allen & Jewell, 2002). Although these institutions appeared to create great opportunities for African Americans, they were “disproportionately neglected with respect to facilities, salaries, and staffing” and “ill equipped to conduct advanced, original research” (Thelin, 2004, p. 136). These institutions were also the center of a great debate about the method by which African Americans should be educated (Allen & Jewell, 2002); earlier historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) had a liberal arts-based curriculum, but the state-funded land-grant institutions had a vocational curriculum.

This debate about the proper way to educate African Americans was held by many, but the most contentious and well-publicized was between W. E. B. DuBois, an advocate of liberal arts education, and Booker T. Washington, an advocate of vocational education (Spring, 2007).

Washington felt that Blacks should focus on developing a trade and less on liberal arts (Thelin, 2004), whereas Dubois felt that liberal arts would encourage “leaders to protect the social and political rights of the Black community and make the Black population aware of the necessity for constant struggle” (Spring, 2007, p. 61).

This debate was a small part of the big picture of educating African Americans. Regardless of the manner in which African Americans were being educated, there was still a level of inferiority and separation, beyond education, between the Black and White races during this time. This was evident in the 1896 court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). In this court case, a biracial man named Homer Plessy was arrested for sitting in the White section of a train. At his trial, Plessy’s lawyers argued that the laws that allowed the railroad to segregate trains violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court ruled that “segregation did not create a badge of inferiority if segregated facilities were equal and the law was reasonable” (Spring, 2007, p. 55). This was the origin of the *separate but equal* doctrine. In terms of education, Fleming (1984) explained that *separate but equal* placed an emphasis on vocational training for African American students instead of liberal arts education. This emphasis on industrial training was justified by a movement that instilled the belief that African Americans were intellectually inferior to Whites. The doctrine of *separate but equal* lasted for nearly 60 years, with the result that Blacks were primarily educated in separate facilities. The milestone case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) ruling and changed the face of education (Spring, 2007). In *Brown*, the Supreme Court ruled that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place” and that “separate education facilities are inherently unequal” (Spring, 2007, p. 115).

Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) ruling, more than 90% of African American college students attended traditional Black institutions (Fleming, 1984). After *Brown*, the number of African Americans attending PWIs increased dramatically. By 1970, more than three-fourths of African American students attended PWIs. This increase was a milestone but created major challenges for students in these new environments.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed in an effort to assure fair treatment for minorities in the United States. Passage of this act was a pivotal point in education (Spring, 2007), allowing the federal government to regulate public accommodations, employment, education, and voting rights. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 stated that no person, on the basis of color, national origin, or race, should be denied or excluded from the benefits of any program funded by the federal government.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was also the beginning of the affirmative action movement and helped to open the door for African Americans wishing to attend PWIs. Although affirmative action created opportunities for African Americans to attend PWIs, it has faced major opposition. Some of the more notable cases that contributed to the discussion of equality and access in higher education for African Americans are *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996), *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003). In *Bakke*, a White man named Allan Bakke was rejected from being admitted into the medical school at the University of California at Davis while less qualified minorities were accepted into the program because the institution had a different admissions policy and reserved a number of spots for minorities. The Supreme Court ruled that the quota system that the University of California at Davis used was not permissible, but that race could be used as a factor in creating a diverse body of students.

In 1996, *Hopwood v. Texas* set the tone for future affirmative action cases. In this case, four White students who applied to the University of Texas School of Law were denied admission. At the time, the school had an affirmative action admissions policy that gave preferential admittance to minority students, including a separate admissions committee and lower cut-off scores. The plaintiffs argued that the use of race in deciding college admissions was unconstitutional. In their ruling, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that

the University of Texas School of Law may not use race as a factor in deciding which applicants to admit in order to achieve a diverse student body, to combat the perceived effects of a hostile environment at the law school, to alleviate the law school's poor reputation in the minority community, or to eliminate any present effects of past discrimination by actors other than the law school. (*Hopwood v. Texas*, 1996, para. 155)

Gratz v. Bollinger (2003) involved Jennifer Gratz, a White woman who applied for admission to the University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science, and Arts. She and another applicant met the requirements to be admitted but were both denied. At the time, the College had a points system that had a maximum value of 150 points and automatically admitted any applicant that had 100 points. Points were awarded on a number of factors such as standardized test scores, high school grades, and personal surveys. Underrepresented populations (Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans) received an additional 20 points because the school felt it had a compelling interest to create a diverse student body. The plaintiffs felt that awarding minority students extra points was unconstitutional and wanted the school to change the admissions policy. The Supreme Court ruled that the admissions policy violated the Equal Protection Clause and Title VI and stated that the 20 additional points

awarded to applicants from underrepresented populations was too narrowly focused to achieve a compelling interest in diversity. The ruling also stated that the admissions policy was unsuccessful at giving individual consideration to each applicant.

The University of Michigan also figured in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), in which a White woman named Barbara Grutter sought admission to the University of Michigan's Law School but was denied even though she met the qualifications to be accepted into the institution. Like the College of Literature, Arts, and Sciences, the Law School explained that it used race as a factor in their admissions process because it had a compelling interest in creating a diverse student body. In this case, however, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Law School and found that the policies were sufficiently flexible because there was no strict quota or points system. The policy provided opportunity to underrepresented applicants without overtly favoring them.

Affirmative action laws and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 have opened doors for students of color to gain access to higher education. Gaining an understanding of the historical challenges and obstacles that African Americans have faced in gaining access to higher education is important in understanding the challenges that African American students face today. As more African American students continue to be admitted to PWIs, it is important to expand the research on them and gain a better understanding of the current challenges they face to help find better ways to support them.

Challenges for African American students at PWIs. The original task for African American students was to acquire a high level of education in the face of inadequate facilities, segregated colleges, and low standards (Fleming, 1984). Since entering PWIs, African American students are expected to perform at high intellectual levels while also adjusting to the majority

White environment. Although African American students had great expectations when they began entering PWIs in the 1950s, the “open hostilities of some years later were a clue that something was amiss and a signal for social scientists to investigate” (Fleming, 1984, p. 17).

Sense of belonging. One of the first, most significant, and most cited studies on African American students at PWIs was conducted by Jacqueline Fleming (1984), a comparative quantitative researcher who sought to answer the question “What happens to Black students in Black colleges compared to what happens to Black students who attended White colleges?” (p. 27). She also wanted to gauge the intellectual development of these students at their respective institutions. Fleming collected data through interviews, questionnaires, and a review of the participants’ transcripts for 3000 African American and White students attending 15 colleges throughout Mississippi, Georgia, Ohio, and Texas and discovered that Black colleges created a more supportive environment for African American students than PWIs. For example, HBCUs create more opportunities for African American students to make friends, become involved in campus life, and have a higher sense of success and progress in their academic pursuits. African American students also felt that faculty at HBCUs were more interested in seeing them succeed than faculty at PWIs.

To get the widest level of generalizability possible, Fleming (1984) included White students’ experiences. She found that, unlike White students, African American students at PWIs had special challenges that were unique to them. White students had no problems adjusting to their academic institutions and they did not feel any sense of unfairness or alienation in the classroom. On the other hand, African American students felt alienated and that they were treated unfairly. These results set the stage for future research on African American students and their experiences at PWIs.

Twenty years after Fleming's study, Davis et al. (2004) conducted a qualitative study of the experiences of African American students at a PWI. In this study, 11 undergraduate African American students were interviewed. The researchers chose graduating seniors because they felt this population could give a more in-depth examination of the significant changes that occurred during their years in college. The results from the study revealed five major themes that characterized the undergraduate experiences explained by African American students attending PWIs. Davis et al. expressed these themes as

1. "It Happens Every Day": Unfairness/Sabotage/Condescension.
2. "You Have to Initiate the Conversation": Isolation and Connection.
3. "They Seem the Same; I'm The One Who's Different."
4. "I Have to Prove I'm Worthy To Be Here."
5. "Sometimes I'm Not Even Here/Sometimes I Have to Represent All Black Students": Invisibility and Supervisibility (p. 427).

In the interviews, Davis et al. (2004) found that the African American students in their study felt uncomfortable and experienced incidents of sabotage, unfairness, and condescension from classmates, faculty, and the campus community in general while attending a PWI. Participants felt that White people viewed African Americans as being less capable and that the only way to change the view of White people was to prove them wrong. They felt they had to put in an extra effort to change the preconceived thoughts that White people had about them. They also believed that PWIs did not create an environment that was healthy for them because their campus was filled with objects and graffiti that overtly expressed racism, as in the following interview excerpt:

I remember actually my first week here, my first day of class. I passed by (name of residence hall), and there was a great big Rebel flag hanging in a guy's window as curtains. I really didn't expect to see anything like that . . . I didn't expect to see things like "Niggers go home" written in the men's room wall. And you know, KKK carved on the desk. (Davis et al., 2004, p. 427)

African American students also had challenges making connections with others at PWIs, including students from different races, faculty and staff, extracurricular activities, campus employment, campus groups, and even other African American students. Participants felt that they had to initiate conversations with students from other races to insure that others knew they were intelligent. They also felt that when they were sitting in a classroom full of White people, asking for notes was a big burden. They were afraid to ask for assistance because they did not feel that White students would help. Some participants in the study felt they could not connect to other African American students on campus. One participant reported,

That's the way I feel, is just everybody has a chip on their shoulder and I get the vibes like the Black female is my own worst enemy. And I'm not trying to, I don't give that off I don't think, but it's kind of like we can't, if somebody's doing something good then it's like, oh, they're trying to be this or they're trying to be that. It's not oh, they're really doing a good job. (Davis et al., 2004, p. 429)

These findings indicated that African American students felt different from other students and that it was mostly a negative experience that made them feel "frustrated," "isolated," "mad," and "bothered" (Davis et al., 2004, p. 430). Part of feeling different for these students included the fact that they hardly ever saw others who looked like them. Davis et al. (2004) concluded the study by discussing the visibility of African American students at PWIs. The students in the

study felt that they stood out because they were typically the only African American persons in a setting full of White people. This put them in situations where others expected them to speak on behalf of all African Americans.

The findings from this study were very consistent with the findings of Fleming (1984) in highlighting the negative feelings that African American students experience at PWIs and showing that there is a continued perception that African Americans are less capable of learning than Whites. The results from these studies on African American students are very valuable to understanding how African American students feel they connect to others at PWIs, but there is room for expanding on the literature. Exploring different populations within the African American community such as rural African American students and how they perceive they connect to others (including other African Americans) at PWIs will be useful in gaining a better understanding of this student population.

Academic performance/retention. More than 75% of White students who graduate from high school matriculate to college as opposed to only 35-50% of African American students (Strayhorn, 2008a). Despite the large gap between these two ethnic groups, African American students are enrolling in colleges at rates higher than in previous years. Nevertheless, African American students complete fewer degrees than their White counterparts (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993).

In 2006-2007, African American college students earned 9.2% of four-year degrees while White students earned 72.2% (NCES, 2009a). The low number of degrees conferred and the extremely low retention rates for African American students—45% in 2009 (“College Graduation Rates,” 2009)—are among the greatest challenges for institutions of higher education (Rowser, 1997). African American students are more likely than White students to not persist in school,

complete fewer college credits, and have poorer grades even if the deficits in academic preparation are considered, societal disadvantages are factored in, and ample resources are available.

Flowers and Pascarella (2003) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study to “estimate the cognitive effects of race in college, while applying statistical controls for an extensive set of confounding influences including precollege and background traits, institutional characteristics, and academic and social experiences” (p. 21). They gathered their data from the first, second, and third follow-ups of the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), a large longitudinal study on the factors influencing personal development and student learning in college. Data were only analyzed for students who participated in all three follow-ups; the total sample size was 1054 students attending 18 different institutions. During the first three years of college, White students had higher cognitive gains than African American students as shown in objective measurements of reading comprehension, science reasoning, writing skills, critical thinking, and mathematics. Flowers and Pascarella suggested that remedial education should be implemented to counteract the lower levels of cognitive development for African American students.

Flowers and Pascarella (2003) were unable to measure the effect that alienation, discrimination, and isolation had on the cognitive development of African American students and stated that “existing research has not adequately addressed how African American students’ perceptions of the campus environment influence learning in college” (p. 46). However, Flowers (2004) suggested that developmental gains in cognitive development for African American students are also accomplished through being involved at their institutions. This is consistent with Tinto’s (1999) statement that involvement is a condition for retention and student learning. The more students are socially and academically involved at their institutions, the more likely

they will be retained and graduate. However, previous research suggests that African American students generally perceive PWIs as unwelcoming environments (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzina, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Fleming, 1984). This unwelcoming feeling could be the reason African American students are not as involved as their White counterparts.

There has been research on the effects of adjusting to a PWI on learning for African American students. Cureton (2003) conducted a quantitative study to assess whether being African American at a PWI entailed unique, racially exclusive social circumstances that affected their academic performance. Surveys were received from 241 participants attending one PWI. The data from the study revealed that African American students have a hard time adjusting to the environment at PWIs. These adjustment issues dramatically affected the academic performance of these students. Cureton suggested that the sensitive nature of conflicts, confrontations, and misunderstandings pertaining to race could be a very frustrating, stressful, angry, or hostile experience for African American students. Each of these feelings could be detrimental to their academic performance because the students could view the institution as the enemy, especially if their attempts to get the problems resolved are unsuccessful. If African American students perceive their institutions to be racist and unsupportive, these negative feelings could cause them to drop out, transfer, or remain at the institution with a negative view of it.

Cureton's (2003) findings are consistent with what Steele (1999) defined as stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when individuals become stressed as a result of being negatively stereotyped. To lessen the stress, individuals learn to care less about the activities and situations that cause it. The act of disconnecting from the stressful situations and activities is supported by others who are a part of the stereotype-threatened group, sometimes becoming the norm for the

group. However, this attitude of “not caring” sometimes results in decreased motivational levels that could become costly to stereotyped groups. African American students who are on the receiving end of negative stereotypes at PWIs and become dissatisfied with their institutions may withdraw psychologically from their institutions. They may stop caring about their academic success and begin to hate their institution, resulting in high attrition rates (Steele, 1999). Students who do not feel supported have a lower chance of being retained than students who feel supported (Tinto, 1999).

Cabrera et al. (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of the role that perception of discrimination and prejudice played within the transition to college process of White and African American students. The data for this study were taken from responses to the NSSL from 1700 African American and White students representing 18 institutions. In their analysis of the data, Cabrera et al. found that both racial groups (White and African American) were negatively affected if they perceived that racism was prevalent at their institutions. The key finding was that perceived racism had a major influence on the retention of African American students in comparison to White students that resulted in a decrease in their commitment level to their institutions and ultimately had a negative effect on their retention.

There is also a statistically significant effect on African American students if there is racial tension among their peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) because this tension can cause transitional and adjustment issues for African American students on their campuses. Students who have transition and adjustment issues are more likely to have poor academic performance and withdraw from their institutions.

Rowser (1997) conducted a quantitative study to determine if African American students' perceptions of their needs had implications for retention. The study was conducted using

surveys to assess students' perceptions of expected GPA, social and personal preparation to adjust to a new environment, graduation year, academic preparation for college, and areas where assistance would be needed for success. The sample consisted of 89 African American students attending a Midwestern university. The results from the study revealed that when beginning their college careers, most African American students feel they are academically prepared, expect to receive a 3.0 GPA or higher, and expect to graduate within five years. Rowser suggested that these expectations create a cause for concern because they are unrealistic for many African American students and could lead to high attrition rates. For example, 90% of the study's sample expected to receive a 3.0 GPA or higher during their first year of college when over 70% of them entered college with a high school GPA lower than 3.0. If students set their expectations too high and are unable to accomplish them, they could perceive themselves as being failures. This perception and low level of self-efficacy could result in these students not returning to college. Moreover, more than half of Rowser's participants felt they needed assistance with their study skills, suggesting that these students did not know how to study and were not taught study skills in high school.

To combat poor retention rates and low academic performance, Cabrera et al. (1999) suggested that if African American students have positive faculty interactions, meaningful experiences with other students, and prior academic preparation, they are more likely to excel in analytical thinking and quantitative skills and develop an appreciation for fine arts. Robinson and Biran (2006) found that African American students who were proud, aware, and eager to work for the benefit of their African American communities were more likely to be motivated to achieve academically.

Flowers (2004) also suggested that African Americans' student development in college is positively impacted by their in-class and out-of-class experiences. African American students who are involved and have positive course learning, library, and other personal experiences at their institutions are more likely to have positive academic and social development. In addition, Mallinckrodt and Sedlacek (2009) suggested that African American students performed better academically and were retained more often when they used on-campus facilities. The facilities that were important to African American students were both academic facilities such as the library and nonacademic facilities such as the gym.

High-achieving African American students at PWIs. Strayhorn (2008b) conducted a quantitative study to “explore the extent to which high-achieving Black collegians feel the need to prove themselves academically, despite their demonstrated intellectual acuity, and measure the relationship between their ‘burden of proof’ and their academic achievement in college” (p. 376). In this study, high-achieving students were defined as participating in at least one of two different scholarship programs for which students had to have at least a 3.5 high school GPA and a minimum score of 23 on the ACT. There were 380 African American participants, with 79% being female and 21% male. Strayhorn found that high-achieving African American students felt they needed to prove themselves at PWIs but hardly ever interacted with other African American students who were high achievers at their institutions. Strayhorn suggested that if institutions create programs to bring high-achieving African American students together, this may aid in eliminating the stress that is caused by trying to prove themselves to others and result in better experiences and improved grades.

Herndon and Hirt (2004) conducted interviews with successful Black students to evaluate the roles that family played in their lives. The participants were all seniors attending two PWIs.

In their analysis of the interviews, Herndon and Hirt found that family influence, comprising moral, financial, and social support as well as ongoing encouragement and family values, was a consistent theme in the lives of successful African American students attending PWIs. The participants stated that the social, emotional, and economic investments that their families made in their semesters at college were critical in their success. The investments that families made in these students also had accompanying expectations; many of the study participants stated that motivation from their families and friends prior to attending college was a major factor in their success at PWIs, as expressed in this excerpt:

It's not about me going to school and getting my degree and getting my job. That's nice, but it's about showing the other people, as far as the younger people and other members of my family, that it is possible, it's not just a little pipe dream. I'm here, I'm all right.

It's not even about me. (Herndon & Hirt, 2004, p. 501)

Herndon and Hirt (2004) also highlighted themes related to the way participants perceived their minority status at PWIs, as illustrated in the following passage:

If you are a Black person coming from a predominantly Black place or mixed area, where you're used to seeing so many different people, forget the school—just the area alone, whoa! Now that's a major adjustment. You have isolated yourself just by choosing to come here. That's moving from a place that you know so well, that you feel really comfortable with, coming to a place that's really uncomfortable. The transition, the adjustments can be hard when nobody else looks like you or has the same interests.

That's going to be hard. (p. 502)

Macro perspectives on race were beneficial to the success of African American students attending PWIs. Families of these successful students socialized them to race prior to attending

college in ways that were beneficial. For example, one participant stated, “my parents taught me to know that, because I was Black and female, I would face obstacles but could still excel academically” (Herndon & Hirt, 2004, p. 501).

Many successful African American students in Herndon and Hirt’s (2004) study stated that they needed a sense of community and connectedness. In order to do so, they created fictive kinships that were like family relationships. Many students considered their friends as their families while they were in college. Mentorship, which the participants defined as a combination of serving as a mentor and being mentored, also played a major role in their success. Serving as a mentor meant shepherding others through the college process by providing information, advice, and being an overall resource.

Summary. African Americans did not begin to become formally educated until after the Civil War. Opportunities for higher education were mostly in the form of institutions that were specifically created for African American students. Blacks remained segregated until *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), when the Supreme Court ruled that separate was not equal and allowed Blacks to enter PWIs. This new opportunity for Blacks created a shift in the manner in which they sought education, and within 15 years of the ruling, the majority of Blacks in institutions of higher education were attending PWIs.

Researchers have discovered that African Americans attending PWIs feel alienated, unwanted, and highly stereotyped. These students have been on the receiving end of racism, both overt and covert. These experiences have had a major effect on the attrition rate for African American students at PWIs. Furthermore, the findings of a few comparative studies suggest that African American students deal with issues that White students do not and that these issues may cause African American students to encounter extra roadblocks that hinder their cognitive

development and lead them to become less involved with the campus community, which has a direct impact on retention (Tinto, 1999).

Previous researchers have thoroughly examined African American students attending PWIs as a whole and frequently compared the experiences of White students to those of African American students at PWIs. Although this is very valuable information, there are unanswered questions about the experiences, cognitive development, and retention rates for different sub-populations within the African American community attending PWIs.

Rural Students in College

Nearly one-fourth of school children in the United States attend schools located in rural areas (Beeson & Strange, 2000). College enrollment rates for students from rural areas are generally lower than enrollment rates for students from other locales (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). This large deficiency in enrollment rates is the result of a number of factors, of which two of the main ones are postsecondary aspirations and access to higher education. When they do enroll in college, students from rural areas face a number of challenges that cause them to suffer academically and socially, increasing their chances of not being retained (Bradbury, 2008). In 2000, the college completion rate for rural adults was half the completion rate for urban adults (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Furthermore, there is a high poverty rate among rural families (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). In fact, the poverty rates for rural families are higher than the poverty rates for urban families. These statistics are very important because one of the most important determinants in whether a student from a rural area attends college is financial support (Schultz, 2004).

Postsecondary aspirations. Unlike affluent areas, many rural communities lack a college culture (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010) that includes active college recruiters

and admissions counselors visiting high schools, financial resources to hire a sufficient number of college counselors for their high schools, access to up-to-date information about scholarships and financial aid, and opportunities for potential college students to visit colleges that are far away. College cultures in these communities are also impeded by the lack of professionals in rural communities due to out-migration. Many individuals in rural community seek higher-paying jobs in urban and suburban areas, making it difficult for students from rural areas to have community mentors who could discuss college options. This lack of college culture sometimes discourages rural youth from pursuing postsecondary education. Although there is a small amount of research on rural education, few researchers have sought to understand this population of students.

Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) conducted a quantitative study on the college aspirations of high school students from rural West Virginia. In this study, 242 high school seniors and 5 principals completed surveys. Of the students who participated, 96% were White and the rest were from undefined racial groups. Academic preparation, such as students' GPAs and whether they took college preparatory courses, was found to play a major role in the college decision-making process for rural students: the higher the students' GPAs and the more college preparatory courses they completed, the more likely they were to have college aspirations. Less objective measures such as preparedness for college, students' beliefs about their own intelligence, and comfort in their potential institution's environment were also associated with college aspirations. Their parents' educational attainment was also very important to the college aspiration of students from rural areas: students whose parents attended college were more likely to pursue higher education than students whose parents did not.

Using semi-structured interviews, Schultz (2004) conducted a qualitative study of the first term in college from the perspective of first-generation students from rural agricultural backgrounds and evaluated their college aspirations. The sample for this study included six students who were enrolled in their first semester of college. Several participants in the study did not originally have plans to enter college or did not make their final decision to go to college until the end of their senior year. Most students who eventually decided to pursue higher education were heavily influenced by coaches and other significant individuals. In particular, parental attitudes toward postsecondary education had a huge impact on their decisions about attending college. If both parents offered support for their children attending college, the decision to pursue higher education was easier for students from rural areas, but if one or both parents did not agree with the concept of college, the participants were confused and conflicted about their decision to pursue higher education.

Although Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) and Schultz (2004) gave valuable insight into the college aspiration of rural students, their samples lacked racial diversity. This lack of diversity brings up questions such as, do African American students from rural areas experience the same college aspiration challenges that White students experience? What do rural African American students see as their influence for pursuing higher education?

College preparation and access. “When they are strong, rural secondary schools provide twenty-first-century students with the high-level knowledge, skills, and technology they need to succeed in college, careers, and life” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, p. 3). However, high schools in rural areas are in trouble due to financial constraints, geographic isolation, and a shortage of properly trained teachers. More than one-fifth of the country’s 2000 worst-performing high schools are found in rural areas.

The lack of resources and financial support in rural areas makes it difficult to recruit, attract, and retain qualified teachers (Jimerson, 2003). Rural schools generally pay significantly lower salaries than non-rural schools. Consequently, many newly graduated teachers bypass rural areas and accept jobs in higher paying districts, leading to teacher shortages in rural areas (Jimerson, 2003). Administrators are forced to place someone to teach their classes, even if the person is unqualified. If they cannot locate enough individuals to teach their classes, they are forced to consolidate them into larger classes. At the high school level, if administrators cannot locate qualified individuals to teach specialized subjects, they generally cancel the classes. In addition, advanced level courses are dispensable during teacher shortages because they are usually electives. By cutting these advanced courses, rural high schools are limiting the number of classes that would properly prepare students for college-level work. Since rural areas tend to experience high rates of teacher shortages, high staff turnover rates, and recruitment challenges, students living in these areas are likely to be denied the essential resources needed for a quality education. The low quality of education in rural areas affects students' preparedness for college. Despite the challenges that rural students have in becoming prepared for college, college preparation programs are a means by which these students can get extra help. These programs are generally available for students from rural areas, but they are not always utilized.

In a mixed-method study with participants from various cities and high schools in Maine, Grimard and Maddaus (2004) examined the major roadblocks that rural low-income youth faced in preparing to seek a college education and strategies to overcome these roadblocks through being involved in an Upward Bound program. Upward Bound is a federally funded program "which prepares high school students from low-income families whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree to enter and complete post-secondary education" (Grimard &

Maddaus, 2004, p. 30). The researchers received 57 surveys from students, 14 surveys from guidance counselors, and 37 surveys from parents of the students. Interviews were also conducted with nine students, seven guidance counselors, and 15 parents. Grimard and Maddaus found that the primary roadblocks that rural low-income students face in their college preparation are financial and social. For example, rural students fail to seek college preparation summer programs such as Upward Bound because they have the opportunity to earn money during the summer at home. Upward Bound provides program participants with part-time jobs, but some students felt that they could make more money in their hometowns. Furthermore, the thought of being away from their families, significant others, and friends made them hesitant about applying to college preparation programs. Upward Bound programs are hosted on a college campus, and some students failed to apply because they were unfamiliar with the large university environment. Students stated that they had never been away from their families and the thought of being away for six weeks was terrifying.

Grimard and Maddaus (2004) also discovered some of the reasons that some students decided to apply to Upward Bound. These students felt they needed to apply because the program would prepare them for college and help them improve their high school grades. In addition, they believed that being exposed to the college environment would eventually be beneficial to their transition to college. Students also reported that they benefitted academically, socially, and financially. Academically, students felt the program prepared them for college, improved their high school grades, and gave them experience on a college campus. Financially, Upward Bound provided participants with summer employment, which made them excited to receive an income. Socially, students felt the program helped them meet other people. Parents

also indicated that the program allowed their children to develop socially, which would be very beneficial to their social life in college.

Although there is discussion in the literature of the challenges to college preparation for rural students in general, and Grimard and Maddaus (2004) gave specific, valuable insight into college preparatory programs and their effect on low-income rural students, there is still a dearth of research on rural students' college preparation and particularly on African American students from rural areas. Many questions remain to be answered, such as how do rural African American students prepare for college and do they utilize college preparation programs? How does rural African American students' preparation for college compare to that of other ethnicities? Are college preparation programs beneficial for rural African American college students?

Challenges for rural students at institutions of higher education. Once enrolled in colleges and universities, rural students are an at-risk population because of their lack of experience in larger cities and towns, large campus environments, and the diversity found on college campuses. Getting accustomed to college norms such as residence halls and cultural diversity is very difficult.

In addition to findings about college aspirations discussed earlier, Schultz (2004) also reported barriers that rural students encountered once they were enrolled in college. In particular, size had a major impact on rural students' transition to college. The expansiveness of the classrooms, the close distance of the residence hall rooms, the expensive cost of tuition and fees, the rigor of the curriculum, and the transformation from being a person from a rural area to becoming a college student all created feelings of anxiety and uneasiness. Other negative factors that affected rural students' transition to college included lack of solitude, disconnectedness, and

desire to return to the country. Nevertheless, there were positive moments. Schultz's participants expressed feelings of pride, excitement, accomplishment, and pleasure generated by a sense of achievement for their progression in life and their ability to experience life outside of their rural areas.

Bradbury (2008) conducted a qualitative study of the experiences of nine first-generation students from the Appalachian region of Ohio as they navigated entry into Shawnee State University, a public open-admissions campus in Ohio. Bradbury identified barriers to admittance and successful integration into college and the factors and influences that assisted these students in the admissions and integration process. For instance, these students felt that relationships with family, significant others, friends, and faculty members were a barrier to their transition to college. In terms of family, participants stated that proximity was a major concern for them. Most rural students felt they needed to be near their families because being away from them and not having their support made the process of adjusting to college very difficult. Many students traveled back home on the weekends because they felt attached to their families and had various chores and responsibilities that needed to be completed. Bradbury also found that mothers had a difficult time letting go of their daughters because they relied on their daughters for assistance and companionship. Friendships were just as important as family relationships in their adjustment to college. Participants stated that they depended on high school friends and newly created friendships to assist with the college adjustment process. Although friendships mostly played a positive role in the college adjustment process, some friendships had negative influences on college success for students who considered drinking buddies as their friends. Dating and serious relationships also had an impact on the college transition process for rural students. Successful engagement on campus was threatened for students when there were

chaotic conditions within their serious relationships. Bradbury indicated that this could lead to major retention issues for this population. Relationships with faculty also affected the participants, who explained that they had difficulty adapting to the different expectations and teaching styles of their professors. Expectations about workloads and preparing for exams proved to be a challenge for them. Some students had difficulty completing homework, reading assignments, and preparing for exams and had inaccurate perceptions of their academic progress so that they did not realize they were performing poorly in class.

Another major challenge for participants in Bradbury's (2008) study was their ability to pay for college. Most students worked to earn the funding necessary to pay for their college tuition, and there were other financial challenges such as paying for textbooks and the cost of gasoline to travel back home. Furthermore, managing money was a challenge for many of these students because they had no previous experience.

However, Bradbury (2008) discovered that the participants had various influences that persuaded them to go to college such as support and encouragement from friends and family, the opportunity to become employed in high-paying jobs, and the desire not to struggle in ways that their parents struggled (unemployment, insecurities, low-wage jobs). Other factors that aided in the academic success of the rural students during their first semester of college included taking notes, studying, attending class, actively participating in classes, scheduling classes with breaks between each class, finishing homework prior to hanging out with friends, and being involved in campus activities.

Schultz (2004) and Bradbury (2008) offered very pertinent information about the challenges that rural students face while attending institutions of higher education, but there is plenty of room for expanding on their findings. Specifically, conducting similar studies with

African American students would give insight into this population and the additional challenges they may face with academic preparation, racism, alienation, and financial support.

Rural African American students. The percentage of African American students attending rural public schools is lower than the percentage of African American students attending schools in other geographical locations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). However, rural African American students are more likely than African American students in large cities to attend public schools that are poverty stricken. Approximately one-fourth of all students from rural areas fail to obtain a high school diploma; for rural minority youth, the rate is even higher (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

Irvin, Farmer, Leung, Thompson, and Hutchins (2010) conducted a mixed-methods study of “the relationship of participation in school, community, and church activities to the academic achievement (i.e., end-of-year school grades) of African American youth in rural low-income communities” (p. 1). The sample for this study consisted of 280 seventh- and eighth-grade African American students attending middle schools in two rural communities in the South. Data were collected using surveys, teacher reports, and interviews with parents. The findings suggested that low-income rural African American students have better experiences adjusting to their schools if they are involved in school activities. There is no clear indication of which school activities have the best positive effect on low-income rural African American students’ academic success, but three areas stood out: school vocational activity, school government, and school academic activity. Involvement in church activities also led to academic achievement for low-income rural African American students. The church served as a key resource by providing students with the essential support needed when dealing with discrimination and racism and was very beneficial to the overall development of students living in impoverished rural areas. Irvin et

al. found that community activities did not have a major effect on the academic achievement of low-income rural African American students and suggested that this was because rural students did not have ready access to community activities and because their low-income status limited the number of activities they could attend.

In a critical case study on a gifted African American child living in poverty in a rural area, Hebert and Beardsley (2001) used a combination of observations, interviews, and a review of the community of “Jermaine,” an African American third grader. Multiple themes emerged from the analysis of the data that explained Jermaine’s academic success including “an ability to express feelings and emotions, articulateness in role-playing and storytelling, enjoyment and ability in visual art, expressive speech, responsiveness to kinesthetic, a sense of humor, richness of imagery in informal language, and originality of ideas in problem solving” (Hebert & Beardsley, 2001, p. 99). These findings are important because Hebert and Beardsley suggested that students from rural areas need to possess some of these characteristics to be successful.

College aspirations of rural African Americans. White people from rural areas were at least twice as likely to complete college as African Americans, and African American students from metropolitan areas were twice as likely to complete college as African American students from rural areas (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). Nevertheless, despite challenges for rural African American students, their educational levels have risen.

In a qualitative study of pathways to successful outcomes for low-income rural African American youth, Farmer et al. (2006) collected data using focus groups composed of community leaders, parents, and teachers and phone interviews with parents of rural African American high school students. Educational success, defined as completing high school, matriculating to college, and completing a postsecondary degree were considered by rural community leaders to

be keys to success. More than 75% of the individuals in this study felt that rural African American high school graduates should further their education. Specifically, the participants thought that African American students from rural communities needed to leave their hometowns after graduation from high school to find better opportunities because small towns did not provide sufficient employment options, economic resources, or education opportunities. Many community leaders in the study stated that there were no valuable opportunities in the community for either their graduating seniors or themselves, so leaving the community may provide better opportunities for everyone in the family. One parent said, “[I] can’t get to work because I don’t have a car, but can’t get a car because don’t have a job to get money. I want my daughters to go to college and get out. When they go, I’m going with them” (Farmer et al., 2006, p. 5).

Participants also believed that students who chose to leave and pursue better opportunities should eventually give back to their communities in at least two ways (Farmer et al., 2006). The first way is to return to their hometowns to use their college degrees or newly acquired skills (e.g., healthcare, teaching) to help to boost their communities. The second way to give back is to return on the weekends to serve as mentors to other youth. Participants also said that even if they did not move back to their communities, these newly educated individuals could still give back to their communities on occasion. The intention is to make sure these individuals stayed connected to their hometowns in some manner.

Some community adults in the study felt that rural African American high school graduates should not further their education at a four-year college or university. One participant stated, “I don’t believe they need to go no further than high school ‘cause many children are not

college material. They should go to training school or trade school to get experience to get a job” (Farmer et al., 2006, p. 6).

In phone interviews conducted by Farmer et al. (2006), parents of rural African American youth expressed concerns that their children’s lack of access to online information created difficulties for their youth in terms of college aspirations. Lack of access to the Internet and the small number of people in their towns who are knowledgeable about college caused their children to have limited exposure to trade programs or college. As a result, youth seeking postsecondary education did not know how to complete their financial aid forms or received inaccurate information about applying to college, and guidance counselors in their schools did not have time to meet with them.

Parents of rural African American youth felt that White youth from their communities had better opportunities than their children (Farmer et al., 2006). Funding allotted to public education in their communities was limited, but because most African American families were low-income, their children had to attend these poorly funded schools. On the other hand, White families in their communities had higher incomes and sent their children to private schools which African American parents felt allowed White children to have a more valuable education.

Summary. The level of education for people in rural areas tends to trail the levels for people in other geographical locations (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). This low performance is caused by a lack in resources such as adequate teachers, access to technology, and other important variables necessary to create positive outcomes for K-12 systems in rural areas.

Rural areas generally lack a college culture (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010) that allows for college recruiters to visit their schools, counselors who are readily available to help

students with the college selection process, financial aid assistance for potential college students, or opportunities for students to make college visits. Most urban and suburban areas have these college cultures that make college access easier for students from these areas. In addition, students from rural areas did not have the proper training to gain access to institutions of higher education such as standardized testing preparation and proper advanced placement classes. This put students from rural areas at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts from other locales. College preparation programs such as Upward Bound have potential to help properly train rural youth for college. Students who used the college preparation programs had positive outcomes, but many rural students do not take advantage of these programs for financial reasons or because they do not want to be away from their families.

African American youth from rural areas are less likely to attend college than their White counterparts and African American youth from other locales (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Community adults and parents of these young people felt that college was a way for them to get away and make better lives for themselves and their families; however, they also believed that when young people from their communities acquired higher education or a new vocation, they should return and give back to their communities (Farmer et al., 2006). Once they are admitted to college, rural students have challenges adjusting to aspects of the new environment such as an increase in diversity, new and different living conditions, and more difficult classes. They also had a hard time funding their college education. These challenges created hardships for these students and sometimes caused them to leave school.

A large amount of the research on rural students focuses on high school students. The research that is available about college students focuses heavily on college aspirations rather than college experiences. There is a lack of research on rural African American students from all age

groups and educational levels, especially college students' experiences. Researching this population would provide valuable information for higher education professionals.

First-Generation Students in College

The number of first-generation students enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities is steadily increasing (Ishitani, 2003). First-generation college students are students whose parents had no more than a high school education and never attended college (Warburton et al., 2001). They are more likely to have completed their K-12 education in a small town than students whose parents have a college degree (Warburton et al., 2001). The high schools they attend are more likely to have over 75% of the student body identifying as being a part of an underrepresented minority group, and they are more likely to come from low-income families and identify as being Black or Hispanic (Chen, 2005).

First-generation status creates a number of problems during the first semester of college that could have an effect on the academic performance and other educational outcomes for this student population (Schultz, 2004; Strayhorn, 2006), including “ignorance about the cost of college and financial aid; lack of parental information about college; misunderstandings stemming from ignorance about the value of relationship-building; and the ‘surprise’ factor relating to college course rigor, course structure, and professorial expectations” (Schultz, 2004, p. 50).

College preparation/enrollment. First-generation college students “exhibit different college enrollment and persistence behaviors than their counterparts whose parents have more education” (Warburton et al., 2001, p. iii). Warburton et al. (2001) conducted a quantitative longitudinal study about the postsecondary success and academic preparation of more than 7000 first-generation students attending public, private, and not-for-profit institutions and found that

first-generation students were less prepared for college than students whose parents attended college. Specifically, students whose parents attended college were more likely than first-generation students to take more rigorous courses in high school and to take advanced placement tests. They were also more likely to take college entrance examinations such as the ACT or SAT than students whose parents did not attend college. When first-generation students did take college entrance examinations, they were more likely to score lower than students whose parents attended college. These factors along with others affected college entrance.

Chen (2005) found that first-generation students are more likely to delay their college entrance or to begin their college journeys at two-year institutions than students whose parents attended college. Furthermore, these students tend to be limited in the types of institutions they can attend and the kind of experiences they may have while attending (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). First-generation students who do choose to attend four-year institutions are less likely to attend research universities and more likely to attend public comprehensive institutions (Warburton et al., 2001).

College experience. First-generation students have a number of challenges associated with their first-generation status after enrolling in postsecondary institutions (Chen, 2005). These students are more likely to attend college part-time and to be employed full-time compared to other students (Warburton et al., 2001). Furthermore, first-generation students are significantly less likely to live on campus than other students. These tendencies toward part-time enrollment, work responsibilities, and living off campus are probably responsible in large measure for the fact that first-generation students also had lower levels of extracurricular involvement and interaction with peers in non-course contexts.

This may place first-generation students at a disadvantage in terms of the developmental benefits they derive from postsecondary education. (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 265)

Pike and Kuh (2005) conducted a quantitative comparison of the intellectual development and engagement of 3000 first- and second-generation students from different areas of the country at various types of four-year institutions. In this study, first-generation students were generally less engaged than second-generation students and were less likely to have diverse college experiences. They were also more likely to perceive the college environment as being less supportive. These factors play a major role in first-generation students' slower development in the areas of learning and intellectual development. Pike and Kuh suggested that first-generation students may be less engaged because they may not understand the importance of being engaged or know how to become engaged. Compared to second-generation students, first-generation students are less knowledgeable and have fewer experiences with college campuses and related activities, role models, and behaviors.

In a quantitative study using data from the NSSL, Pascarella et al. (2004) sought to understand how first-generation students experience college and how they benefit from it. Their data sample included 3,331 students from various backgrounds attending 18 institutions. In this study, extracurricular involvement had more positive effects for first-generation students than for other students in the areas of degree plans, responsibility for and sense of control over their own academic success, and critical thinking. However, although extracurricular involvement was shown to have positive effects on first-generation students, some college experiences were not very beneficial. Experiences such as employment, participation in intercollegiate athletics, and volunteer work had a more negative effect on first-generation students than on other students because they reduce both the level of and time for involvement in on-campus nonacademic and

academic activities. As a result, students were isolated or removed from broad exposure to the general campus culture. Pascarella et al. also found that

hours studied, number of term papers or written reports completed, number of unassigned books read, and scores on an overall measure of academic effort/involvement all had more positive effects on a range of end-of-second- or third-year outcomes for first-generation than for other students. These outcomes include critical thinking, writing skills, openness to diversity, learning for self-understanding, internal locus of attribution for academic success, preference for higher-order cognitive tasks, and degree plans. (p. 280)

Orbe (2004) suggested that first-generation students are more comfortable expressing themselves and discussing their experiences with other students who are first-generation. However, exchanges between these students do not happen as frequently as one may expect. When they do occur, it is usually between one or two individuals and not a large group.

Academic experiences. First-generation students face a number of academic challenges that can be directly related to their first-generation status. They are more likely than students whose parents attended college to take remedial classes during their first year of college because they begin college underprepared for postsecondary coursework (Warburton et al., 2001). This lack of preparation is the result of taking classes in high school that were not rigorous. It is also more difficult for first-generation students to choose a major (Chen, 2005). These students earned an average of 18 credit hours during their first year of college, whereas students whose parents attended college earned an average of 25 credit hours. The number of credit hours accumulated during the first year of college has an important relationship with long-term postsecondary outcomes.

Strayhorn (2006) “examined the effect of first-generation status, precollege and within college experiences, and background characteristics on cumulative college GPA” (p. 97) using longitudinal data from a National Center for Educational Statistics study entitled *Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study*. The sample size for the study was 11,192 first-generation students. The results from this study revealed that GPA was not merely a function of background characteristics such as gender, age, and race, nor of college experiences such as the number of hours students worked at a job. Instead, it was a function of a combination of these variables while including first-generation status. Pre-college factors like major, ACT score, and SAT score were found to have a positive effect on cumulative GPA for first-generation students (Strayhorn, 2006). Academic integration also had a positive effect on the academic performance of first-generation students. First-generation students who were happy with the intellectual life of college attained higher GPAs, but students who took remedial courses were more likely to have a decrease in their cumulative achievement. Furthermore, Strayhorn found that the higher the students’ aspirations were, the higher their cumulative GPAs. As a result of these findings, the author suggested that institutions of higher education should put more resources toward first-generation students’ college preparation and that future researchers should focus on strategies to guide educators and administrators on how to promote students’ personal and educational aspirations.

College persistence. First-generation students do not perform as well as students whose parents attended college in that they usually have lower GPAs (Chen, 2005). The lower performance and GPAs for these students is prevalent through their entire undergraduate careers, causing them to be more likely to repeat courses than other students. They are also more likely to drop out of college and never return (Warburton et al., 2001).

Ishitani (2003) investigated the “longitudinal effects of being a first-generation student on attrition” (p. 433) and found that after the first semester of college, first-generation students had a survival rate 9% less than students whose parents graduated from college. After the sixth semester, first-generation students had a survival rate that was 22% less than the rate of students whose parents graduated from college.

Summary. First-generation students are defined as students whose parents did not attend college and who are part of the first generation in their family to attend (Warburton et al., 2001). These students are often far behind their counterparts whose parents attended college. Many of their challenges are a result of the lack of information their parents can provide about college, lack of knowledge about the cost of financing a college education, and ignorance about college course rigor, professional expectations, and course structure (Schultz, 2004). When they do enroll in college, first-generation students have a number of challenges, both socially and academically. They are less likely to be engaged on campus, which ultimately has a negative impact on their academic success. However, if they have high aspirations prior to attending college, they are more likely to have better academic results.

The literature is replete with information on the challenges associated with not having parents who attended college. Although this information is very beneficial in creating support for these students, there appears to be a lack of research on the various student subpopulations who identify as being first-generation. Gaining an understanding of how being in a subpopulation while identifying as a first-generation college student would be very beneficial in crafting effective programs and policies in higher education.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs. In particular, I sought to understand how students who identified as being African American, a part of the Millennial generation, and coming from a rural town make meaning of their experiences at a PWI by exploring the experiences of these students at PWIs across the Midwest. Two research questions guided this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs?
2. How do these students make meaning of these experiences?

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology that was used to explore the experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs, including the theoretical framework and research approach used for this study, the selection process and criteria for participants, and the process of data collection and data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT). In order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which African American and rural status affects college experience at PWIs, it was important to use a theoretical framework that explains discrimination, racism, and the intersection of multiple identities in students. CRT was the best theoretical framework for my study because it focuses

on the racialized, classed, and gendered experiences of communities of color and offers a transformative and liberating method of examining and understanding ethnic/racial, class, and gender discrimination (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). It uses transdisciplinary knowledge and the methodological base of ethnic studies, sociology, women's studies, law, and history to create a better understanding of the multiple forms of discrimination.

History of CRT. CRT was first conceptualized in the mid-1970s as a movement consisting of scholars and activists interested in transforming and studying the relationship among power, race, and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT derived from radical feminism and critical legal studies, but quickly spread to other disciplines. The early pioneers of CRT “borrowed the idea of legal indeterminacy—the idea that not every legal case has one correct outcome” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5). CRT also incorporates a critique of triumphalist history, builds on feminist insight, and is concerned with rectifying historic wrongdoings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Tenets of CRT. The basic tenets of CRT are ordinariness, interest convergence, and social construction. Ordinariness “means that racism is difficult to cure or address” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Interest convergence means that “the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 149). Social construction is defined as the “process of endowing a group of concepts with a delineation, name, or reality” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 155).

Color blindness, defined as a “belief that one should treat all persons equally, without regard to their race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144), is a term associated with CRT. Critical race theorists believe that color blindness is a remedy that can only cure the blatant

forms of discrimination because it does not address covert forms of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

CRT in education research. In education, “the race-neutral or colorblind perspective, evident in the way the curriculum presents people of color, presumes a homogenized ‘we’ in a celebration of diversity” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). For example,

current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient. As a consequence, classroom teachers are engaged in a never ending quest for “the right strategy or technique” to deal with (read: control) “at-risk” (read: African American) students. Cast in a language of failure, instructional approaches for African American students typically involve some aspect of remediation.

This race-neutral perspective purports to see deficiency as an individual phenomenon. Thus, instruction is conceived as a generic set of teaching skills that should work for all students. When these strategies or skills fail to achieve desired results, the students, not the techniques, are found to be lacking. (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 19)

To combat these race-neutral perspectives, CRT researchers allow students to tell their own stories or name their own realities through a process called counter-storytelling (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Delgado (1989) indicated that it is necessary to name one’s own reality because a large part of reality is socially constructed. By using their own voices, members of marginalized groups can use stories as a means of psychic self-preservation and to lessen their own subordination. Techniques of naming one’s own reality include chronicles, poetry, fiction, stories, and parables to illustrate the irony and false necessity of much of today’s civil rights doctrine. Counter-storytelling is also used to expose and critique the normalized discussions that perpetuate racial stereotypes (Decuir & Dixson, 2004).

CRT can also be used to express the experiences of African American students at PWIs (Solorzano et al., 2000). Solorzano et al. (2000) found that African American students at PWIs often experience subtle forms of racism, known as microaggressions, which affect their everyday lives. To combat daily microaggressions, African American students at PWIs seek refuge in counterspaces, which are “sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 70).

For the purpose of this study, the concept of intersectionality will be used to examine the multiple identities of rural African American Millennials. In CRT, intersectionality is defined as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51). These categories along with others can be separate disadvantaging factors for individuals; those who possess multiple characteristics could find themselves at an intersection of recognized sites of oppression. For example, an African American woman is both African American and female and may experience opposition based on her being a woman or based on her being African American.

Ecology. Ecology refers to the study of organism–environment interactions (Banning, 1978). To gain an understanding of the behavior of a person, Walsh (1978) stated that one must gain an understanding of the environmental context or situation in which the behavior occurs. Moos (1974) stated two assumptions pertaining to ecology. First, the perceived climate of an environment may be inferred from behavioral perceptions. Second, the perception people create for their surroundings influences their behavior in that environment.

At institutions of higher education, ecological models can be used to provide insight into how students interact with the university environment to promote the development of their identities, such as sexual orientation and racial identity development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). These models can also be used to determine how campus environments may be shaped to encourage optimal growth and development. In student affairs, “campus ecology” refers to the study of “college students and their interactions with their campus environment” (Banning, 1978, p. 5). By using an ecological perspective to study higher education, campus ecologists are able to focus on individual students, who are usually at the center of student affairs work and student development, and their surrounding people, policies, and places.

In this study, I investigated the ways in which rural African American Millennials interacted in the college environment. I wanted to understand whether these students’ perception of their campus environments affected the way they behaved. I also looked for the impact that these students have on their college environments.

Summary. Critical race theory was used as a foundation for this study because rural African American Millennials are a population that is rarely discussed in the literature. Applying the models and techniques associated with CRT gives these students a voice and allows them to tell their counterstories to what others have described as normal. While giving their counterstories, students gave their perceptions of racism and other factors that may have a negative effect on their college experiences. CRT also allowed me to address the intersectionality of these students. My participants had the opportunity to discuss themselves as a single entity instead of choosing one of the multiple identities they had. For instance, students did not have to speak only about the African American aspect of their lives or only about the

rural part of their lives; instead they were able to talk about all aspects of their lives and how the combination of identities affected their experiences at a PWI. This synthesis will be very helpful in creating resources specifically for this population.

Ecology refers to the interaction between an organism and an environment (Banning, 1978). The form of ecology that is most germane to this study is campus ecology. Students in this study came from locations that are completely different from their campus environment. Viewing their experience through the lens of campus ecology sheds light on the interaction between these students and their new environment.

Research Approach

Qualitative research. In this study, I captured the voices of the participants through a qualitative research method. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Creswell (2007) explained that the final presentation and written report of qualitative research “includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action” (p. 37). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that qualitative research uses a range of empirical materials—personal experience, case study, introspection, interview, and life study—that describe problematic and routine meanings and moments in individuals’ lives.

Creswell (2007) further stated that qualitative research should be used when an issue or problem needs to be explored or when a detailed understanding of an issue is needed. Qualitative research should also be used when there is a need to better understand a setting or context in which participants address an issue or problem. Finally, qualitative research should be

used when theories about certain samples and populations are inadequate and new theories need to be developed.

The experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs have not been included in previous literature. It was important to explore the experiences and reflections of this population in order to collect information about how these students make meaning of their experiences while attending PWIs rather than describe assumptions about their experiences that could be inaccurate.

Phenomenology. I used a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs. A phenomenological study offers explanations of the meaning for multiple individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon or a concept by focusing on their commonalities (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology focuses on the experience itself and the process of how that experience is transformed into consciousness. (Merriam, 2009).

Critical qualitative research. Critical qualitative research is used to critique, examine, and uncover the cultural, psychological, and social assumptions that limit and structure our ways of being and thinking in the world (Merriam, 2002). The heart of critical research is power dynamics: “Questions are asked about who has power, how it’s negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on” (Merriam, 2009, p. 35). In education, critical qualitative theory raises questions about whose “interests are being served by the way the educational system is organized, who really has access to particular programs, who has the power to make changes, and what are the outcomes of the way in which education is structured” (Merriam, 2009, p. 35). Critical qualitative researchers not only seek to understand what is going on, but also attempt to bring about a better society by critiquing the way things are

done. Critical qualitative research can be combined and used with other qualitative methodologies.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was utilized for the participant selection in this study. Purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Participants were recruited using a network sampling method, which is one of the most common forms of purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). It requires the researcher to identify key participants that meet the study’s established criteria for participation. In order to participate in this study, each participant had to identify as being African American (or Black), being from a hometown with fewer than 50,000 residents that was not within 50 miles of a metropolitan city, being born after 1982, and attending a PWI in the Midwest for graduate or undergraduate education. As participants were interviewed, they were asked to refer other individuals who met the required criteria for participation.

I also relied on open recruitment as a means to gain participants. I posted flyers on campuses and sent an e-mail to students and asked that they forward the e-mail to others (see Appendix A). When individuals responded to the e-mail and showed interest in the study, I contacted them to answer any questions they had and determined if they were willing to participate in this study. Once participants confirmed their willingness to participate in the study, I scheduled interviews at a location they selected.

A total of six individuals participated in this study. Participants were undergraduate and graduate students from PWIs located in the Midwest who identified as being from a rural area, a

Millennial, and African American (or Black). The participant sample for this study included both men and women.

Data Collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted at the participants' respective institutions in a location selected by the participant. Prior to starting the interviews, participants received an informed consent document which I also read aloud; participants signed it after all their questions were answered. The informed consent forms gained participants' permission to interview them while also explaining confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. A copy of the informed consent document can be found in Appendix B.

After signing the informed consent document, the interviews were conducted using the same protocol; however, the interviews were semi-structured in nature to allow for unscripted and spontaneous dialogue and conversation with each participant. Therefore, each interview had a unique flow and each participant was able to provide valuable information. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded with a digital recorder. As suggested by Merriam (2009), I also recorded written field notes of my impressions and observations during the interviews. Before analyzing the data, I transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim. The transcribed data were stored on a secure flash drive and kept in a locked cabinet.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data in qualitative research consists of organizing and preparing the data for analysis, creating themes through a coding process, and representing data in tables, figures, or a discussion (Creswell, 2007). I followed Creswell's (2007) outline of how a phenomenological

study should be analyzed. I began by reading the transcripts multiple times to gain a full understanding of the participants' voices. Then I went through the data and highlighted important statements, quotes, and sentences that described the participants' experiences of the phenomenon, a process Creswell refers to as horizontalization, and developed clusters of meaning and themes. I gave a textural description by writing descriptions of the participants' experiences using the significant statements and themes. I then used a process called imaginative variation, using significant statements and themes to create a description of the setting or context that "influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Finally, "a composite description that presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 62) was constructed.

In a phenomenological study, researchers who have prior experience with the phenomenon typically explore their own experiences in order to examine the magnitude of the experience and to also become aware of personal viewpoints, assumptions, and prejudices (Merriam, 2009). This examination of the researcher's personal viewpoints is called epoche or bracketing. During bracketing, the prejudices of the researchers are temporarily set aside or bracketed so that he or she can examine consciousness itself.

As a rural African American Millennial who attended multiple PWIs, I have personal biases regarding my perception of PWIs and the experiences rural African American Millennials have at these institutions. I realized that I was emotionally invested in this study, so I used multiple validation strategies to minimize my personal biases. These strategies included triangulating or confirming data from multiple sources, having the study reviewed and revised by the participants, and having other researchers examine the procedures (Creswell, 2007).

The accuracy of my interpretations and themes was verified through triangulation of the data. Triangulation is used to find regularities in the data by comparing different situations, methods, and sources to determine if the same patterns keep recurring (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). For this study, I asked colleagues to act as peer reviewers to scan the raw data and determine if the findings are reasonable based on the data. I also made use of member checking with my participants to solicit feedback on my emerging findings. Finally, I took field notes to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions and to create a better understanding of the participants' perceptions.

Summary

In this qualitative study, I used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs. The sample for this study was acquired using network sampling and open recruitment and consisted of six participants from various PWIs in the Midwest.

Individuals were asked to sign an informed consent document prior to participating in the study. I interviewed the participants using semi-structured interview questions and recorded their responses using an electronic recorder. I transcribed the interviews verbatim by hand.

To analyze the data, I read each transcript to become familiar with the data and highlighted important information to identify themes, which I used to create descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon studied. The data were triangulated through member checking and peer review.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Interviewing these students was the most enjoyable task of the dissertation process. These amazing students shared their unique and interesting histories, and they were all eager to clear their busy calendars to schedule a meeting time with me. Their passion for this topic was evident through their encouragement and support for me in my quest to complete this dissertation.

This chapter summarizes the results of the study. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs and how they make meaning of these experiences. Due to the large amounts of data collected, thorough ongoing analysis of only the data believed to be most important to this study has been included in this chapter. The overarching themes that emerged from the research are as follows: the presence of college aspirations, desire to attend an HBCU, experiencing culture shock, lack of academic preparation, experiencing microaggressions, lack of parental involvement, and no desire to return home after graduation. The themes combined form the basis for describing the lived experience of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Data

Name	Population of Hometown	Year in College	Sex	First-Generation
Faye	350	Grad	Female	Yes
Marie	600	Grad	Female	Yes
Felisha	31,500	Senior	Female	Yes
Lindsey	19,000	Junior	Female	Yes
Will	25,000	Senior	Male	No
David	12,000	Senior	Male	No

Overview of Participants

Faye. Faye is a 24-year-old graduate student at a large predominantly White public research I institution located in the Midwest. She received her undergraduate degree from an HBCU located in the South. I was given Faye's e-mail address by a colleague and I sent her an e-mail about the nature of my study. She responded that she was very interested in participating.

Faye grew up in a very small rural community in the Southeast. Her parents are happily married and she has six half-sisters and one half-brother. She is the youngest of her siblings and is her mother and father's only child together. Neither of Faye's parents attended college. Her mother completed high school, but her father quit school in the fifth grade in order to go to work.

Up until about the age of 10, Faye worked with her father on their farm as they managed about 20 acres of tobacco. When her father felt he was getting too old to continue harvesting tobacco, he switched to growing and managing a garden:

We switched over to a garden growing vegetables, tomatoes, collards, turnips, pretty much everything you can think of that it is a plant. We also had pigs, we had about four pigs, and I don't know how many chickens. . . . At one point we had about 30 chickens, but then we got hungry and it then kind of dwindled down to about 10.

Faye grew up in a predominantly White rural community with a population of about 350 residents. She explained that she only had one neighbor on "the other side of our garden." Because she did not have many neighbors, her church family was "like my neighbors." She mentioned that in her community, "it doesn't matter what color you are, everybody talks to everybody." She stated that she did not see Black people on a daily basis and that she saw and interacted with other Black people mainly at church and school.

Faye's community only had one school system and, as she explained, "most of the people that you start elementary school with are the same people you graduate high school with." Although she did not speak a lot about the relationship between White and Black students at her high school, she expressed that she felt White students had an advantage over Black students in her community:

I think about all of the Black people in my high school and all of the White people in my high school. . . . Of those [White] people, most of them were if not loaded [with money], they were right there at it or they were mid to high class and most of those [White] students were in the AP classes, straight As and everything. They already knew what was destined for them [after completing high school]. And then it was like, you have most of the Black folks, they didn't know, because they didn't know they could or that they had the ability to learn.

Faye felt she was very fortunate to be one of only a few Black students from her high school who had an opportunity to seek higher education.

Marie. Marie is a 24-year-old second-year graduate student at a large predominantly White research institution located in the Midwest. She is attending graduate school at the same institution where she received her bachelor's degree. Marie and I agreed to meet on her campus to conduct the interview. We initially agreed to meet in the student center but upon arriving we decided to walk around campus to find a quiet place for the interview. We finally used an open classroom in the arts and sciences building.

Marie was born in a very small, predominantly White town located in the Midwest. The population of her hometown was about 600 residents, and her family was one of only three Black families living there. Her parents have a total of four children; she is the only girl and the youngest of her siblings.

In her community, Marie stated that “everybody knew everybody.” Unlike the other Black families in her community, Marie's family was considered to be an “upper class Black family” even though neither of her parents attended college. This status was given to her family because her father is a preacher and in her community preachers are seen as holding a position of power. Her mother is a stay-at-home mom and is originally from Marie's hometown, so her family is well known in her community.

Marie's K-12 experience was completely different from that of any other participants in this study. She was the only Black woman in her graduating class; she stated that she had been the “token Black girl” from elementary through high school. The only other Black person in her graduating class was a Black man. While in primary and secondary school, she did not see a problem with being the “token Black girl” because as she stated, “that is all I knew.”

Felisha. Felisha is a 21-year-old college senior attending a large predominantly White research institution located in the Midwest. As had happened with Marie, Felisha and I had our initial contact in the student center, but the lack of privacy there caused us to look for a different location. She suggested that we conduct the interview in a quiet study room located on the first level of a privately owned off-campus student housing facility. It is important to note that Felisha's answers were short, but they gave a wonderful account of her experiences.

Felisha was from a small rural town of about 31,500 residents located in the Midwest. She was the only participant in this study whose hometown was majority Black, which was somewhat surprising to me considering that her hometown was located in the Midwest. She explained that my reaction was similar to how everyone else reacts when she mentions that her rural hometown is mostly Black: "everybody think [it] is crazy because it's a li'l small country town with mostly Black people." She herself did not think that her hometown was small; she referred to it as being "condensed." She described her hometown as being a place where children can grow up, older people could retire, and everyone knew each other. She felt that most people who graduated from high school in her hometown only had two options: work at a factory or get away.

Felisha's hometown had two public high schools that were rivals. One high school was predominantly Black and she referred to it as being "hood and thuggish." The other high school, which she attended, had an even mix of Black and White students. She described her high school as being a pretty easy-going environment where everyone knew each other. She did not recall any racial incidents at her school and she spoke of only good experiences.

Although the student population of Felisha's high school was split evenly among White and Black students, she took classes with mostly White students because she was in advanced

classes. Few of the other Black students qualified to be in advanced classes, and there were at most only three other Black students in her classes throughout her entire high school career.

Lindsey. Lindsey is a 20-year-old junior at a large predominantly White public institution located in the Midwest. She is very energetic and absolutely loves being in college. We met at a coffee shop because we wanted a relaxed environment where we could have a good conversation.

Lindsey and her brother were raised in a single-parent household. Her mother raised her alone and Lindsey considers her to be her best friend. Her father lives in a different state and she rarely speaks to or sees him.

Lindsey is from a small rural town with a population of about 19,000 residents. The town is predominantly White, with about 10% percent of the population being Black. She described her hometown as a community that does not have any positive Black role models and lacks things for young people to do, especially young Black people.

She was the only participant in this study who depicted her hometown as being very racist. One of the largest Ku Klux Klan chapters in the country is located in the same county as her hometown, and she stated that she and other Blacks in her community have experienced racism. She told several stories about the daily occurrences of racism in her community. The first story she told was about the unfair treatment of Black people in her community and how White people are not held to the same standards:

Like when I went home for Christmas, me and my brother had gone to Wal-Mart and we got my mother a TV for Christmas. We were walking out and the little old White lady at the door stopped us and these two White guys went around us and the alarm went off and she didn't even blink and I said, "Ma'am they just set the alarm off" and she said, "Thank

you, have a good day.” . . . My brother called me a few days later and told me that he had went to Wal-Mart again and bought some DVDs and he set the alarm off and he said he was going to do like the White people did and keep walking. The next thing you know it was a big ole commotion as if he tried to steal something.

Lindsey mentioned that this type of unfair treatment happened all the time in her community.

Lindsey attended a private school from kindergarten to fifth grade. Although her family typically would not be able to afford private school, her mother was fortunate enough to have a close friend who homeschooled her children. Her mother’s friend agreed to teach Lindsey and a few other children from the community. For the six years that Lindsey attended this small private school, the largest enrollment was 18 students.

When Lindsey started public school in the sixth grade, she qualified to be in honors classes. She felt that the private school gave her the attention and education she needed to be successful in the honors classes. The only concern for Lindsey in her honors classes was the lack of other Black students in her classes. She only had three other Black students at most in her classes during the rest of her time in middle school. Although she got used to being one of a few Black students in her classes, she stated, “I still felt ostracized.”

Things did not change for Lindsey when she started high school. Once again, she was one of only a few Black students who took advanced placement (AP) classes. The other Black students at her high school did not qualify for AP courses and were in standard and remedial classes. In addition to being one of a few Black students in her classes, she also had to deal with the everyday racial segregation of her high school. This racial division was very apparent in the cafeteria, where Black students sat with other Black students, White students sat with other White students, and as she explained, “the Asian students fit in where they fit in.” The only

times Black and White students really interacted was in athletics, but Lindsey described these interactions as being superficial.

The times where you would see like Black people and White people kinda mingling a little bit more would be like revolved around athletics. . . . All the dance team girls and cheerleaders would be around the football players and of course the Black boys played football and basketball. . . . Those [White] girls would talk to them as we would see even in the NBA or the NFL, so those kinda relationships would be created on a superficial basis.

Will. Will is a 23-year-old, fifth-year senior at a large predominantly White public research institution located in the Midwest. I advised a student organization that was a part of a national organization, and Will was a member of this organization. I remembered that Will had stated that he was from a small town, so I sent him an e-mail explaining the nature of the study. He responded and stated that he would like to participate and we arranged a convenient time to conduct the interview during a weekend.

Will was born in a small town located in the Midwest with a population of about 26,000 residents. He explained that his hometown was made up of about 30% African Americans, 48% Whites, and the remaining percentage divided among Asians and Hispanics. The city is home to industrial plants, power plants, and manufacturing plants. Will described the city as having a big growth spurt due to the formation of more industrial plants. He feels that most people stereotype his city as being very small, but when they visit, they realize it is not like a typical rural town.

The unique aspect of the town's make up is that most of the adults living in the community relocated to this area to work in the plants. This was the case for Will's parents: his father migrated from Chicago to this small town to work in an industrial plant. His mother

relocated with his father and works as a teacher. Will's parents are married and are both college graduates.

When describing his high school, he labeled it as being very diverse for a high school in a small town. Even though the population of the city was composed of mostly White people, Black students were a majority at his high school. White students were the next highest population and there were a large number of other ethnic populations (e.g., Native American, Asian, Hispanic, and African). His high school had a Black principal and a lot of Black teachers. He explained that having Black administrators and teachers was very abnormal for his area and he could not explain how this happened at his high school.

Overall, Will described his high school experience as being good. He felt he learned a lot at his high school and was prepared for college. A big part of his college preparation was the AP classes he took. Despite having a majority Black student population at his high school, his AP classes comprised mostly White and Asian students, "so that was an experience and prepped me for when I got to college."

David. David is a 23-year-old senior at a large predominantly White research institution located in the Midwest. I knew him prior to interviewing him from our involvement in the student organization I alluded to in Will's story, but he was also referred by Will. They were not from the same hometown, but they each knew that they were from rural locations. After Will gave me David's information, I sent him an e-mail and he responded stating that he was willing to participate in the study. We initially set up an interview, but he texted me and stated that he could not do the interview because he had other obligations. We set up another interview and the same thing happened. After two attempts, we finally were able to set a solid time to conduct the interview via phone.

David is from a small town located about 45 minutes from the nearest big city. The town has about 12,000 residents, with Black people making up about 35% of the population. Like most of the participants in the study, his hometown was majority White and other races were almost non-existent. David described the community as having little to no racism or negative racial occurrences.

David grew up in a middle class household with happily married parents. He was the second participant in the study whose parents both obtained college degrees, and they were very involved in his academics. His parents believe that education “is the key to success,” so they instilled the importance of education in him at an early age.

David’s small hometown had one school system where most students attended the same school from kindergarten to twelfth grade. He described his grade school experience as being normal, but like many of the other participants in this study, he took AP classes in which he was one of only a few Black people. Despite the lack of other Black students in his classes, he made it clear that he did not experience any racism.

There weren’t any problems or any racial tension at my [high] school. We [Black and White students] all got along well. We had all been in school together since kindergarten and it has never been any tension. . . . We’re all still good friends till this day.

David’s aspiration to attend college came at a very early age because his parents instilled in him the value of higher education. His only option other than college was the military, and he did not want to join the military.

For me, that [military] was never an option. I was raised that, you are either going to college or you are going to the military. . . . I pretty much knew I was going to college from a very early age, like elementary school.

Discussion of the Themes

The presence of college aspirations. Despite being from rural communities that did not have college cultures, all of the participants in the study had aspirations of attending college. For the purpose of this study, college aspirations are defined as having the desire to attend college prior to graduating from high school. As students discussed their experience of gaining aspirations of attending college, it was apparent that these students gained their aspirations at different points in their lives and different factors played a major role in the cause of these aspirations.

For instance, Will and David both had college aspirations as early as they could remember, and their parents were very influential in their decision to attend college. Will stated, I didn't have a choice [about whether to attend college]. . . . My parents have always harped on the importance of college, the overall experience of college, and networking. I mean naturally out of all of my friends, I always knew I was going to college. There wasn't ever a doubt in my mind that I was going.

Similarly, David stated,

For me, college was never an option. I was raised [by parents] that, you are either going to college or you are going to the military. . . . I pretty much knew I was going to college from a very early age, like elementary school.

Although Felisha has always had college aspirations, she did not have pressure from family. Instead she saw college as an outlet.

I always knew I was going to college. I always knew I had to get out and go somewhere. College was my only outlet and being that nobody else in my family had been to college,

I knew that it was something I had to do. I knew I wanted to do it because no one else [in my family] had done it before.

Furthermore, Felisha wanted to attend college because she wanted a better opportunity than others in her family.

All of the grown-ups in my family had a job at the factory. My mother went away to the Navy when she first graduated [high school], but when she retired from the Navy and came back, she went and worked at the factory. Even after [people from my hometown] leave and come back to [my hometown], the only way for [people from my hometown] to work is if you do some type of factory job. I didn't want to work in a factory so my only outlet to get out and do something was to go to college.

For some participants, college aspirations did not occur at an early age, nor did their parents play a major role in their decision to attend college. Neither Faye nor Marie had aspirations of attending college until they started high school. Faye stated,

Not knowing much about higher education, I was like I don't know if [my family] would have the funds or if I would go [to college], and I really did not think about college until I got to high school and got into Upward Bound, the Trio program. I got into it freshman year [of high school], which is different than most students who usually get into [Upward Bound] their sophomore and junior year and so I was the first person to start Upward Bound my freshman year. . . . Upward Bound really prepared me for college and that is really what opened my eyes to, you know, everything higher education.

Marie had a similar experience in that she had no intentions of attending college until her senior year of high school.

I always had good grades. I graduated from high school with a 3.9 and I was always involved in clubs and stuff, but my goal was never to put that on a college application. It was just to do well in high school and actually graduate [from high school].

Like Faye, Marie was introduced to college through a college preparation program. She stated, I wasn't thinking about college until my senior year. At the end of my junior year, I had applied for this thing called the Governor's Scholars program in Kentucky and it was a program where we went to a college campus for six weeks and majored in whatever we wanted and we got the college experience.

In addition to the college preparation program, Marie was also influenced by a guidance counselor who pushed her to apply to college.

The person who introduced me to the idea of going to college was my guidance counselor. Even today, I give her the credit for putting that into me, 'cause if it wasn't for [my guidance counselor], I wouldn't have ever taken the ACT, I wouldn't have sent out an application, so she was who introduced me to that, during the beginning of my senior year. She's the one that pushed me to apply for scholarships and do my ACT, um before that, I wasn't thinking about it, because there was no African American that I knew that went to college from my high school.

Desire to attend an HBCU. Most of the participants had an idea about the types of institutions they wanted to attend when they began the college application process. Marie wanted to attend a PWI because of what she had seen in media representations of college life. She stated, "I saw a lot of hype of the college on TV as far as sports and the advertisements that go on. They [the media] hyped [the institution] up and I wanted to get out of the small town." David chose his PWI because it offered the major he wanted.

I was looking into good engineering programs, but I didn't really want to get too far away from home. [The institution I wanted to attend] had one of the best engineering programs in the nation, probably the best in our state, so I wanted to go there.

However, half of the participants in the study had a desire to attend institutions that were connected to their race. Using their voices, I will share the participants' desires to attend HBCUs in this section and present the factors that hindered some of the students from attending these institutions.

Why an HBCU? Faye desired to attend an HBCU for two reasons. The first was a college visit that inspired her. The second was to have the Black experience. Through Upward Bound, Faye had an opportunity to tour HBCUs while in high school. She explained,

Well in Upward Bound, we went on college visits and we visited HBCUs. When we visited Dubois University, I really fell in love with it because it was a nice environment, people were nice, and I realized I wanted to go to a historical Black college because I wanted to see Black people everyday, instead of once a month.

She further explained why seeing Black people every day was important to her:

Because my high school was predominantly White and then like the sports teams were predominantly White, I wanted to get the feeling of having everyone look like me in a big community, like a family reunion. I didn't have that feeling at home.

Felisha also wanted to attend an HBCU. Although she did not mention that she wanted the "Black experience," she explained that she wanted to get away from her home state and attend Spelman College.

I applied to everywhere as far away from [my home state] as possible. I was applying to everywhere else, like Georgia, Florida, California, Louisiana and all these type places. I

got into Spelman, which was my first choice school and I really wanted to go there. . . . It [Spelman] was something I always heard about. You know how you always hear about the big prestigious schools; well I heard about Spelman and that it was in Atlanta and that it was a Black all-girls school. I looked it up and researched it my sophomore year. Then my senior year, I made sure I applied.

Lindsey also looked at institutions outside of her state, focusing her college search solely on HBCUs in other states.

Initially I wanted to be a Spelman girl and I was going to go to an HBCU. I had gone and toured Spelman my freshman year of high school I think. I had also looked into Hampton and looked into Howard.

Hindrances to attending an HBCU. Of the participants who wanted to attend an HBCU for undergraduate studies, Faye was the only one to actually go. Cost and attendance were major factors in why Felisia and Lindsey did not enroll in HBCUs despite their strong desires to attend. Lindsey explained,

Whenever it got closer to the time [to apply for college], I had realized that I didn't want to be in debt my entire life or I didn't want to graduate with any crazy amount of debt. I decided that I would rather go to a school [in state] and be ok with being or having money, than to go to the school I would want to and end up being broke.

Felisha also explained why she did not attend an HBCU:

I got into Spelman, which was my first choice school and I really wanted to go there, but then my grandma ended up getting sick and she had a stroke and I was like I didn't want to go away too far [for school] because she's sick and my grandma was like the main matriarch in my family.

Experiencing culture shock. After students were admitted to their institutions, they moved to their new cities to attend school. While transitioning to these new locations, an overarching theme of culture shock emerged. Culture shock was experienced at different levels by the participants.

Respondents who were from very small rural hometowns seemed to experience culture shock a little more and had more difficulties adjusting to their new environments than participants from larger rural hometowns. Regardless of hometown size, all of the rural African American Millennials had to get adjusted to their new environments just like any other college student moving to a new location. However, some participants had a little more than the typical adjustment issues. For instance, Felisha, Faye, and Marie struggled with adjusting to the larger cities. Specifically, Felisha had challenges adjusting to larger roads and more traffic:

Like going to the mall you got to get on the interstate and I'm not used to all that because being in [my hometown] you can get to somewhere in like five to ten minutes. But here, it takes like fifteen to twenty minutes, then traffic, ahh, I hate traffic, it's the worst thing ever. I don't have to deal with traffic in [my hometown], but then when I get here, all this traffic, all these people, all these different roads, interstates, and exits. It was frustrating for a while, but it took me a while to get used to that.

Marie was shocked by the size of the city her university was located in and was excited about the stores and amenities it had to offer.

I know I just took at least a day or two to drive myself around to see if I could actually get around [the larger city]. . . . There was so much that you could do, like you just research and take time to see what was all offered in [the larger city], like there was a lot to entertain you. . . . There was also a lot of different races, every time you turn around,

you don't just go into a store and see just White people, you don't go into a store and just see Black people. There were different people [from other races] everywhere. I felt like the city was just big! And I still don't think I have been all over the city yet.

Similarly, Faye was surprised and excited by the close proximity of amenities at her institution because in her hometown she had to travel long distances to get food and other resources:

I could leave my dorm and walk to wherever I need to, but back home, you would have to jump in a car and drive to wherever you are going. . . . [In college] you could easily walk from this place to this place or this place to this place and then there were like fast food joints everywhere; . . . everything was just closer instead of having to drive 30 to 45 minutes away, you could easily go somewhere.

Beyond the culture shock experienced in their new cities, some participants were amazed by the different types of people they saw on campus. For example, Marie was shocked by the different types of Black people at her school.

The initial experience [of college], the first time was some kinda frightening because it was probably more people on that campus right then than in my hometown. It was kinda frightening because it was a lot of people around me, culture shock definitely. [My college] was so diverse and you don't see that many shades of people in my town so it was definitely culture shock and definitely kinda frightening at first. . . . There wasn't just African Americans and White people, there were all kinds. That was a culture shock. Also, Black people are different up here. I mean the way they [Black people] dressed was different than what I had seen. [Black] people down my way do wear baggy jeans, they try to look hood but Black people up here, you do have people who wear baggy

jeans, but you then have the African American males that looked preppy that wore nice clothes. I didn't know you had those different types of Black people, I just thought they were always going to be hood. With the girls, you had your prissy kind and then you had your hood girls. I didn't know that there was a difference or there could be a difference in Black people. I just thought they were all ghetto or all hood from what I had seen.

Faye and Lindsey were both afraid of other Black people from larger cities because of stereotypes they had formed. Faye stated,

I wouldn't stop in Durham, because Durham is the hood and they like to kill people. Well this is a perception because Durham is like 75% or 76% Black people and a lot of those Black people have been put in a limelight of being like criminals and trying to live up to that. And a lot of them have taken on criminal actions when they are really not criminals or hoodrats. And so, because you see everyday on the news, everyday, there's not a day that Durham is not on the news like somebody getting shot, killed, stabbed so people just know, I don't want to be caught in Durham at night and that was my perception of all Durhamites/Durham folks. So when I got to [my college], that was in my mind, so when I met all those people from Durham, I was like, oh they are not hood, they ain't trying to kill me. So then it changed my whole mindset.

Lindsey had a similar experience of having negative perceptions of Black people prior to attending college. She stated, "like I didn't grow up around anybody that were from the rough areas or anything like that, so I didn't really grow up around a lot of Black people." This resulted in her gaining stereotypes about Black people, especially Black men, from urban areas.

I kinda felt like I'm used to clinching my purse or you know, looking a little bit more or maybe having negative thoughts in my head or like he [a Black man] look like he is about to rob somebody or he look like he smoke weed. I have had those thoughts before.

When asked where she gained her stereotypes from, Lindsey explained,

Kinda just like how people create perceptions towards Black people if you have not necessarily grown up around a lot of Black people or being around a lot of so-called like hood type stuff, you know kinda more urban kinda Black person.

When I probed for more of her thoughts about these stereotypes, Lindsey explained that the media played a major role in the creation of her stereotypes.

These perceptions were created from the television and media and then the perceptions that people give from the television and media about Black people. Watching the TV and media myself and then getting those same perceptions and feeding off of those people, 'cause I felt, I was always the exception to everybody.

In addition to getting adjusted to other Black students and different ethnic backgrounds at their new institutions, homosexuality was also a new experience for many of the respondents. Most importantly, the response to homosexuality varied between participants. For instance, Felisha lacked experience with homosexuality but was not shocked and welcomed it when she started college.

It [homosexuality] wasn't shock, it was kinda like whatever. I was kinda glad to see it [homosexuality], because being in [my hometown] you know, it's a smaller city. . . .

There are people in [my hometown] that I knew that are homosexual but they don't talk about it. It's like they [gay people] don't let everybody know. They know that it's going to be like a big stigma around you like, oh he's gay; so people don't talk about it much.

[Gay people] are stuck in the closet when you are back home. Then you come on campus, it's a bigger city and people are out with it [homosexuality], people are out with this, they are comfortable with who they are, they don't have to hide anything. It wasn't shocking to me because I knew it was probably going to happen. Just the fact that I was able to see it and meet people who are gay and are proud to be gay and don't have to hide it, I was kinda glad to actually see it.

For other students, homosexuality was not as exciting and it went against their beliefs.

For example, Marie had strong beliefs against homosexuality and it was a big adjustment for her when she started college.

State University is a community that accepts the LGBT community. Before I got to State University, back home that wasn't heard of. There were not LGBT people that I knew of at the time from my community and if they were they kept it low key. I know for one, a boy that I graduated with would not come out and say that he was gay, but he would continue to date girls and act like he was straight and then not confess that he was gay until about two or three years after we graduated from high school. I think it's because nobody in that community is accepting of that group and also because the county is very Christian based and you see a lot of churches and a lot of Christianity things going on in that town. Personally I am a Christian and my father is a pastor and I know what the Bible says about same sex marriages or same sex relationships, so when I got to State University, I was like whaaaa, people are doing it and don't care. Oh wow, they don't care if you see them and are out like that, so that was a very big shock to me. I didn't know how to respond to people that were like that, I can't say that I hate them initially or

didn't like them, I just didn't know how to embrace it or accept it, so yeah, that was kinda hard for me.

Racial diversity and homosexuality were not the only sources of culture shock experienced by study participants. Some study participants had trouble fitting in or feeling connected to their institutions once they started college. Three areas stood out that yielded discussion: fashion, eating, and interacting with other Black students.

Marie, Faye, and Felisha mentioned that when they arrived on campus, they noticed that their sense of fashion was completely different from that of the other Black women. This caused them to feel out of place at their institutions. Marie stated,

I think one of the challenges was just fitting in as far as maybe the clothes that I wore and the hair style that I had. Like I said earlier, where I come from is very conservative, so when I came to college, I had no weave or I didn't have no hair color, it was all my hair. And then what I wore was not name brand, was not tight, was not revealing or anything but it wasn't what everybody else was wearing. I just figured that I was behind in style, because there wasn't too many urban places where I could shop at in my hometown. . . . When I came here, it was a struggle to see other females walking around with nice clothes and looking nice and I just stuck out like a sore thumb because I was looking all countrified and you know, so that was a struggle for me. I just felt that I was an outcast on that part.

Faye explained her initial reaction to how people dressed in college:

I was like, hmm, it's a lot of freedom, a little too much. I don't know, it was like people did stuff they shouldn't have done. Like if their grandmother walked on campus they should not have had on the outfits they had on. It was like people were just free. . . . I

guess growing up in a small town, everybody kinda looks the same and then when you go somewhere different, you have like people who wore different stuff and then like they may have been showing a butt cheek, I mean it was just different. It was like the stuff I would see on TV. It was just shocking.

In the following passage, Felisha describes her experience on the first day of college and how she felt out of place.

It was a big transition because I was kinda coming from a small town and I remember the first day of class, I remember I had on a t-shirt and some jeans and tennis shoes and I remember walking outside and like watching all the girls walking around in dresses and heels. I was like where is everybody going, why is everyone dressed up, that was a shocking thing for me. Here I am looking like a country bumpkin, you know, with my backpack. I remember I had a blue Jansport backpack that I still have 'til this day and I just looked. I felt like I stood out of place a little bit.

Faye and Marie also expressed that they had issues transitioning to the food selection offered in college. Faye stated,

Given that we had the garden, I never went out to eat at a restaurant. I never went out to eat until I got to high school, when I was playing sports and stuff. Yeah, I thought Applebee's, all they had was apples and they just like made different dishes with apples. So that was a big surprise to me. . . . In the cafeteria [in college], we would have a lot of food. Like most of the kids, you know, the city folks we call, they would go to like the pizza line or the fast food line but I would always go to the home line because that is what I was used to. And it was like greens and chicken and stuff like that. . . . It was like I went there because that is what I was used to. I needed to get my vegetable, my meats,

and my bread and I would be straight. And everybody else went to the fast food line and I thought that was strange. They used to be like you should eat this and I was like no I am just going to stick to what I am used to.

Marie's hometown did not offer many fast food options, so she ate home-cooked meals growing up. She stated,

Well my mom was a stay-at-home mom until I was about 15 or 16, so she was the one always cooking. We would only go out to eat fast food when we were out shopping or something like that. And also, around my town, it's not that many fast-food restaurants either, so if you did not want McDonalds, Wendy's, or Hardee's, you are out of luck. . . . So being that my mom wasn't there [at my college] to cook my meals, all I had was fast food and junk food and my dorm stuff so I never got a home-cooked meal until somebody's mother invite me over.

Interactions with other Black students. Despite having differences in food selection, most respondents explained that they had mostly positive interactions with other Black students on campus. There were a few notable instances in which students were referred to as being "country" by their peers. For example, Lindsey stated, "they [other Black students] all knew me as little country girl." This did not bother Lindsey, but Felisha had a different response when other students treated her differently because she was from a rural hometown.

The main thing was that they [other Black students] knew I was from [my hometown], so that stigma of being from the country was always over my head. They would always think, oh you are from the country blah blah blah, you don't know anything about the city. Or they would say like little comments regarding the country that I'm supposed to

disregard because they think I'm like a country bumpkin or something. . . . I guess once I get to know people, they get over that stigma of me being from the country.

Lack of academic preparation. All of the participants with the exception of Faye suggested that college-level coursework was a lot harder than they had expected. Most of them mentioned that they were “high achievers” in high school and took advanced placement courses. Unfortunately, once they started college, they quickly realized that they were not as prepared as they thought and some of their first semester grades were lower than they expected. Marie stated,

I just felt like I wasn't prepared for college, even though my counselor put the idea in my head, she didn't prepare me for how hard it was and how much I would have to be strict on myself. So when I got to college, I didn't have any study skills, I didn't know how to study because high school was easy to me. You know it was easy to remember stuff, but when you get to college you have so much reading to do per night and then you have a test at the end of the week. It was just too much and I think at the end of my freshman year, I had a 2.3 and that was a major difference from my 3.9 in high school. I just felt like I wasn't prepared on how to study or how to manage my time at all.

Lindsey spoke of a similar experience:

My first semester was probably my most challenging one because I realized I didn't know how to study well. I could pick up on stuff when I was in high school in the lecture you know, write down notes and not even look at them again until the test and you know get an A. But that did not fly in college. So I remember, when I took all my tests for the first time, I was really caught off guard. I made Bs, Cs, and Ds.

Felisha also had difficulty adjusting to college-level work:

College was harder than I expected it to be as far as class wise. Coming from all these classes in high school where I was making As in the accelerated classes and getting college credits, I thought I was about to come to college and the classes were going to be easy. Then I got up here [my new school] and it's kinda different. I'm like dang did they teach us anything in high school because what I am learning here is totally different. So the classes seemed a little bit harder.

Will explained the differences between high school and college in the following passage:

College was different than high school. You didn't have people babying you, telling you to wake up and go to class, making you do your homework, making you study for tests, it was different. [Professors] could care less. Some want you to succeed and others really could care less. They come to class and get that money and go on about their lives. You know it was quite difficult in a sense.

Unfortunately, Lindsey's lack of preparation caused her to lose her full scholarship.

My freshman year, I had a full scholarship, full tuition + \$6200 stipend, plus I had like three other outside scholarships that equalized out to be like \$2000. After freshman year, my GPA was like a 2.3 so I lost my scholarships.

In contrast to these students, Faye felt that she was prepared for college and that she valued education more than other students.

In college, I knew it was going to get harder but I didn't understand how I was making straight As but then you have people failing these courses. Like [other students] paying all this money to go to school, but yet they want to go party Thursday through Tuesday and then think that they are going to pass.

Faye also felt that the professors at her undergraduate HBCU showed interest in her success.

The professors are totally different and even though most of my professors at [my HBCU] were White, they cared for you and they cared about your success. . . . It seemed like all professors cared about you at [my HBCU] but then at [my PWI] it's like a select few. And of course at [my HBCU], they wanted you to be successful because with the Black professors, they have already been in our shoes and they knew how hard it was for us out there, and especially the ones that were women, not only being a woman, they knew it was hard for us, so they kinda stayed on us.

Experiencing microaggressions. When asked about racism on campus, almost all of the participants stated they hardly ever experienced overt racism. However, Lindsey, Faye, and David all gave accounts of personally experiencing or seeing someone else experience microaggressions or subtle forms of racism (Solorzano et al., 2000). Of particular note was the effect on Faye, who experienced microaggressions from a professor in a class in which she was the only Black student.

I had a social entrepreneurship class with this one professor I'm not too fond of now because I got picked on this semester. . . . I mean he encouraged everyone to talk, but I always thought I was being singled out, out of everyone else in the classroom. For a long time, I thought it was only me who thought like that so I asked one of my friends. I asked does it seem like he picks on me, and she was like, yeah, he does it all the time. So after that [experiencing microaggressions], I kinda stopped blogging like I should have because he always questioned everything I would post . . . and so then I just kinda shut up in class and I stopped saying anything. I don't know if this is what you call racial profiling or whatever the term is, but I was like I never had this happen like, ouch!

David also spoke of feeling that he was not wanted at his institution. He stated, “sometimes when you are around White people, you can see that they don’t really care to see you around, you know what I mean.” This feeling was similar to the feelings Lindsey had when she saw a Black man being discriminated against by campus security.

I saw this Black guy come in [to the library], he had like little dreads and the security that was working stopped him and was like, we need to see your student ID. I’m like did they really just stop him from going to the library? When they stopped him, he was like when did they start checking IDs? I was like that is the same thing I was wondering. . . . He didn’t card me and I saw other people walk in that they didn’t card. . . . There was a White guy who walked out right behind me and he was like, “You saw that, right” and I’m like, “Yeah, that was really messed up.” He was like, “I sat in there for 20 minutes and I didn’t see the security guard card one person.”

Solorzano et al. (2000) suggested that Black students resort to counterspaces or safe places as a result of experiencing microaggressions. All of the participants in the study spoke of locations on campus where they went to feel comfortable and where they were allowed to be themselves. These locations varied. Lindsey considered the cultural center her safe place.

I go to the culture center a lot. I go because I know it’s there and it’s mostly for Black people. I know it’s going to be Black people there. It’s going to be people that I know, people that have become like mentors or kinda like role models.

Felisha spoke about going to her campus’s cultural center to hang out, but she generally went to the student center to be around other Black people. She stated, “In the [student center] is where I sat; in the [student center] there were all Black people.” David also stated, “If you want to be around [Black] people, you go to the [student center].”

Marie's counterspace was not related to her race, but to her spirituality: "My comfort spot was church and probably [the school choir]. I could be myself there." After being asked why she stated she could be herself she clarified,

I think with [the school choir], it's more so because we are Christian-based, not so much about it being Black. It's more about having the same values, the same outlook on life, and the same belief system which makes you feel comfortable with somebody.

Faye's counterspace was also not based on her race. Her counterspace was the Student Support Services office, where she retreated because it was connected to her rural identity.

Student Support Services when they were open, that is where I was and if not, I was in my room. . . . Student Support Services is what I knew, because I was used to Upward Bound and so Student Support Services was a Trio program and so it was like my Upward Bound and Upward Bound was all I knew. And so I was like, well I will just go here [Student Support Services] and the people were nice and they just welcome you and this was like my home. I set up shop in the little corner and I had my own little computer.

Lack of parental involvement. J. L. Wilson (2008) described helicopter parents as being over-involved in their students' lives. Some of the participants in this study explained that their parents were not helicopter parents and were not very involved in their college careers. Faye explained that her parents were not too involved in her college career because they did not know how the college process worked.

I was the first one [to go to college], so it was kinda like this was new for me but it was also new for them [her parents], so they really didn't know what to expect and they didn't know how this was going to work out so it was just different for them. . . . They never

came and visited. I mean . . . yeah they didn't come to visit. I went home, I tried to go home once a month.

Because Faye's parents were not very involved in her college experience and were not able to attend functions at her school, she relied on others to serve as her family on campus.

I spent a lot of time in Student Support Services and so I had a mentor. She was an angel sent from heaven. During the first year I was there, I got accepted into the honors college and so she came to like the reception because my parents couldn't attend. Most of them in that office, they were really, it was like they were my family, my second family, so I would go in there every day. I would be in there all the time and that was like my second family.

Marie spoke of her parents' lack of involvement in paying for her tuition.

During college, they [my parents] didn't help me financially because they really didn't have any money of their own. My car was paid for with scholarships all four years.

They didn't help me financially, even though they always offered, they didn't because I wouldn't accept it because I knew they didn't have it. But they supported me with the love and encouragement.

Furthermore, her parents hardly ever visited her and on the few instances they did it was for other reasons.

[My parents visited] maybe two times a year and then one of those was because there was a [church] conference up here that they usually have once a year. I would see them then.

There wasn't anytime that they just wanted to come up here and visit.

Although Felisha's mother did not play a major role in her college career, she did provide emotional support. She explained,

My mother gave me support, by just letting me know I could. Like when I would call and be like oh my God, this class is so hard I can't do it, she just gave me support like you can do it, you are at school, this is what you wanted to do. You have to finish it, you can't stop. And my family here in [the city I moved to], they supplied me with food and things like that and a getaway from campus when I don't want to stay on campus. I would always go over there and chill with them and just know that family was around me that loved me and they were all rooting for me to finish college because they knew that I wanted to finish because nobody in my family ever did it before.

No desire to return home after graduation. Many rural communities lose college educated residents due to out-migration or people moving to other locales after obtaining their degrees (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). All of the study participants except for Faye stated that they will not be returning to their hometowns after graduation, primarily because their hometowns did not have many employment opportunities or social opportunities for them.

Lindsey explained why she would not return to her community:

Because it's small and it's nothing to do. Because of so many White people and it lacks culture and it lacks diversity. I want to be around people that, you know if I want to go somewhere for salsa night and if I want to get some jerk chicken, or if I want to, you know, go to the theater and see a movie that is targeted towards Black people, you know a Tyler Perry movie, like I want to be able to go to the theater and know that man [Tyler Perry] is getting his money's worth. So when I go to the movie, it's not going to be just me and my momma sitting in the theater. On top of that, I don't really like towns, I prefer cities. I am not a slow-paced type of person.

For some, job opportunities were the primary reason for not returning to their hometowns. This was the case for Marie.

I don't plan to be back in [my hometown] at all. I feel like urban towns and bigger cities, since I'm in education, have more African American students that are struggling in the inner city schools than you do in the small town schools. So my idea is to be somewhere I'm really needed and I can really make a difference so I would choose a city versus a small town.

Felisha also had no intention of returning to her hometown. She feels that there are no opportunities for her there and that the only reason she goes back now is to see her family.

I will always come back to visit. When I visit and I'm there long enough, I might do little things like volunteer at the Boys and Girls club, go back to schools and talk to the kids and things like that, but as far as move back and do things fully in [my hometown], no. I don't want to move back. . . . even when I visit, I can't stay too long because there isn't nothing to do and it sucks the energy out of you.

David has no intention of returning to his hometown after completing his degree. His hometown does not provide the same opportunities as larger cities, so he will focus on relocating to a bigger city or possibly another state.

I got used to living in a bigger city and obviously there is more things available to you when living in a bigger city. My major is now sports administration and it's really hard to find a job in that field in a smaller city.

Faye was the only person I interviewed who had aspirations of returning to her hometown after graduating from college. She wanted to return and build a child development center

because she felt that a lot of children in her hometown got into trouble because there was not much to do there. She stated,

So I want to go out to different communities similar to [my hometown] and find out what they are doing, being like a sponge, so I can take it back and like have those skills and implement a program in [my hometown].

CHAPTER 5

Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs and how they make meaning of these experiences. This section will give an analysis and interpretation of the themes that emerged from the study. The following areas will be discussed: the presence of college aspirations, desire to attend an HBCU, experiencing culture shock, lack of academic preparation, experiencing microaggressions, lack of parental involvement, and no desire to return home after graduation.

The Presence of College Aspirations

Students from rural areas generally lack college aspirations due to the lack of college culture in their rural communities (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010), such as few or no college-educated residents, no college recruiters visiting their high schools, and very few teachers or counselors instilling the importance of college in their students. For the participants in this study, most of their communities lacked college cultures for these reasons.

It is important to note that study participants were mostly from predominantly White communities. The few people in their communities who had college degrees (e.g., teachers, principals, doctors) were White. This created even less of a college culture for Black students because they hardly ever saw college-educated people from their ethnic background.

Considering that all of the students in this study did not see many people who looked like them with college degrees and that they were from rural hometowns that lacked college cultures, one could assume that most of the participants in this study would not have had high aspirations of attending college while in elementary and high school. However, the majority of the students in the study had aspirations of attending college from a very young age. The catalysts behind the creation of these college aspirations included parental influence, better job opportunities, and a desire to get away from their boring rural environments.

Parents proved to be very critical in the college aspirations for some students, particularly those who were not first-generation college students. This is consistent with previous findings, such as those of Warburton et al. (2001), that students whose parents attended college were more likely to have college aspirations than students whose parents did not attend college. It appears that the parents of non-first generation students created a college culture within their homes and this led to these students having aspirations of attending college at an early age. For the students who were first-generation college students, their parents had some influence on them, but their primary reasons for wanting to attending college were that they were not happy living in a small town and they wanted better opportunities than their hometowns had to offer.

A few participants did not have aspirations of attending college until they reached high school. These students were from very isolated rural communities that were predominantly White and had a population of fewer than 1000 residents. Even without having aspirations of attending college until high school, these students were gifted and took college preparatory courses while in high school. Their aspirations of attending college seemed to be gained through college preparation programs such as Upward Bound and interactions with college-educated mentors.

Despite taking AP courses and excelling academically while in high school, none of the participants stated that they were recruited by any colleges, so they were left to locate and apply to higher education institutions on their own. This is disheartening because these students were gifted, took AP courses, and had extremely high GPAs, but colleges did not see a need or did not want to allocate the proper resources to effectively recruit them.

These students wanted opportunities to attend college and wanted to feel as if their hard work was noticed, but institutions of higher education seemed to overlook their successes and focus on locales that were highly populated and had larger concentrations of gifted students. This is the complete opposite of the recruitment process for athletes from rural areas. Colleges and universities tend to utilize a great deal of resources to send recruiters to small rural communities to recruit young athletes. This indicates that colleges and universities consider rural African American Millennial scholars to be less valuable than rural African American Millennial athletes and that they are not worthy of being recruited by institutions of higher education.

In addition to recruitment, there seems to be a strong need for mentorship for rural African American Millennials during their K-12 experience. Although most of the participants in this study had aspirations of attending college, they did not know the steps for applying or being admitted, nor did they know how they were going to finance their post-secondary education. Marie is an example of the positive effects of having a mentor. She gave “all of the credit” to her mentor for being the reason she became interested in college, took the SAT, and applied to college. This suggests that some rural African American Millennials benefit from having mentors, especially when they are thinking about attending college.

College preparation programs were also very beneficial to the college aspirations of rural African American Millennials. This was the case for Faye, who had a wonderful experience in Upward Bound that proved to be the avenue by which she gained aspirations for attending college. This is consistent with the findings of Grimard and Maddaus (2004) that college preparation programs expose rural students to college and aid in increasing their aspirations of attending college.

Desire to Attend an HBCU

When deciding on colleges, some rural African American Millennials wanted to attend institutions where they felt they belonged. For some students this meant choosing a school because of the majors it offered, but for a few others, this meant attending an HBCU where most people looked like them. This was evident in the fact that Faye stated that she wanted to attend an HBCU because she wanted her college experience to feel like a “family reunion.”

Many of these students came from hometowns and attended high schools that were predominantly White. Although there were other Black students at their high schools, the participants took most of their classes with White students because they were in AP classes. The desire study participants had to attend HBCUs could be the result of their feeling isolated at their high schools and in their predominantly White classes. This void and alienation in their high school classes could be the catalyst for these students’ wanting to be in an environment where they would feel welcomed, hence their desires to attend HBCUs.

HBCUs also seemed to be an environment where students felt they could see other African American students who were high achievers. Many of the study participants were one of a few high-achieving African American students at their high schools, so most of them did not have the opportunity to meet other African American students who were as academically gifted

as they were. Lindsey spoke of this as she explained that as a result of her being a smart and articulate Black woman, she “was always the exception to everybody” and “the Black people felt I was kinda White and the White people knew I was still Black.” She was alienated from both White and Black people at her high school. Situations like these made her want to attend an HBCU to find people who were like her.

Belonging was the key to why these students wanted to attend HBCUs. Solorzano et al. (2000) suggested that Black students seek refuge in counterspaces or safe places where they are allowed to be themselves and can be around other Black students while at PWIs. It appears that African American Millennials in this study sought to attend HBCUs because they viewed these institutions as counterspaces to their predominantly White rural hometowns and their predominantly White high schools.

Despite wanting to attend an HBCU for undergraduate studies, only one participant from this study was able to do so. Financial obligations and distance were the two main factors that hindered the other students from attending HBCUs. This finding is not shocking because previous researchers have suggested that rural students have a hard time financing their college education (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004). Furthermore, the students who were not able to attend HBCUs wanted to attend private HBCUs that were located in different states. This created additional financial barriers for these students because they would have to pay for the cost of relocating, private school tuition, and other expenses with living in a new city.

Private HBCUs seemed to be first choice for students who wanted to attend HBCUs but were not able. Institutions such as Spelman College, Howard University, and Hampton University were named when respondents discussed the schools they wished to attend. The

student who was able to attend an HBCU attended a state-funded public HBCU. One of the factors in her attending the public HBCU was its relatively lower cost than private HBCUs.

Regardless of the type of HBCU the participants in this study desired to attend, the overarching theme is that they wanted to be in an environment where they felt they belonged. They wanted to be around other students who looked like them, have teachers who looked like them, and be at an institution they felt cared about them. As shown by Faye's experience, when these students are put into the HBCU environment, they could have a great opportunity to succeed academically and to connect with other students who look like them. They would also feel supported by faculty and administrators as Faye suggested while describing her experience at an HBCU.

Experiencing Culture Shock

Previous researchers have suggested that rural students have a hard time being successful in college due to their lack of experience in bigger towns and cities (Bradbury, 2008; Schultz, 2004). Furthermore, Moos (1974) suggested that a person's behavior is influenced by their perception of their environment. The transitions for the students in this study were consistent with the findings of previous researchers in that their transitions to their new larger cities were difficult and the way they responded to these environments was generated by their perceptions of these environments.

The students in this study were exposed to a number of things that were not prevalent in their hometowns. New experiences such as seeing people who were openly gay created an extra adjustment that the students in this study had to make when beginning college. Although this was beneficial for some participants who were excited about the exposure, it created stress for other study participants because gay went against their spiritual and moral beliefs. The added stress

from being exposed to different things created an environment on campus in which some rural African American students were not comfortable.

At PWIs, Black students find it hard to connect with White students and sometimes experience feelings of isolation (Davis et al., 2004; Fleming, 1984; Steele, 1999). Rural students also experience feelings of isolation because they find it hard to connect with students from other locales (Schultz, 2004). As in prior research, the students in this study struggled to connect with White students because they were Black and also found it difficult to connect with Black students from different locales.

The unique struggle for the students in this study was that they were trying to fit in while being Black and rural. Although Black students generally feel comfortable around other Black students (Solorzano et al., 2000), this was not initially true for my participants because it was hard for them to connect with other Black students from “the big city.” These students came from rural hometowns where they were not exposed to a lot of other Black people, and the media they were exposed to portrayed Black people from larger cities in a negative light. This caused them to respond to their new larger cities based on the perceptions they created from what they had seen in the media. Some of them experienced stress because they were not comfortable being around other Black students from larger cities when they started college and this sometimes led to feelings of isolation.

Lifestyle differences also played a part in why Black students from rural hometowns did not connect with other Black students from different locales. The students in this study suggested that they differed from students from other locales particularly in the areas of apparel and food choices. The rural students appeared to dress less trendily and more conservatively than students from different locales. They also had to get adjusted to eating fast food, which was

not available in their hometowns. The importance of these lifestyle differences is that the rural African American Millennials in this study felt that they were outcasts and did not fit in because they were different from most of the other Black students.

Lack of Academic Preparation

One of the most important findings of this study was that most of the participants felt they were not academically prepared for college. This is consistent with previous findings that rural students (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Rowser, 1997) and African American students are less likely to be prepared for college than their White counterparts (Abbott, 2006; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Grimard & Maddaus, 2004). This lack of college preparation could be due to a number of factors based on the findings in this study. First, the students were in new environments that did not have any structure, and there was no one to hold them accountable. In their hometowns, study participants' parents gave them structure and held them accountable for their academic success, so being away from their parents created challenges for them. It appears that the study participants wanted structure and would have greatly benefitted if they had had support adjusting to their institutions.

Second, some students felt that their high schools did not properly prepare them for college-level work. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) suggested that 20% of the lowest performing high schools in the country were located in rural areas. This could explain why students excelled at their rural high schools but struggled at their colleges. Their rural high schools could have been lower performing schools and the teachers could have been underprepared, leaving the students to suffer as a result. When these students matriculated to college and began studies, they quickly realized that they had not learned the necessary knowledge to be successful during their first year of college.

Third, students could have been so focused on adjusting to their new cities and trying to fit in with other students that they did not spend a sufficient amount of time focusing on their academics. Many students in this study stated that they had adjustment issues and felt out of place when they started college. The distractions could have been overwhelming for these students, causing them to suffer academically.

Experiencing Microaggressions

Most students in the study did not feel they experienced many microaggressions or subtle forms of racism (Solorzano et al., 2000). This could be due to the fact that Millennials tend to be more welcoming and sensitive to differences (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007), making White Millennials more aware of microaggressions. The perpetrators of the few microaggressions that were reported were faculty and staff who were not in the Millennial generation. Steele (1999) suggested that when microaggressions or any forms of racism are exhibited by professors, some African American students tend to disconnect from the class, create a “do not care” attitude toward that class, or create a negative perception of the institution.

Some participants in this study spoke about shutting down as a result of experiencing microaggressions from administrators and faculty. This is important because faculty at PWIs may not realize that they are subconsciously singling out or subtly discriminating against Black students, causing them to not perform well in class or to leave the institution as a result of feeling unwanted.

Solorzano et al. (2000) stated that students resort to counterspaces as a result of experiencing microaggressions. Participants in this study went to a number of places specifically because they knew they would see other Black students and be in an environment where they could relax and have a good time.

Lack of Parental Involvement

The Millennial generation has been described as having parents who are overly involved in their children's college experience (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007; Tyler, 2007; J. L. Wilson, 2008). However, this was not true for the majority of the participants in this study, especially the first-generation students, whose parents were not active in their college experience. Most of their parents rarely visited them while in college, were not able to support them financially, and could not give them any advice about college.

The situation was completely different for the participants in the study whose parents had attended college. These students received some financial support, visits, and tips and advice about college from their parents. These parents were more like helicopter parents. This suggests that the parent's educational level is an important indicator of the amount of involvement a parent will have in the college career of rural African American Millennials.

No Desire to Return Home after Graduation

Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) suggested that rural areas lack college culture because college-educated residents out-migrate. The findings from this study were consistent with this finding in that all the participants except one stated that they would not return to their hometowns after graduating from college, primarily because the participants' hometowns did not offer job opportunities and did not have a social life for young Black professionals. This could mean that rural communities are at risk of continuing a cycle of not having a "college culture" because rural college-educated Black people are out-migrating from their home communities.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs. The study was guided by two research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials attending PWIs?
2. How do these students make meaning of these experiences?

This chapter gives implications for practice, recommendations for future research and final words.

Implications

K-12. The findings from this study suggest that some rural African American high school students did not have any intentions of attending college until they took part in a college preparation program. For these reasons, high schools in rural areas should offer college preparation programs. Such programs would give students an opportunity to be exposed to college while they are still in high school, hopefully resulting in more rural African American Millennials enrolling in college.

K-12 administrators in rural areas also need to focus on developing and hiring qualified teachers. The study participants were very shocked when they started college and did not feel their teachers properly prepared them for college. This is very important because, if rural

African American Millennials continue to come to college underprepared, there is a big risk that these students would perform poorly academically and drop out as a result.

Charting the progress of students is another method which K-12 administrators and teachers should use in order to track these students and their academic success as early as elementary school. This would allow rural schools to be advocates to colleges for rural African American Millennials who are gifted and capable of successfully matriculating to college. Such monitoring will also help these students feel they are supported by their school systems and gain aspirations of attending college at an early age.

Finally, K-12 administrators and teachers have to work harder at creating college cultures in their rural communities. Previous research (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010) and the students in this study suggested that there are not college cultures in their communities and that this lack seriously affects their aspirations of attending college. Building a college culture would include bringing back rural African Americans who have successfully matriculated to, and graduated from, college, creating online communities and resources to connect rural African American Millennials with college graduates and hiring more Black staff and administrators.

Practice. Rural African American Millennials should be actively recruited by colleges from the time they are seen as being high achievers. Many of the study participants were in advanced classes throughout their entire K-12 careers, so it was clear that they were capable of performing well academically early in their lives. This type of recruitment would be similar to the sports model used by college coaches when they first see young Black males in rural communities who show promise of excelling in sports at an early age. College coaches are willing to offer these young athletes scholarships, send tutors to help them academically, and chart their progress while they are in the K-12 school system. A similar model could be used for

rural African American students when they show the first signs of being academically gifted. These students should be offered scholarships and put in college preparation programs as early as possible, and their progress should be charted throughout their entire K-12 careers. Such efforts would help these students fully understand the scope of college, despite being in rural communities that typically do not have college cultures.

In addition, institutions of higher education should focus on recruitment efforts for rural African American Millennials by actively sending college recruiters, admission counselors, and financial aid administrators into these rural environments. Specifically, African American administrators should make these efforts because the findings from this study suggest that some rural African American Millennials come from environments where they are not exposed to African Americans with college degrees. Meeting educated African Americans and getting the proper help needed to apply to college are very important; the participants in this study were forced to find colleges on their own and go through the application process with little help or guidance. If colleges do not send qualified individuals into these environments to actively recruit and assist rural African American Millennials with the college application process, a large number of these students could bypass college and stay in their rural communities without fulfilling their potential.

The findings from this study also revealed that African American students from rural areas face specific, unique challenges when they come to institutions of higher education. Institutions of higher education need to focus on providing the necessary resources to help make the college experience and transition easier for these students.

The students from this study also wanted to feel that they belonged at the institutions they attended. Unfortunately, a large number of them did not feel they belonged at their institutions

when they first started college, so it is the duty of institutions of higher education to provide transitional programs for these students to make them feel welcomed. Summer bridge programs are one way to help students adjust to their new colleges and environments so that they experience less culture shock at the start of the school year and can focus more on excelling academically instead of dealing with culture shock.

If summer bridge programs are not possible, it should still be a priority for institutions to provide resources for rural African American Millennials from the first day they arrive on campus. The transition processes for the students in this study were similar to those of international students coming to the United States for the first time. These feelings included unfamiliarity with a new environment, different styles of eating, different types of people, and different cultures. If these students are not properly oriented into these new environments, institutions risk losing these students. To keep this from occurring, institutions could implement orientation sessions that are designed specifically for rural students.

It is also important for institutions to know that rural African American Millennials want to connect with other students. Colleges could respond to this by offering mentoring programs for rural African American Millennials in which they are paired with older students from rural areas. This would allow these students to meet others who are like them while also getting one-on-one transitional support.

In addition to the resources mentioned above, colleges and universities should offer programs such as Student Support Services for rural students once they are enrolled in college. One study participant benefitted greatly from this type of program as it served as her safe space while in college. Programs like this could assist with the transition and increase the retention for rural African American Millennials attending PWIs.

Faculty and administrators. It is important for higher education administrators to gain an understanding of the needs of rural African American Millennials so they can create resources to help them successfully transition into their new cities as well as their new educational environments. Specifically, institutions should offer training about this student population to faculty and staff so they can have a better understanding of this student population. After training, institutions should assign individual administrators to monitor the progress of rural African American Millennials throughout their college years, especially during the first few weeks of college, to limit the culture shock these students may encounter. This effort from institutions could have positive effects on the transition and adjustment for rural African American Millennials.

Furthermore, college administrators and professors should attend mandatory trainings on microaggressions and counterspaces. A few participants felt they experienced microaggressions from college administrators and professors, and these experiences had negative impacts on their experience in college. Training would allow college administrators and professors to gain a better understanding of what microaggressions are, which would hopefully result in their being more conscious of their oppressive actions. Administrators should also be aware of how to create safe places students can resort to when they become overwhelmed or feel like outcasts at their PWIs and allocate the necessary resources to cultivate and enhance them. This could result in students feeling more connected to their institutions and feeling that their institutions care about them, as well as giving students more opportunities to connect with others who are like them.

Finally, it is important that institutions do not lump this population of students with all African American students and expect them to rely on the same resources to be successful. It

was very apparent that the rural African American Millennials who participated in this study did not feel that they initially identified with other Black students on campus, resulting in feelings of isolation. Expecting these students to walk on campus and automatically connect with other Black students would be a mistake. Their rural identity is an important part of who they are, and these students deserve to be addressed as being rural African American students and not just African American students.

HBCUs. Considering that half of the study participants wanted to attend HBCUs, it is important that HBCUs also actively recruit African American students from rural areas. A few study participants wanted to attend these institutions because they wanted an environment in which they felt they belonged. While recruiting, these institutions should offer scholarships and financial support for these students considering that there are not many HBCUs in Midwestern states and most Midwestern rural students would have to relocate to different states to attend these type institutions.

Limitations

This study has some limitations, including institutional type and time constraints. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with two men and four women who all attended large research universities. A broader range of institutional types may have yielded different results. In addition, I initially planned on each interview lasting at least one hour, but a few participants had time constraints and were unable to interview the entire hour. As a result, I was not able to get as much information and clarification as I wanted in some cases. I might also have gained a better understanding of the participants' stories if I had observed them interacting in their hometowns, but limited resources prevented this from occurring.

Future Research

Researchers must continue to explore the lived experiences of rural African American Millennials in college. The results from this study revealed that students from rural hometowns with a population of fewer than 1000 residents had unique challenges, which further investigation may help to clarify so that their needs can be addressed. Researchers should also explore the experiences of rural African American Millennials who also identify as being first-generation college students. There was a noticeable difference between the experiences of rural first-generation students and rural non-first-generation students. A study of the differences between female and male students from rural areas may also yield valuable results. I was not able to address gender in this study, but I did see differences in the descriptions of the types of challenges faced by women versus those faced by men. Finally an in-depth examination into the experiences of rural African American Millennials attending HBCUs would assist in understanding why these students attend and what type of experiences they have at these institutions.

Final Thoughts

There is an invisible population of students enrolled in predominantly White colleges throughout the country who are waiting for others to acknowledge their existence. They are a minority in terms of their race and a minority in terms of their home locales, and they have unique challenges in transitioning to their predominantly White institutions. These institutions are in a position to reach out to these students and give them an identity on their campuses that could provide them with more positive experiences in college and more success at maneuvering through the educational system and obtaining college degrees. These students will in turn positively contribute to their hometown environments by being an inspiration to younger African

Americans, showing them that it is possible to succeed in college, raising the value of their hometowns by returning with a college degree, and allowing them to utilize their newly acquired knowledge to better their hometowns, even if it is only when they return to visit.

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APPENDIX A

Initial E-mail to Participants

Dear Friend,

My name is Corey Guyton and I am a doctoral candidate in Higher Education Leadership at Indiana State University. I am inviting you to participate in my dissertation research designed to gather data on the experiences of rural African American first-generation Millennials attending predominately White Institutions.

The criteria for participation are (1) self-identification as African American or Black; (2) a first-generation student, meaning your parents did not graduate from college; and (3) you have a hometown that is in a rural location, meaning it has a population of less than 50,000 residents. If you fail to meet any of the aforementioned criteria, your interest in this study is appreciated, but please do not proceed; feel free however, to forward this letter to anyone who might meet these criteria.

Participation in this study includes an in-person digitally recorded interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes in a location of your choice. Your participation in this study is voluntary and your responses are confidential. Additionally, you may withdraw at any time without any penalty.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Corey Guyton by e-mail at corey.guyton@indstate.edu; or by phone at (812) 223-2795.

Thank you in advance for your participation and please forward to anyone you believe might be interested.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Document

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Evaluating the Experiences of Rural African American First-Generation Millennials attending Predominantly White Institutions

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Corey Guyton, who is a doctoral student from the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations Department at Indiana State University. Mr. Guyton is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation. Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton is his faculty sponsor for this project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because 1.) You are from a rural area, 2.) You identify as being African American or Black, 3.) You identify as being a first-generation student, and 4.) You attend a predominantly White institution (PWI).

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the experiences of rural African American first-generation Millennials attending PWIs and determine how these students make meaning of their experiences.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. I will ask you to participate in a digitally recorded face-to-face interview lasting approximately two hours in a location chosen by you.
2. After the interview has been completed and transcribed, I will send it to you via e-mail to check to make sure it is accurate and consistent with what you stated.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORT**

I expect that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and I believe that they are not likely to happen. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality will be maintained through assigning a pseudonym to you. You will have the option of choosing your pseudonym, but if you prefer, I will select a pseudonym for you at the time in which you sign this document. I will also collect your e-mail address on this informed consent document for the purpose of linking your pseudonym with your e-mail address. This will allow me to maintain confidentiality when I send the transcription of our conversation to you via e-mail for verification. This form will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. This locked cabinet will be different than the locked cabinet where the digitally recorded data/transcriptions are stored.

Data will be collected and stored on a digital recorder reserved specifically for this proposed study and kept under lock and key in a secure, locked filing cabinet. I will be the only individual that will be in contact with data and participant identifiers.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Mr. Corey Guyton
Principal Investigator
Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations Department
114 Jones Hall
Terre Haute, Indiana 47809
812-223-2795
Corey.guyton@indstate.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECT**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

E-mail Address

Pseudonym

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your hometown.
2. Tell me about your high school experience.
3. Tell me about your college selection process.
4. Tell me about your experience with technology.
 - a. When did you get a computer? Internet? Cable? Satellite?
5. What has been your experience dealing with Black students who are from the inner city?
6. What has been your experience transitioning from a rural community to a large institution?
7. What was your experience interacting with White people in your community?
8. What has been your experience interacting with White people at this institution?
9. Where do you go on campus to feel comfort?
10. What are the challenges you have faced transitioning to this new environment?
11. What are your plans after graduation?
12. What role does your family play in your life while attending college?
13. What made you choose this institution?
14. What influenced your decision to go to college?
15. When did you first decide you were going to college?
16. Is your first semester the same or different than what you expected?