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HER-STORY: A NARRATIVE STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO TRANSFER TO A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

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by
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Dedications

What a journey this has been! I have worked through the loss of family, a pandemic, and changes in my life. I am so thankful for everyone that walked this journey with me. I want to thank my mom Phyllis for encouraging me, pushing me, and of course, asking, "When will you be finished!" I dedicate my work to Myles and Jocelyn, my two heartbeats. Thank you for loving me and supporting me every step of the way. You both have made me so proud to be your mom, and I love you. Keep your heads held high and stay focused on your goals! Charles, thank you for supporting me. Aunt Jean, Uncle James, Marcus, and Savayah, I did it. I promised you I would complete this journey, and now I am here. I hope I continue to make you proud of me. Thank you, Saniyah, for calling to check on your aunt and talking to me about my study. Thank you to my sisters and brother for understanding my focus on school and my constant writing with my virtual groups. I love you all so much! To my extended family, which is extremely large, thank you for the love and support while I have walked this path. Thank you, James, for checking on me to make sure I was alright. The laughs and sharing memories of your dad kept me focused on this process. Malcolm X (1962) once stated, "The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman." Thank you to my participants for allowing me to share your stories. I hope it helps us as Black women to get the respect, protection, and support we deserve.

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Abstract

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Monica Reid Kerrigan, Ed.D.
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this narrative research study was to explore the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. More specifically, this study focused on Black women students' ability to succeed while navigating against dominant majoritarian views and negative stereotypes while attending a predominately White institution. This study focused on the resilience and success of Black women as they worked towards obtaining an education. Black feminist thought and Anti-Deficit Achievement theory assisted the study in identifying negative stereotypes, oppression, and the women's abilities to be successful. The findings indicate that while these women faced negative stereotypes and transfer barriers, they used their voices to gain their desired support. This study assists in expanding the limited research on first-generation African American women college students' experiences when they have transferred to a predominately White institution. This study shows the importance of positive institutional agents, culturally responsive teaching, and support for first-generation Black women transfer students to assist them in their continued college success.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The transfer process is one that many students attempt to do each semester from their community college to a four-year college. In a report for The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, on an average of 852,439 students who first enrolled at a community college nationwide, 31.5% or 268,749 students transferred to a four-year institution within six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). Research conducted by Townsend (2008) supports the idea that many transfer students may run into issues adjusting to the social aspects of the transition, including feelings of isolation on campus. When the transfer student is also first-generation, transitioning can be more difficult because of social-class disparities. Colleges and universities are aware of these disparities, so they seek to mitigate them by offering programs to help first-generation students adjust to higher education (Engle et al., 2006). Stephens et al. (2014) share that many institutions offer programs to assist first-generation students with financial resources or academic skills, but these resources do not guarantee success for first-generation students.

The pathway to higher education is not always equal and equitable for all students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Although the number of Black women enrolled in historically White institutions has grown in recent years, research has failed to adequately address these students' mental, social, and emotional well-being (Green et al., 2018). The experiences of Black women and girls remain marginalized in our society. Crenshaw et al. (2015) explain, "the existing research, data, and public policy debates often fail to address the degree to which girls face risks that are both similar to and different from those faced by boys" (p. 11). The challenges facing Black people and Black men and

boys are treated as the same. Patton et al. (2016) explain, "as a result; an asymmetrical solidarity is perpetuated among Black people, relegating the lived experiences of Black women and girls to the margins" (p. 194). Because of these experiences and marginalization, Black women are either serving as props in narratives about Black men or being left out altogether (Johnson, 2013). Although there is an argument that all students need to feel that they "matter" on their campus (Schlossberg, 1989), students of color can feel marginalized more than they feel that they matter. This marginalized experience can negatively impact these student's academic and social experiences (Jackson, 1998).

Green et al. (2018) argue that while Black women seek higher education to gain upward mobility, they find themselves in a hostile environment that acts as a microcosm of the larger society where race, gender, and power relations are present. Research has also shown that Black women are the most isolated group at predominately White institutions, which is psychologically and emotionally taxing (Shavers et al., 2014). Jackson & Harris (2007) argue that higher education's general system is not built for Black women to succeed. Although researchers have discussed these findings, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019) indicates that in 2015-16, 64% of Black women earned bachelor's degrees. Winkle-Wagner (2015) argues that contradictory trends emerge when addressing Black women's success in college. Black women have doubled their enrollment rates in thirty years, but their graduation rates are not as high as White and Asian women.

When you couple the transition process for a student who transfers to a four-year school, first-generation, and an African American female student with the hostile

environment these students can face, their success is essential. If the climate in these student's environments is especially hostile or alienating, social connectedness will decrease (Lee et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2014). Also, individuals that do not have the ability to socially integrate or be engaged in the social life of their environments will suffer (Townley & Kloss, 2011; Thelamour et al., 2019). The transition it takes to be a college student can be challenging for many students. Several studies speak about the struggles and triumphs of different populations of students. There is in-depth research on Black students but more specifically on Black males and their persistence at four-year institutions (Brooks et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2013), but very few studies focus on Black women and their ability to be successful in college. Black women face negative stereotypes and discrimination on their White campuses but can still earn a degree successfully. Black females are entering and completing college at greater rates than Black males, giving Black students the widest gender gap than other ethnicities (Lee & Ransom, 2011).

Problem Statement

The college success of African American women remains underexplored due to trends in research of examining students of color as a group that encompasses men, women, and multiple racial/ethnic subgroups (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Research has further shown that attending a predominately White Institution (PWI) is difficult for many students of color, specifically African American women, because Black women endure marginalization on several levels. Being a woman and African American presents these students with complex issues such as racism and sexism. This study examines how first-generation African American women who transfer to a PWI have transitioned on

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their campus and are successful. Black women graduate from college at a higher percentage rate than Black men, but their success is still barely discussed in academia.

It appears that the traditional climate and standard education pedagogy have been unsuccessful in creating an inclusive environment for previously marginalized students (Harper & Shaun 2007; Howard-Hamilton & Hughes, 2003). Undergraduate enrollment percentages of African Americans in higher education are currently high. While the numbers have increased, the overall four-year graduation rates remain low at approximately 21% (NCES, 2019). Research has shown that African American women enroll and graduate from 4-year institutions at higher percentages than do African American men. Despite calls for more research on African American women, insufficient research remains focused on African American men (Walpole, 2008).

African American students have not given up their dreams of obtaining an education. These students have placed a high value on education for generations (Bennett & Lutz, 2009; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). The increase in undergraduate enrollment shows evidence of this. However, the lack of support for these students may be a reason for their poor academic success. It has been established that African American women attend colleges at a higher rate than African American males. It is reported by NCES (2018) that 62% of Black women and 38% of Black males were enrolled in an undergraduate program. A comparison of student persistence rates of African American students attending historically Black colleges (HBCUs) and those attending PWIs shows very different results. Less than half of African American students graduate from PWIs, while 60% of African American students graduate from HBCUs (Arminio et al., 2000). Furthermore, African American students at predominately white institutions (PWIs),

which enroll the majority of Black students, have lower grade point averages (GPA) than students attending HBCUs (Allen & Haniff, 1991; Walpole, 2008). These results indicate a need for more research to be done on the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution.

Erik Erikson (1968) argues that groups previously oppressed and unable to reap the dominant culture's benefits would incorporate negative images of themselves. While African American women are enrolling in college at increased rates, researchers have found that many Black women attending predominately White institutions often encounter social, emotional, or academic barriers while on the path to graduation, which may have several consequences (Dahlvig, 2010). One such consequence is that African American women may not feel like a part of the campus community, interfering with their success at the PWI. Further research has been conducted to examine why underrepresented racial minority and lower-income students enroll in schools that may not be the best fit or provide the resources and support they need. Although there are many disparities in college enrollment choices, one main factor for these students enrolling in colleges that are not the best fit is that the college is close to home. The proximity to their home means their tuition is lower, and they can commute to their campus (Klasik et al., 2018; Long, 2004; Niu & Tienda, 2007; Rouse, 1995; Skinner, 2018).

African American women enrolled in PWIs have significant barriers stacked against them because of their race and gender. When you also consider Black women, who are first-generation transfer students to a PWI, there is concern about the impact on their ability to adjust to a new school and be successful. American history has recorded

the treatment of African American women and the continued devaluing of these women. Malcolm X (1962) once stated, "The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman." This study will focus on the experiences of Black women and explore the resources they used that set them on a path toward being successful. This study will also discuss the challenges and barriers Black women can face during the transfer process. Transferring can be difficult for students, so this is another layer of complexity for first-generation Black women to contend with.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative research study is to explore the perceptions of first-generation African American women's experiences who transfer to a predominately White institution. More specifically, this study focuses on Black women students' ability to succeed while navigating against dominant majoritarian views and treatment while attending a predominately White institution. This study will focus on the resilience and activism of Black women from a Black feminist thought point of view as they obtain an education. Qualitative studies are needed to truly understand through "thick rich" descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) what is happening (or not) from the viewpoint of this population of students in reference to being on the campus of a predominately White institution.

Research Questions

This qualitative narrative study was conducted to understand the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a PWI. There are three questions that will guide this research. The questions are:

1. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution take a stance in their empowerment towards gaining a postsecondary education?

2. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution demonstrate success?

3. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution engage on campus?

Delimitations

Delimitations are the limitations consciously set by researchers, which are the boundaries or limits of their work (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A delimitation for this study is the use of Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory as a framework that will allow the researcher to focus on African American students. Since this study is being conducted to examine the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution, this framework will only allow for focus to be placed on a specific population of students. Black feminist thought is another framework being used for this study. This framework assisted the researcher with examining African American women's experiences attending a predominately White institution. Black feminist thought is a viewpoint that clarifies Black women's perceptions of their lives in consideration of their history of oppression and marginalization (Collins, 2009). A delimitation of this framework is it will only focus on the perceptions of African American women and our persistence towards success. Also, only students in this population that demonstrate academic success will be considered for this study. Another delimitation of this study is the sample size of four first-generation African American

women transfer students, which is not representative of all first-generation African American women who transfer to James University. Participants must be in good standing, meaning their academic record should show their success rate, first-generation, African American women, and transfers attending the university.

Significance of Study

There is literature written about African American women attending predominately White institutions (PWIs); however, a large amount of the research indicates that African American students attending PWIs generally have difficulty assimilating socially and academically (Allen, 1992). This study seeks to fill the existing gap about the experiences and perceptions of first-generation African American women who transfer to a PWI. This study will focus on the transfer process, perception of the resources and support available on campus. The findings of this study will inform the field by providing insight into the experiences of this population of students and assisting the field with providing adequate support. This study aims to examine the experiences of first-generation African American women attending a PWI and discuss how Black women can navigate on campus and be successful students. Through these findings, institutions can assess resources and support offered to first-generation African American women.

This study will assist institutions with finding ways to strengthen or improve their services. Black women students on predominately White campuses are rarely integrated into their institutions' life and culture, and there are no clear paths for them to effect change at these institutions (Moses, 1989). This study will bring insight to faculty and administrators, more so those that identify as White. Focus will be placed on the experiences of these women, the current responses of the university they attend, and how

the university provides support to these women. The existing literature examines the differences of experiences for Black men or Black students. It does not delve into the multitude of experiences Black women have on a predominately White institution's campus. This study is intended to provide new information that will offer guidance and strategic support for first-generation African American women attending predominately White institutions. The present study explores these issues through the lenses of Black Feminist Theory and Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory.

Summary

This chapter began by discussing the transfer process for students from a two-year institution to a four-year institution. The discussion further looks at how transferring into a predominately White institution impacts a first-generation African American woman. This study seeks to expand the research on first-generation African American female transfer students who transfer to a specific predominately White institution in the Northeast. The purpose of researching this institution is to understand these women's experiences, the support available, and their ability to succeed. First-generation college students (FGCS) enter college with little familiarity with postsecondary education, are academically unprepared, and do not have much support from their families (Ishitani, 2006). Most FGCS identify as students of color, take remedial courses, and struggle with transitioning into college compared to continuing-generation college students (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). This population of students has a lot stacked against them once they get to campus. As African American women, they deal with the negative stereotypes about them in society. They are not expected to be successful, but research shows, this population of students earns a bachelor's degree at a higher rate than Black men. This

study seeks to learn about first-generation African American women's experiences through the lens of Black feminist thought and Anti-deficit achievement.

Terms & Definitions

There were important terms used in this research that are important to understand. The following definitions are pertinent to this study.

African American Women- Refers to a woman having origins of African descent (this can include cisgender, transgender, or non-binary people). The term African American is interchangeable with Black in this qualitative research study. The United States Census also includes people with Sub-Saharan lineage (e.g., Nigerian and Kenyan) and Afro-Caribbean lineage (e.g., Jamaican and Haitian) (Rastogi et al., 2010).

Transfer Students- Refers to any undergraduate student who leaves their initial institution of higher learning for another institution of learning (Fauria & Fuller, 2015; Cuseo, 1998).

Underrepresented Students- Refers to students with limited resources and supports in terms of applying to college and being college-ready. They may not have benefited from a "college-going" culture and could be the first in their families to attend college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Black- The term Black is interchangeable with African American in this qualitative research study. These terms describe Americans who identify themselves as having historical origin from West Africa (Brown, 2011).

First-Generation College Students (FGCS)- Some researchers describe this population of students with parents who never attended a university at all. In contrast, others define first-generation college students as those with parents with "some" college experience but never graduated (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

Persistence- The academic progress of a student who enrolls in college and remains enrolled until degree completion (Hagedorn, 2006).

Retention- A series of institutional measures, that when viewed by administrators, allows the ability to measure a student's progress towards completion of a degree (Hagedorn, 2006).

Predominately White institution (PWI)- Institutions with more white students enrolled than students who are members of underrepresented racial groups (Bourke, 2016).

Historically Black College/University (HBCU)- Historically Black colleges and universities were established to serve the educational needs of Black Americans. These schools were established because Blacks were generally denied admission to traditionally white institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 1991)

Imposter Phenomenon/Syndrome- Feelings of inadequacy that persist even though the person is successful. This syndrome plagues people with self-doubt and feelings of being a fraud within their environment (Parkman, 2016).

Race- The perceived differences in appearance and behavior across individuals and groups. Other criteria used to define race include region or geographical area of origin, nationality, language, and religion (Gaines, 1994; King & Stansfield, 1990; Loue, 2006).

Microaggressions-refers to brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Sue et al., 2007).

Black Feminist Thought- An interpretive framework used to understand the standpoint of Black women. Black Feminist Thought is the reproduction of Black womanhood

through the experiences of Black women but engages a social justice perspective in collaboration with other traditionally marginalized groups (Collins, 2009).

Empowerment- An intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources; or a process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Anti-Deficit Achievement- Anti-deficit achievement is a qualitative research design created to invert questions commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black student attrition. The Anti-deficit model suggests researchers should understand the African American college student experience from the standpoint of what works and what contributes to their success (Harper, 2006).

Success- Often used as a metric for an institution's performance, student success can be seen in persistence and increased self-efficacy outcomes. Success can be defined as achieving a particular goal but can have different meanings in how faculty and students describe it as well as minoritized students like first-generation, underrepresented, or Black, Indigenous, and people of color groups of students (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020; Weatherton & Schussler, 2021).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature review focused on the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer into a predominately White institution. This chapter includes discussions from other researchers who address women as females. All other discussions about women from this researcher will follow the current APA 7 guidelines. This review will discuss literature about first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. The majority of the literature discussed is from a deficit standpoint. Based on the deficit perspective of the literature, two conceptual frameworks, Black Feminist Thought and Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory are used to support an anti-deficit perspective. Also, this review includes research about family and campus support available for Black women while navigating their way on a predominately white campus. Individual characteristics students bring with them through the transfer process will have an impact on persistence (Tinto, 1993). Tinto further states that students of color, either new or transfer students, may find transitions even more difficult on many campuses where there is not a large mass of students from similar backgrounds. Racial and ethnic minority students can find themselves feeling overwhelmed with the whiteness they can encounter when first arriving on a predominately White campus (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009). African American women historically are not placed in a position in society to be successful.

There has been a lack of support in research about African American women. Patton et al., 2016 argue between 1991-2012, a 22-year span, only 48 articles were

published on the experiences of Black college women compared to 62 articles written on the experiences of Black undergraduate men (Harper, 2012). Patton et al., 2016 further critiques research by explaining that there is little known about Black women's experiences and challenges in college. The authors further explains that "over the last 20 years, most of the literature on Black girls presents mythologized discourse, which suggests we are "okay" because they fare better than Black boys" (p. 194). Black feminist thought shows that Black women are viewed in society in a negative stereotypical way, but they can persist in their educational careers. This theory clarifies the impacts of racism, classism, and sexism on the lives of Black women by challenging historical views about them and enables scholars to dispel subordination of some based on race, class, and sex (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). First-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution (PWI) can be successful, so Harper's Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory will be used as a framework to support this. Harper (2012) argues that Anti-deficit Achievement should be used as a framework to deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color have managed to succeed. Both frameworks are being used as a guide to explore existing educational research. This chapter was organized to discuss how Black women are viewed and treated at PWIs but can excel and be successful.

Higher education is one of many paths that leads individuals to greater social mobility, economic growth, a sense of achievement, employment opportunities, and working in higher status jobs (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Over the past 80 years, the United States experienced a dramatic increase in college enrollment and completion (Horowitz, 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018),

young adults 25-34-years-old showed higher employment rates based on their higher educational attainment levels. The percentage of these students that earned a bachelor's degree or higher is 86%, and the employment rate for young adults with some college (79 percent) was higher than the rate for those who had completed high school (72 percent). Obtaining a college degree for First-Generation African American women can provide opportunities for them and their families. Ishitani (2016) argues that a higher education degree is of great value to all students, providing them with economic gains, higher earnings, and greater career opportunities.

As previously discussed, the pathway to higher education is not always equal and equitable for all students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). As a first-generation African American woman who transfers to a predominately White institution, this population of students makes up several separate populations. These students, as a separate population, do not always find success in higher education. As a transfer, they are considered non-traditional students that lack higher education experience (NCES, 1996). The same is said for the persistence of first-generation students because they do not have the same support as a White counterpart or continuing generation student (Cataldi, 2018). There are barriers already setup against these students. When these intersections of a student are coupled with being an African American woman attending a predominately White institution, research shows these students are expected to assimilate on their campuses but have difficulties socially and academically (Allen, 1992). Research shows that Black women are successful in college because they enroll and graduate at higher rates than Black men (Winkle-Wagner, 2015), but they are left out of the conversation. Ricks (2014) argues that although Black girls and women have adopted coping and defense

mechanisms while dealing with gendered racism, these methods are interpreted by

teachers and school personnel as personality or cultural characteristics instead of

responses to daily microaggressions. First-generation African American women who

transfer to a predominately White institution are successful over Black men because, as

argued by Green & Mabokela (2001), Black women have the ability to rise above

challenges and master goals. The authors further say that Black women establish changes

by breaking barriers and building bridges to success. The ability to be successful was

further explored through the use of conceptual frameworks that focused on Black

students.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized Collins's theory of Black Feminist Thought and Harper's Anti-

Deficit Achievement Theory to explore what factors contribute to the retention and

success of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately

White institution. These frameworks were chosen because they complement one another

through the lens of Black women being successful, empowered, and the primary focus of

this study. Black feminist thought argues that all Black women share common

experiences due to the intersection of race, gender, and social class, known as

intersectionality (Collins, 2009). This theory is being used to discuss societal views of

Black women and how those views are seen on a predominately White institution's

campus. This theory also helped to explain the barriers African American women face,

leading to her persistence towards success. Black feminist thought is a viewpoint that

clarifies Black women's perceptions of their lives in consideration of their history of

oppression and marginalization (Collins, 2009). Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory

reframes deficit-oriented thinking to focus on the achievement of students of color (Harper, 2012). Instead of focusing on the disadvantages of underrepresentation, educational disparities, and barriers that students of color face, Anti-Deficit Achievement focuses on the success and positive attributes of students of color. This study used Black feminist thought and Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory to discuss the marginalization of African American women who attend predominately White institutions and focused on their success.

Using a combination of Black feminist thought's distinguishing features and Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory as conceptual frameworks, this study explored the experiences of African American women and their perceptions of their campus. Black feminist thought provided a space for Black women to share their stance and experiences when a sense of belonging does not exist (Collins, 2009). Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory challenges researchers to understand Black men and what contributes to their success (Harper, 2010). Research has found that Black women are positioned in oppressive environments where they face challenges due to gender and racial disparities (Collins, 2009). Despite all that is known about what complicates and undermines achievement for minority groups, Harper (2010) argues that these groups successfully navigate their way through college. Collins (2009) explores the idea of the matrix of domination which is a concept that draws attention to the inherent complexity of privilege and how it shapes people's lives. Although Black women face the intersectionality of race, gender, and class disparities, Black feminist thought allows these women to empower themselves and push back against their oppressive environments. Anti-Deficit Achievement complements this empowerment by showing how Black

women can navigate the inequities and racial achievement gaps to be successful (Harper, 2010). Although this theory was created to research Black men and their success, it was used in this study to help create a discussion about the success of Black women.

Black Feminist Thought

> How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?
>
> Maria W. Stewart

This study was informed by Black feminist thought. Using Black feminist thought as one of two theories served as the foundation of this study which, seeked to illuminate Black women's experience by focusing on academic achievements and the support systems that contributed to retention. Black feminist thought privileges experiences and ideas of Black women, which are often minimalized or ignored by society (Collins, 2009). This perspective acknowledges the interaction of multiple forms of oppression experienced by Black women, such as racism, sexism, and classism (Crenshaw, 1998). Black feminist thought began in the sociology arena to identify African American women's marginalized position in American society (Collins, 1986; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Collins identified African American women's marginalization by describing it as an outsider-within status. When an African American woman experiences being the outsider-within, she understands that she is a participant and not entirely accepted. The thought that females/women are often viewed as always "becoming" and never "being" places women as allies with other groups excluded from the dominant group or society-for instance, with the LGBTQ+ community, Jewish people, and racial and ethnic minorities (Tong, 1989, p. 230). Black feminist thought

explained these thoughts of "becoming," as a theory used as a form of empowerment for

Black women. Black women's empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of

knowledge that perpetuate objectification, commodification, and exploitation (Collins,

2000, p. 289). Collins (2009) argues that Black feminist thought views Black women's

struggles as a part of a broader struggle for human dignity and social justice. Black

feminist thought encourages Black women to empower ourselves by understanding the

world's perceptions but not letting it stop us from being who we are in this world.

Obtaining an education can be one form of empowerment and activism that will allow

Black women to fight against the system of oppression. Collins (2000) argues that the

skills gained in school is part of focused education for Black community development

and thus helps to centralize our worldviews which empowers us more. The author

explains that as long as Black women's oppression persists, so will the need for Black

women's activism (Collins, 2009, p. 274).

There are six distinguishing features of Black feminist thought which are: to

empower Black women, give Black women a unique standpoint on their experiences, and

show that Black women have commonalities with oppression. Other features of Black

feminist thought are Black women use our intellect as contributions and, Black women

can and should make significant social changes. Also, Black feminist thought can be used

to promote coalition-building with other social justice projects and groups. The first

distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought empowers Black women through their

ideas. This distinguishing feature is the idea of empowering Black women against

oppression. Black feminist thought aims to do this for African American women within

the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions (Collins, 2000). The

author further explains that Black women cannot be completely empowered unless intersecting oppressions are eliminated (p, 22). The second feature argues that Black women possess a unique standpoint on their experiences. Collins (2000) states that the matrix of oppression is an interlocking system of race, class oppression, gender, and privilege, which has given Black women a group knowledge or standpoint of our marginalized status. The third feature acknowledges the commonalities and diversity among Black women. U.S. Black women's collective historical experiences with oppression may stimulate a self-defined Black women's standpoint that in turn can foster Black women's activism (p. 30). This activism can allow Black women to push against the matrix of domination. Collins (2000) discussed this matrix of domination by describing it as social organizations within intersecting oppressions that originate, develop, and are contained. According to the author, such domination has occurred through schools, housing, employment, government, and other institutions that regulate patterns of intersecting oppressions that Black women encounter (p. 228).

The fourth feature acknowledges the intellectual contributions of Black women. This distinguishing feature focuses on the tradition of merging intellectual work and activism. Collins (2000) explains that as Black women, we can analyze the intersecting oppressions that restrict our lives. As intellectuals, our experiences as Black women provide us with a unique point of view concerning Black womanhood, which is not the same for other groups (p. 35). The fifth distinguishing feature of U.S. Black feminist thought focuses on the significance of change. As social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them (Collins, 200, p. 39). According to Collins (2000), remaining focused on these changes will allow Black women to avoid

allowing dominant groups to suppress our views. The last feature of Black feminist thought is to promote coalition-building with other social justice projects and groups. The idea of this feminist feature is to recognize that Black women's struggles are a part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice (p. 41). As a Black feminist, Black women are tasked with committing to being the intellectual activist that should work with other social justice projects to bring attention to the "survival and wholeness of entire people" (p. 42).

Black women have been illustrated through culture, history, and media in various combinations of four images: (1) as a family-oriented, nurturing, and portly self-sacrificing Mammy; (2) as an always need to be in charge, argumentative, and threatening Sapphire; (3) as a highly sex-crazed, seductive, sexually irresponsible, promiscuous Jezebel; and (4) the Welfare Queen who appears to have direct ties and access to unlimited monetary gains thorough the U.S. welfare systems (Collins 1990; Sims-Wood, 1988; Weitz & Gordan, 1993). Collins (2009) argues that it is vital to use the concept of controlling images because it brings attention to the negative stereotypical representation of Black women. Stereotyping and preconceptions of women leaders are primary factors that impede women's ability to rise to the top of higher education institutions (Gamble & Turner, 2015: Knapp, 1986). Black feminist thought is used as a path to address negative stereotypes that share a portion of the "general ideology of domination" that takes on a special meaning for Black women (Collins, 2001, p. 69). Researchers have found that Black women are expected to conform to what society deems as "norms of race and gender" or are expected to pick between their race and gender (Croom & Patton, 2011; Everett & Croom, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Negative racial stereotypes affect women of color, particularly Black women, disproportionately, and in ways, gender discrimination alone cannot explain (Walkington, 2017).

Black feminist thought provides a way to deconstruct existing frameworks in society, especially economic structures, education, and many academic disciplines (Brewer, 1993). More importantly, Black feminist thought makes African American women the center or primary focus of research. Collins (2009) noted that Black feminist thought helps dispel and break down stereotypes about African American women and their intellect. Black feminist thought is a social and political perspective that attempts to address social issues that affect Black women in society and political environments. Black feminist thought focuses on the meaning and experiences of a Black woman's life. A Black women's political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups (Collins, 1986, p. 747). Black feminist thought is necessary to uncover African American women's voices to capture their experiences from their standpoint and separating them from African American men and other women.

Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory

Anti-Deficit Achievement is qualitative research created to study achieving undergraduate African American male students of color. This framework is informed by decades of literature on Black men in sociology, psychology, gender studies, education, and society. It inverts questions commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black student attrition. Focusing on persistence toward degree

attainment, the framework does not focus on existing theories to examine deficits. Instead, researchers using this framework should deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color have managed to succeed (Harper, 2012). According to Harper (2012), African American students have been investigated primarily with the results typically implicating in the student's home, family, or community in their lack of success (Harper & Harris, 2010). College administrators develop reactive policies to address the needs of socially disadvantaged groups (Harper, 2006). There is a wealth of research and literature with examples of the depth of inadequacies and inequities that plague the African American community (Ross et al., 2012; Walpole, 2003). These approaches, known as deficit models, are where colleges and universities take little to no responsibility for African American students' poor performance and place the burden on the students and their backgrounds (Harper, 2006).

Harper's Anti-Deficit model suggests researchers should understand the African American college student experience from the standpoint of what works and what contributes to their success. The author argues that researchers should focus less on what a student lacks and more on how they were able to achieve success. Numerous researchers have called attention to the underrepresentation and racism that Black students endure on predominately White campuses. While important implications for policy and practice have been generated from these studies, Harper (2015) maintains that much remains to be known about how students manage to excel and persist despite these challenges. Most published evidence on Blacks at predominately White institutions (PWI's) makes clear why so many of these students fail but reveals far too little about

what can be learned from those who craft productive responses to racism and other environmental forces that undermine success (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2013).

Once a student enters higher education, college achievement is considered one of the most important factors. College achievement and persistence are influenced by students' different experiences and their engagement on campus, including interactions with peers and faculty. This is considered the midpoint of a student's educational pipeline, and within this midpoint, Harper (2010) identifies three researchable dimensions of success that influence students' college achievement; classroom experiences, out-of-class engagement, and enriching educational experiences. With these researchable dimensions in mind, the literature used to examine the success of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution can explain how these students can navigate and become successful on campus. Black feminist thought seeks to change the negative stereotypes of Black women in education; tying in Anti-Deficit achievement theory to this student population can help researchers see that Black women can benefit from positive support on campus, but they can also be successful in college. It seems necessary to investigate how Black students can persist through graduation, especially considering what the literature says about racism, stereotypes, and low expectations that threaten their success at PWIs (Harper, 2015).

Transfer Students

Transferring for a student from one institution to another has become very prevalent amongst college students. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that in 2018, nearly 5.7 million undergraduate students entered community colleges, compared to 10.9 million that entered 4-year institutions. Students change

institutions for many reasons, but this research focuses on transferring from a 2-year to a 4-year institution. NCES shares that although 65 percent of beginning community college students plan to transfer, only 24 percent do so within six years (2018). Transfer students tend to have a non-traditional background and not a lot of experience with college. According to NCES (1996), students with family and work responsibilities and other circumstances that may interfere with completing their educational goals are considered non-traditional students. These circumstances can be associated with their high school status, family, and financial background. NCES further explains that non-traditional learners receive this distinction because of their enrollment trends at a two-year or 4-year institution. Traditional students enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school and attend as full-time students, but students that "diverge from this pattern are non-traditional" (NCES, 1996).

Students transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college or university to earn their bachelor's degree. Several studies have shown evidence of transfer students beginning the baccalaureate degree at a community college. However, it has been demonstrated that these students are less likely to complete the process (Allen et al., 2013). The authors argue that since transfer students deal with challenges while transitioning, these challenges can account for why they may not obtain a bachelor's degree. The authors further explain that this can be attributed to transfer shock. Transfer shock is described as the difficulty a transfer student has with integrating and adapting to their new campus (Hill, 1965). However, once a transfer student can adapt to their new campus, many can succeed and earn their degree. According to Horn & Skomsvold (2011), students that transfer with a certificate or two-year degree were 16% more likely

to earn a bachelor's degree than students who transferred without one. Further research

has shown that if a community college student transferred to a public flagship school,

they were as likely to graduate as those who started there. If they transferred to a less

selective public four-year school, they had a better chance of graduating than native

students (Jenkins & Fink, 2015).

Earning a higher degree is a goal many students accomplish through the transfer

process. However, obstacles specific to the transfer process can include moving to a new

location, finding childcare, and transferring course units (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013).

The greatest challenge for transfer students may involve overcoming self-doubt about

their ability to succeed at the four-year university (Schmertz & Carney, 2013). A higher

education degree is of great value to all students, helping to provide them with economic

gains, higher earnings, and greater career opportunities (Ishitani, 2006).

Transfer Student Persistence

Persistence is the academic progress of a student who enrolls in college and

remains enrolled until degree completion (Hagedorn, 2006). Student persistence is linked

to transfer students being able to complete their college careers and earn a degree.

According to Reason's (2009) model of student retention, there are four areas the

researcher believes influence a student's persistence. These influences are pre-college

characteristics and experiences such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, or transfer

GPA. Other influences, as described by Reason (2009), are organizational culture or

policy factors on campus, a student's peer environment, and their experiences with

faculty. Transfer students must adapt to a new environment, new professors, and policies

and procedures when transferring to a 4-year college or university. This change can cause

anxiety, which researchers have connected to students' predisposition to drop out of school (Lufi et al., 2003; Pappas & Loring, 1986). Perhaps one of the most important facilitators of student persistence is student involvement on campus (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2001; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Astin (1984) defined student involvement as the mental, physical, quality time and effort students extend towards academic and social experience. Since many transfer students from community colleges are used to taking classes and leaving campus, it is difficult for them to form a sense of community. Research has shown that the more students are involved and integrated into college life, they can persist in their studies (Astin, 1993; Lufi et al., 2003; Ory & Braskamp, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Transfer Student Retention

The responsibilities of academia and outside life for transfer students play into their ability to stay in school and be successful. NCES (2019) reports that the institution being researched, James University, reported having 16,120 full-time undergraduate students in Fall 2018. The statistics for this institution show that 2,025 of those students were transfer students. The school has relationships with several community colleges in the area, so obtaining statistics of the number of students that transfer to James University from these 2-year schools will need to be investigated. This will assist with a clear picture of how many of the 2,025 were community college or lateral transfer students. The school shows an average of 72% of overall graduation rates, but that rate was not broken down to compare students already attending classes at the school and students that transferred. Transfer student persistence is a topic that many researchers have studied and explain the phenomenon as the ability of students to graduate from a program (Lufi et al.,

2003). The authors share, it seems that a large number of these studies were aimed at predicting academic persistence in order to reduce the dropout rate from school, college, or a university. Research has shown that students who are socially disadvantaged, academically less prepared, and who experience a lack of resources and support are less likely to stay in school (Astin, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Oseguera & Rhee, 2009). Harper (2010) argues that despite knowing what complicates and undermines achievement, these disadvantaged students still manage to navigate their way through college successfully.

First-Generation College Students

Although there are many definitions of first-generation college students (FGCS), some researchers describe this population as students with parents who never attended a university at all. In contrast, others define first-generation college students as those with parents with "some" college experience but never graduated (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). It is essential for institutions of learning to note that there is a growing demographic diversity of the undergraduate student body (Pascarella et al., 2004). These diverse demographics include enrollment trends amongst students based on race, ethnicity, and gender. First-generation college students (FGCS) come from low-income backgrounds and identify as students of color. These students display different persistence and degree attainment patterns than continuing-generation college students and their White counterparts (Cataldi et al., 2018). Using results from the National Center for Education Statistics, Cataldi et al. (2018) point out that in 2003-04, 23% of students entering the nation's four-year institutions and 42% of students starting at two-year colleges were first-generation students (p. 9). Ishitani (2006) explains that certain groups of individuals are less likely to attend and graduate from American institutions of higher education. One

of these groups of students the author addresses is first-generation students in which he explains are students whose parents never attended college. Researchers have found that a higher level of socioeconomic status positively affects academic and social integration and ultimately influenced one's enrollment decision (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Ishitani, 2006). Terenzini et al. (1996) state that first-generation students are less likely than traditional students to have experiences connected to success and persistence in college. Although admission rates are increasing, underrepresented students are more likely to leave school than their majority counterparts (Franke et al., 2011; Loeb & Hurd, 2019). Loeb & Hurd (2019) also explain that 50% of first-generation students enrolled in college obtain a bachelor's degree in 6 years compared to continuing generation and White students.

According to research, many colleges and universities seek to mitigate social-class disparities by offering programs to help first-generation students transition into higher education (Engle et al., 2006). Since first-generation students often do not have families that understand their college experiences, they lack the knowledge needed when transitioning from one school to another. Stephens et al. (2014) share that many institutions offer programs to assist first-generation students with financial resources or academic skills. However, these resources do not guarantee success for first-generation students.

There appears to have been a disconnect for many years between schools offering support to first-generation non-traditional transfer students and retention. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), there are several characteristics a student can have, which would identify them as non-traditional students. These

characteristics are being independent for financial aid purposes, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part-time, and working full time. Research shows that only 56% of first-generation students have earned a credential or were still enrolled 6 years after initially entering college (Cataldi et al., 2018; Radunzel, 2018). This percentage rate goes down if the student is a first-generation transfer student. Either these students are completing their programs several years after their prospective graduation dates or not graduating. These students need support and guidance, which research has shown that the impact of family involvement can help or hinder these students.

Parental Involvement

Numerous researchers have documented the impact that parental involvement and parental levels of education and income have on students' postsecondary enrollment (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). While parent support and participation have been shown to have positive benefits for students who attend college, parents of first-generation college students do not have adequate time or knowledge to provide support (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Williams and Ferrari, 2015). Parental involvement and support from their family are important to the overall success of first-generation college students (Engle et al., 2006; Horn and Nunez, 2000; Vega & Moore, 2012). As the first in their families to attend college, many of these students do not receive help from their parents or other family members regarding pursuing higher education because of their lack of knowledge and understanding about college. As these students navigate the transition to college and work to integrate into college and adapt to the college culture, the degree to which these

families are engaged in their children's education might vary significantly (Wang & Nuru, 2017).

Due to parents lacking familiarity with higher education and not graduating from college, they may not be able to advise their first-generation students regarding how they can navigate the college process (Wang & Nuru, 2017). The first-generation student population is diverse, but researchers have found they face more significant challenges than continuing generation students. Researchers have found three explanations that have attributed to these challenges. First, family members may not be able to provide advice about what to expect and how to succeed in college. Secondly, because of family responsibilities, first-generation students spend more time off-campus, making integration into the college environment more challenging. Third, these students may not feel at home in the college culture, which can cause them to straddle home and college cultures (McKay & Estrella, 2008; Orbe, 2008; Wang & Nuru, 2017; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991).

For some first-generation students, parents' doubts about college can decrease the likelihood that they will persist to graduation (Wang & Nuru, 2017). Since family involvement can vary, researchers have found that more family involvement could serve as an important influence on the success of first-generation students (Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017). It has been documented that having in-person interactions and support from family members can be very influential on the academic success of a first-generation student (Dennis et al., 2005). Some first-generation students have parents who encourage their children to pursue both family and educational goals by encouraging them to remain close to their family roots (McKay & Estrella, 2008). Researchers have shown that family

involvement could influence the success of first-generation college students (Azmitia et al., 2013, Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017). Parental involvement is vital to the experiences of FGCS, but college readiness is also an essential factor of their college experiences.

College Readiness

First-generation college students tend to be less prepared academically for higher education than non-first-generation college students. Due to a variety of challenges and barriers, FGCS more often exhibit lower levels of college readiness and reduced rates of college enrollment and retention than their non-FG peers (Havlik et al., 2020). Examples of barriers include a lack of study and time management skills, remedial courses, limited academic and social support, and have low self-confidence in their academic abilities (Havlik et al., 2020; Reid & Moore, 2008). As a whole, FGCS tend to come from lower-income families and attended lower-resourced K-12 schools, which in turn increases their need for more significant financial and academic assistance while attending college (Havlik et al., 2020; Ishitani, 2016). While there is a growing number of first-generation students enrolled in U.S. colleges, the number of first-generation students earning a bachelor's degree is declining: Between 1999-2000 and 2011-2012, the proportion decreased from 37 percent to 33 percent (Minicozzi & Roda, 2020).

Literature that examines differences in academic preparedness between first-generation and traditional students focuses on factors such as standardized test scores, grade point averages, and type of course work completed in high school (Atherton, 2014; Lee et al., 2004). College readiness is defined as the level of preparation required to be successful in college without the need for remedial coursework (Baker et al., 2005; Schademan & Thompson, 2016). Researchers argued that the differential college

preparedness of advantaged and disadvantaged young people is the major determinant of differences in educational attainment (Bowen et al., 2005). However, it has been demonstrated that even when differences in academic preparation are taken into consideration, first-generation students are still at an increased risk of failure (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Schademan & Thompson, 2016). Reid & Moore (2008) found the value of relationships first-generation students had with their teachers, counselors, and administrators attributed to their decisions to attend college.

First-Generation Students and Academic Advisor Support

Academic advising has consistently been reported as a positive influence on student retention (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Academic advisors are among the few individuals at the institution with whom students can obtain access and make a connection (Swecker et al., 2013). Academic advising involves a student and an academic advisor establishing a relationship to facilitate decision making, resource identification, problem-solving, and goal setting in the advisee's personal, professional, and academic endeavors (Swecker et al., 2013). For first-generation students, they may not have individuals in their lives (e.g., family) who can directly relate to taxing experiences, because of this, they may not share their college-specific troubles (Glassgen et al., 2018; Jenkins et al., 2013).

Researchers have found that although they might gain increased cultural capital from interactions with faculty members and staff, many first-generation students do not readily pursue those interactions (Glassgen et al., 2018; Ward et al., 2012). Feelings of isolation and being alone may persist for these students because of their lack of interacting with college staff (Glassgen et al., 2018). This lack of interaction can cause a

first-generation student to struggle and lead to the student not completing their degree. Academic advising offers an effective retention strategy for individuals considered at most risk for dropping out, including first-generation students (Swecker et al., 2013). In recent decades, researchers, campus practitioners, and faculty have attempted to improve student experiences in college, focusing on student learning outcomes and student peer and faculty support, increasing advising and academic support, and tutoring in the interest of helping students better adjust to college demands (Carter et al., 2013).

Many colleges and universities struggle to retain and graduate first-generation students. Retention has become a challenge for many institutions of higher education (Green & Wright, 2017). Academic advisors assist colleges with retaining students because they are experienced with providing support to students. Appropriate support and tools are needed for students to navigate through their college and university programming successfully. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching and practices are needed, which will place focus on collective and individual empowerment (Green, 2010; Green & Wright 2017; Lane, 2006).

Researchers have recommended that advisors use proactive advising with at-risk students because it places the responsibility on the advisor to make initial contact and establishing a relationship with the student (Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Schwebel et al., 2008; Swecker et al., 2013). The argument for this type of advising is that it allows the high involvement of the advisor, which can assist with the success rate of a first-generation student (Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001; Swecker et al., 2013). Although being a first-generation student in college can be challenging when coupled with being an African American woman in higher education, the experiences of these students are not

readily detailed. According to Johnson-Bailey (1999), African American women's position in research is the source of their invisibility.

African American Women in Higher Education

Black students' enrollment in higher education institutions has increased over the past decades, but Black students still have the lowest retention and graduation rates among their counterparts (Guiffeida & Douthit, 2010; Hall, 2017; Harper, 2013). From 2000-2018, the enrollment rate for Black students increased by 6% (31%-37%) and 6% (35%-41%) for Black women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Because of this information, it is recognized that Black women are attending college. Strayhorn (2017) indicated that undergraduate racial/ethnic minorities increasingly represent a portion of undergraduate students enrolled in public universities. The author explains that of the 21 million full-time and part-time undergraduate students that attend higher education institutions, Black students make up 2 million of those students (Strayhorn, 2017).

In recent years, research and programs have been designed to support Black men in college, such as President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" program. This initiative was created as a gender-focused program to address the crisis facing males of color. This is support needed for Black men, but it also increases the neglect of Black women. Winkle-Wagner (2015) argues the college success of Black women remains underexplored due to research examining students of color as a group at the aggregate level (i.e., students of color encompass men, women, and multiple racial/ethnic subgroups). Furthermore, the NCES indicates that in 2015-16, 64% of Black women earned a bachelor's degree; however, Patton et al. (2015) argue that Black women

historically and currently maintain a presence in the academy, but their experiences linger

primarily invisible and unacknowledged. This insinuates a subtle yet direct link between

their representation and engagement on campus (Patton et al., 2015, p. 59). Patton &

Haynes (2018) argue that few institutional leaders (e.g., presidents, provosts, chancellors,

boards of trustees, deans) understand how, why, and the extent to which minoritized

peoples are affected by multiple and overlapping forms of oppression. Harper (2013)

explains that minoritized peers often seek out and take responsibility for new or younger

peers to help socialize them to racial realities on campus. This allows for minoritized

students to avoid feeling lonely while also preparing them for future encounters of

microaggressions on campus.

    Researchers have found that if institutions commit to attracting African American

students, faculty, and staff, this can reduce feelings of marginalization among African

American women (Zamani, 2003). Other forms of support suggested by researchers are

developing and maintaining programs and policies that focus on African American

women's concerns and needs on campus. Also, augment curriculum and classroom

experiences to be more inclusive of African American women (Zamani, 2003).

Discussing imposter syndrome/phenomenon can show some of the struggles an African

American woman in higher education can face.

Imposter Phenomenon/Syndrome

    Clance and Imes (1978) utilized the term Imposter Phenomenon to describe the

traits and behaviors of a group of high-achieving women who were struggling to

internalize their success (Parkman, 2016). Although initially a discussion about these

high achieving women, Imposter Phenomenon has been researched in relation to higher

education. Increased competition for students and declining state appropriations by the federal government have left colleges trying to keep up with demands from students and parents (Barnshaw & Dunietz, 2015; Parkman, 2016). The Imposter Phenomenon has the potential to negatively impact an organization's ability to retain students, faculty, and staff. Understanding this phenomenon can help identify those at risk for leaving (Parkman, 2016). Finding ways to connect students from the poor and working classes with peers, administrators, and faculty members from similar backgrounds can reduce imposter syndrome and increase a sense of belonging and engagement (Ardoin, 2020, p. 322). Impostorism, at its root, is about an inability to accurately self-assess regarding performance (Kets de Vries, 2005; Parkman, 2016; Want & Kleitman, 2006). Rooted in the ideology of privilege, imposter syndrome ignites a sense of otherness. Some marginalized groups are aware of how they are othered, and this awareness influences how they navigate spaces (Edwards, 2019).

African American Women at Predominately White Institutions

Many studies have been conducted on the experiences of African American students at PWI's (Solorzano et al., 2000; Strayhorn, 2008a). Campus racial climate, or the campus community's attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity, is a topic of ongoing concern for students of color in higher education settings (Hurtado et al., 2008; Thelamour et al., 2019). Students of color are forced to think about and speak on behalf of their race, and white students remain unconscious of their racial identity and privileges (Harris & Linder, 2018; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Research has shown that colleges and universities, as microcosms of the larger sociopolitical context, can reflect the hostility demonstrated in

recent national events (George Mwangi et al., 2017; Thelmour et al., 2019). Because of these events, it is reasonable that students of color might feel more marginalized from their campus communities (Thelmour et al., 2019). Although there is research on the influence of peers on college student outcomes, specifically minoritized students, which shows a positive effect on learning, developmental change, and persistence among same-race peers, literature is lacking (Astin, 1993; Bensimon, 2007, Harper, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Experiencing hypervisibility and invisibility simultaneously can lead to stress-related physical and mental health concerns (Clark et al., 1999; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). This is often Black women's experience at historically White colleges and universities (Kelly et al., 2019b). Black women students' issues of racism and sexism have become hypervisible with widespread media attention because of movements of activism in society and on college campuses (George Mwangi et al., 2018). At the same time, this coverage renders the founders of each of these movements, Black women, invisible because credit for the movements has been given to White women and placed focus on the death of Black men (Chan, 2019). African American student activism, campus unrest, and broader progressive social movements highlight how higher education systematically reproduces society's racial hierarchies (Allen et al., 2018). The erasure of Black women's voices while using their labor is not new (Kelly et al., 2019b; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012). In a study conducted by Kelly et al. (2019b), Black women used emotional energy to combat perceived inferiority, and these women performed roles counter to the "angry Black woman" and masked this anger by being the "independent Black woman" in class who did not need any help from professors or peers. The

emotional energy Black women students expend trying to manage how White faculty and peers experienced them negatively impacts their success in academic majors (Kelly et al., 2019b). Collins (2009) formulates a theory about elite groups of people that hold tools of power within their ability to state what society values and how ideas of Black women can be manipulated. These elite groups of people use existing symbols in addition to creating new ones when needed to make poverty, sexism, racism, and other forms of injustice appear as normal parts of life (Walkington, 2017).

Tinto (1993) argues that colleges are comprised of both academic and social systems, each with its own characteristics of formal and informal structures and set of faculty, student communities, and staff. The student's ability to integrate into these systems can influence their decision to stay or leave college. Despite Tinto's research, PWIs are failing to meet their promises in delivering diversity on campus, ensuring that minority students' voices are heard, and ensuring that adequate support is available to help them succeed (Chen & Hamilton, 2015; Eakins et al., 2017). Black feminist thought stresses that African American women show strength and use knowledge as a mechanism for change (Collins, 2009). This change can take place with support for African American women through their professors. In the next section, the importance of faculty and student engagement will be discussed.

Faculty-Student Engagement

A student's relationship with faculty is an essential aspect of their academic sense of belonging as an African American student at a PWI. If faculty are operating based on negative stereotypes in the classroom, whether consciously or not, minority students may feel uncomfortable, mistrustful, or demoralized (Davis et al., 2004). Accessibility and

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support from faculty members are essential to a student's success. Contact between

African American students and faculty help predict subsequent college persistence

(Strayhorn, 2008b). Research indicates that faculty/student relationships affect student

satisfaction with college academic achievement and retention (Astin 1984; Guiffrida

2005). However, further research shows that African American students at predominately

White institutions (PWIs) may not receive the same benefits associated with relationships

with faculty (Guiffrida, 2005). It has been concluded that Black students attending PWIs

had less contact with faculty outside the classroom, and because of this, they are less

likely to integrate into campus life than White students (Guiffrida, 2005; Nettles, 1991).

There is a lack of African American women faculty and student affairs personnel

working in higher education institutions, which also impacts Black female college

students (Bartman, 2015). Research shows that Black women held 3 percent or 45,000 of

the 1.5 million faculty positions in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (U.S.

Department of Education & National Center for Education, 2018). When Black women

search for role models and mentors in their college environment, they start to look

outside their cultural group because of the lack of Black faculty members. In a qualitative

study, researchers found that participants recognized that self-confidence in their success

as students were related to their relationship with their Black mentors (Louis et al., 2014).

As previously discussed, The NCES indicates that in 2015-16, 64% of Black women

earned a bachelor's degree. However, there still is not enough Black faculty or student

support staff to mentor these students towards being successful.

If given the opportunity, Black women can provide a "richness and depth to many

areas in higher education" (Carroll, 1982, p. 125). As long as higher education

institutions lack Black faculty, Black women will continue to have difficulties. Landsman & Lewis (2006) argue that Black students commonly face pressures that students who do not share the educators' racial and cultural background do not. This is further supported by researchers who have found that Black students who attend PWIs experience difficulty developing relationships with White faculty. Students of color were more likely to seek academic help from family, friends, or academic counselors who are minorities than White faculty (Braddock, 1981; Guiffrida, 2005). The need for a greater number of African American faculty at PWIs is significant for the academic sense of belonging of African American students (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Strayhorn, 2008b). These students can find meaningful relationships and support when they seek to be involved on campus. This involvement can be through clubs, sororities, or finding support through their institution.

Campus Involvement

Social support systems such as student organizations are generally used to facilitate the adjustment, retention, and progress of African American students (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Williamson, 1999). Being involved in student clubs and organizations is associated with academic achievement and persistence (Guiffrida, 2004). Many African American students experience feeling isolated or alienated when they attend a PWI. Thus, African American students began creating their own social networks to cope with segregation from the larger college community. These student organizations were formed to create solidarity and unity among African American students and other people of African descent, expressing positive aspects of African American history, culture and advocating for change in the colleges or universities on which they were located (Williamson, 1999). In a study conducted by Fisher & Hartmann (1995)

regarding the impact of race on African American students' social experiences at a PWI, some African American students found it important to stay together. The students in this study reported that staying together gave them a sense of security and helped them maintain their racial and ethnic identity.

When Black students become engaged in African American organizations, they have an easier time being socially integrated at PWIs (Guiffrida, 2003). For students of color who may struggle emotionally and socially at PWIs, membership in multicultural student organizations (MSOs) offers students the opportunity to develop a strong sense of identity, connect culturally with other students, and contribute to campus life (Gloria et al., 2005; McCoy, 2014; Museus, 2008). Research has shown that some colleges offer deficit-remediation programs that are available to help address barriers such as feelings of isolation, lack of resources, or stereotyping students of color deal with (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Dulabaum, 2016). The authors explain that deficit-remediation programs seek to create feelings of belonging by addressing the student's needs or perceived deficits. It is important to recognize the concept of anti-deficit achievement is to place focus on the positive aspects of a student and their success at their college. The literature review on first-generation college students and African American women's academic and social experiences who transfer to a PWI addresses academic preparation, campus involvement, and student support. It is also essential to discuss the persistence and responsibility of institutions to work on these students' retention.

Retention of African American Women at PWIs

Retention of Black students at predominately White institutions (PWIs) is often studied. However, very few researchers examine what helped retain Black women

undergraduate students from PWIs (Kelly et al., 2019a). Information about the experiences of Black women obtaining an education at a PWI is limited because a majority of the research is focused on the experiences of Black men (Kelly et al., 2019a; Stewart, 2017). Stewart (2017) argues that inquiry into Black men's experiences is valuable to higher education research and practice; it is equally valuable to understand Black women college students. Black students attending PWIs report increased psychological stress and difficulty adjusting socially (Donovan & Guillory, 2017; Miller, 2017; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2008). Researchers share that this stress can be more acute for Black women because of the marginalized identities they have (Allen & Joseph, 2018; Miller, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Rosales & Pearson (2003) found that Black women students at PWIs reported dealing with racism, oppression, and negative perceptions from peers, faculty, and staff. Black women students often feel invisible or isolated at their institutions, and when they are visible, they believed others did not perceive them as valuable members of the academic community (Stewart, 2017).

Given their multiple intersecting identities, Black women undergraduate students have unique experiences at PWIs (Allen & Joseph, 2018; Miller, 2017). Black women's marginalization and isolation at PWIs affect their sense of belonging and ability to complete college (Donovan & Guillory, 2017). This is a student population that needs institutional support but often does not get that support. Despite the ongoing research on the negative experience of Black women attending PWIs, they are still a neglected population (Shaw, 2017). Black women as students are looked at as being strong or independent. However, research shows this ideology is causing institutions to ignore these students, which relieves their responsibility to the student (Patton et al., 2017). One

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of the strongest impacts on student validation and retention is their relationships with faculty. Faculty, parents, classmates, and partners substantially affect student involvement and retention both in and outside the classroom setting (Hurtado et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2019a). Students of color have a more challenging time adjusting to the campus environment, are less engaged, and less likely to persist through college when professors do not consider the unique differences in their students' learning styles and cultural heritage (Holmes et al., 2000). Faculty attention to their students is vital to retaining African American female students at a PWI, but institutional support can also assist with their retention.

Institutional Support for African American Women

Universities and student affairs professionals can counter how "the dominant representations of people of color build upon and elaborate ideas, images, and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in American history and become the rationale for the differential treatment of groups and individuals" (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 10). Such commitment to dismantle this power through privileging the lived experiences of African American women can create a welcoming campus climate (Bailey-Fakhoury & Frierson, 2014; Constantine & Watt, 2002). Addressing race and gender discrimination within the academy requires structural solutions (e.g., institutional change, sound faculty administrations, and a new area of civil rights legal action) (Benishek et al., 2004). As higher educational institutions work to increase equity in services for all students, some critics maintain that inequity of services and support is more prevalent for African American female transfers from community colleges. These students need support from faculty, academic support staff such as advisors, and access to academic achievement. An

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American success unseen in virtually any other nation is the ability to provide access for both traditional and non-traditional students at all academic achievement levels (Harris, 2013).

Black Feminism, Anti-Deficit Achievement, and PWIs

The literature discussed about first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution show deficits impact these students. African American women encounter race and gender bias, isolation, invisibility, along with subtle and overt forms of racism (Evans, 2007; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Using the lens of Black feminist thought, Collins (2009) argues that Black women are inherently valuable. Although these students face negative stereotypes on their PWI campus, they are still thriving. The NCES indicates that in 2015-16, 64% of Black women earned a bachelor's degree; however, Patton et al. (2015) argue that Black women historically and currently maintain a presence in the academy, but their experiences linger primarily invisible and unacknowledged. This insinuates a subtle yet direct link between their representation and engagement on campus (Patton et al., 2015, p. 59). When viewing these women through the Anti-Deficit Achievement lens, Harper (2010) argues this framework should deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color have succeeded. The author shares most empirical studies amplify minority student failure and deficits instead of achievement (p. 64).

Black women on a PWI campus are viewed as a population that does not need much support because of their success in college. However, when students are engaged, involved, and feel appreciated on their campus, they are more likely to be retained (Furr, 2002). While it is imperative for Black students to feel welcomed on their campus, this is

not always the case for Black women. Many topics concerning Black women attending a PWI have been started to focus on their feelings of not belonging, loneliness, being attacked by racial microaggressions, all while being academically successful (Arminio et al., 2000; Charleston et al., 2014; Hotchkins, 2017; Muses et al., 2008; Robinson-Wood, 2009; Sue, 2010). The amount of literature that focuses on Black women in higher education trails behind other topics and given that there is nearly three-fourths of Black women attending higher educational institutions (Allen et al., 1991), it is vital to make sure that we review the literature on their experiences, especially Black women attending PWIs. Chavous & Cogburn (2007) indicate that Black female undergraduates occupy dual spaces that identify them as at-risk and resilient. The idea of these women being resilient is commendable. However, it is also an indication that further research needs to be conducted to understand why these students need to be resilient and determine what university administrators can do to remove the barriers these students face. If we focus solely on their resilience, the entire story of the spaces they occupy is not considered (Zamani, 2003).

Summary

This chapter discussed transfer students, their characteristics, challenges, and general reasons for transferring from a two-year institution to a four-year institution. The experiences, challenges, backgrounds, and characteristics of first-generation college students (FGCS) were also discussed. Additionally, literature was reviewed on the experiences, persistence, retention, and challenges for Black women in higher education, specifically while attending predominately White institutions (PWIs). Historically African American students are treated unequally, experience racism, and are faced with

negative stereotypes. These stereotypes, as discussed in this chapter, are focused on

Black women and their societal experiences. Black women are often perceived as these

negative stereotypes that other students on their college campus may believe. These

stereotypes often make these women look unapproachable or look like strong people who

do not need help, guidance, or support from their peers, faculty, or college/university they

attend.

Research has shown that African American women's experiences have been

hidden by research conducted on African Americans, African American men, or Euro-

American women. Johnson-Bailey (1999) argues that African American women's

position in research is the source of their invisibility. Although the experiences of first-

generation, transfer and Black undergraduate women have been studied, very little

research has been done on the intersectionality of all three of these populations. This

study is focused on all three of the individual populations as one student population and

the influence of Black feminist thought and using Anti-deficit achievement to discuss the

success and not the failures of these women.

Chapter 3
Methodology

This narrative study examined the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution (PWI). This research study looked at how these women transitioned at a PWI and ultimately became successful. Research shows that the number of African American women in higher education institutions has increased over the past decade (Allen, 1992). While enrollment for this population of students is increasing, research shows that many predominately White institutions fail to understand the challenges these women encounter and often neglect having supportive programs available for them (Rosales & Person, 2003). As a researcher, it is vital for me to represent my participants and honor their voices. Tillman (2002) discusses the importance of being culturally sensitive when focusing on African Americans as participants in research. Cultural sensitivity is the researcher's understanding and approach to learning about participants' lifestyles, beliefs, habits, needs, and fears (Sieber, 1992). It was important for me to share the experiences, voices, and perspectives of my participants.

Research Questions

This qualitative narrative study was conducted to understand the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a PWI. There are three questions that will guide this research. The questions are:

1. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution take a stance in their empowerment towards gaining a postsecondary education?

2. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution demonstrate success?

3. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution engage on campus?

Research Design

Narrative Inquiry

A narrative design approach was used to learn about the experiences of the participants. According to Riessman (2008), a narrative inquiry is designed for the humanities and enables the researcher to study individuals' lives through stories. Narrative inquiry is increasingly used in studies of educational experience. The general notion of narrative inquiry is the human experience in the world, which translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). The view of experience to which Connelly and Clandinin refer, which is the cornerstone of research, is rooted in John Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy (Clandinin, 2006). Based on Dewey's views, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed a narrative view of experience. The researchers were able to do this by drawing on Dewey's first criterion, interaction; the authors wrote, "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but people cannot be understood only as individuals. People are always in relation, always in a social context." (p. 2). The authors drew on Dewey's second criterion, continuity, as they wrote, experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to other experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, narrative inquiry was appropriate to use because it created a better understanding of the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. Narrative inquiry is a literary form of qualitative research that places a special emphasis on writing (Creswell, 2008). So narrative inquiry is concerned with analyzing and criticizing the stories we tell, hear, and read in the course of work. It is also concerned with the myths that surround us and are embedded in our social interactions (Webster & Mertov, 2007, p. 7). Narrative is the type of discourse that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). This type of inquiry was appropriate because this study investigated the experiences of this population of students. Through the use of Narrative inquiry supported by the conceptual frameworks of Black feminist thought and Anti-deficit Achievement, participants were able to share their experiences from their perspective. More specifically, with the support of Black feminist thought, first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution used our voices to push back against White male-dominated ideology of who we are as Black women (Collins, 2000).

Participants were co-researchers because narrative research is derived from participants' providing stories about their lives and experiences (Creswell, 2018). Using this approach, students should feel free to open up during the interview and allow for follow-up questions. This type of interview is used to encourage and stimulate the participant to tell the interviewer something about some important event in their life and the social context (Muylaert et al., 2014). Narrative research focuses on interviewing participants at some length to determine how they have personally experienced

oppression (Creswell, 2018, p. 59). It is essential to find themes throughout the different interviews (Creswell, 2018), which gave insight into how first-generation African American women who are transfer students feel about their experiences and challenges at James University. Narrative research employs restorying the participants' stories using structural devices, such as plot, setting, activities, climax, and denouement (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013, p. 278).

Researcher's Role

My role in this study was that of an interviewer, observer, collector of data, and analyzer. The researcher serves as an instrument of data collection, which indicated the data must be interpreted through a human instrument rather than through questionnaires or a machine (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). The researcher serves as the translator and studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 3). As the researcher, I was expected to remain aware of my biases because I related closely to my participants. I am a first-generation African American woman who transferred to a predominantly White institution. Each student's experience is different and unique to who we are. I was an adult student attending community college for the second time as a married woman and mother. The first time I attempted community college, my son was a toddler, and I was not prepared for the commitment it took to be a college student at that time. My second try at my local community college worked better for my family and me because my children were older and in school all day. I created a school schedule for myself that complemented my children's school schedules. I would

arrive home a little before they did, get them off the bus, and go home, and we would do homework together.

When I graduated from my community college, I was immersed in activities, honor societies, and student groups. I graduated with two Associates degrees and a 3.7 GPA. I transferred to a predominately White institution because my professor, who also taught at the school, encouraged me to look into the school and the school's programs. I met with an advisor and felt this was the school I was meant to attend. The academics and prestige of the school were appealing to me. I also earned a scholarship covering the two years I had left to earn my bachelor's degree. I commuted to my new school and would often arrive a couple of hours before my classes started. The culture on my campus was very uncomfortable for me in the beginning. I noticed longer than usual looks from White students, and I began to feel unwelcomed on the campus. A young White woman asked me if I was a graduate student or the teacher's assistant in one of my classes. Of course, this question in front of the whole class placed a spotlight on me, and when I answered no, most people stared at me, trying to figure me out, but no one was courageous enough to follow up on her question.

My mentor saved me; he was my rock during my time of adjustment on this new campus. I often tell people that I would have quit school if it were not for him talking to me and encouraging me. I found a community of other Black students closer to my age, and we built a support group. We encouraged each other, studied together, and most of us graduated together. I believe my experiences at the PWI were unique to me as an African American woman. These experiences allowed me to have an outsider within point of view. Collins (2000) explains that I am an outsider of the dominant group as an African

American woman, but I can occupy space because of my intellect. This space then allows me to gain insider knowledge. The author further explains that this outsider within status has provided a special standpoint on self, family, and society for Black women.

I was interested in interviewing other Black women and learning about their experiences and discussing what they are doing to succeed at their PWI because of my own experiences. It was crucial for me not to place my personal views or opinions on my participants. It was also important to acknowledge that my participants would likely share experiences of being the outsider within. Still, this role can provide insight and foster new angles of vision on oppression (Collins, 2000). As a researcher, I utilized strategies that improved the reliability and validity of qualitative findings (Creswell, 2018), which assisted me with being transparent during this process. The goal of research is to rely on participants' thoughts and views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2008). Sharing the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution, allows for more insight from our standpoint.

Research Site

I conducted my research at James University, a mid-size, public research university located in a rural area on the East coast. The undergraduate and graduate enrollment at this PWI totals 19,678 with 15,963 undergraduate students, 2,466 graduate students, and 1,249 professional/medical students. James reports 33% of the student body are under-represented students, respectively. The university offers 90 bachelor's, 48 master's, 2 professional, and 8 doctoral degree programs (Fast Facts, 2020). About 34% of the total student population identifies as students of color with the current breakdown of 10% Black/African American, 9.7% Hispanic/Latino/a, 4.3% Asian, 2.7% two or more

races, 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 5.1% Race unknown (Forbes, 2017). The school's retention rate is 85%, with 48% of students graduating in 4 years and 69% of students graduate in 6 years. Also, 54% of the students are male, and 46% of the student population are female (Forbes, 2017). James University reports 27% of its student population is first-generation (Flying First, 2020). I conducted my research at James University because the school has a sizable number of first-generation African American women who have transferred to the university. This is because James has several partnerships with community colleges in the area, and they work to make the transfer process seamless. The university was also used for this study because 66% of the student population is White, making the school a predominantly White institution.

Participants

Students that are currently attending James University were contacted through student email. A description of qualifying attributes for participants was they must be first-generation, African American women, transfer students from a community college, with a 2.0 grade point average or higher. A definition of first-generation students was provided in the email so participants were able to decipher if they qualified to volunteer for my study. There are different definitions for the first-generation population. I used the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) description and an explanation provided by researchers Blackwell & Pinder, 2014. The National Center for Education Statistics is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations (NCES, 1998). NCES defined first-generation students as undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education. Blackwell & Pinder (2014) also identified first-generation students as those

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with parents who never attended a university or those with parents with "some" college experience but never graduated.

Sample

The sample size for this study was four first-generation African American women; transfer students currently enrolled at James University. Students were recruited using purposeful sampling based on them matching the characteristics of this study. This type of sampling technique was used to identify and select participants to obtain information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). To get information-rich cases, individuals or groups are identified and explicitly chosen for their knowledge about or experiences with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). There are several purposeful sampling strategies a researcher can use in qualitative research. This study utilized criterion sampling, allowing predetermined specific characteristics that all participants must share (Schreier, 2018). Criterion sampling allowed me to select participants based on a set criterion so data could be gathered. This data assisted with answering research questions.

This type of sampling was appropriate for my research because of my interest in the specific experiences of African American women at a predominately White institution. Students that identified as first-generation African American women who have transferred to James University were contacted. I contacted stakeholders in several student success departments at James University. A list of students that met the characteristics of my study was provided to me. Along with purposeful sampling, I collected data using two interviews. The first interview consisted of open-ended questions and the second interview was a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured

interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents are asked to answer preset questions. Open-ended interviews are conducted using questions that the interviewee should be able to give in-depth answers to. Interviewing has the value of investigating complex and sensitive issues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A description of the study and a definition of the term first-generation was emailed to students identified as first-generation African American women transfer students to James University. This helped to obtain students who met the attributes for this study. Some questions used during the interview helped identify characteristics such as asking how many semesters they attended James University, age range, and grade point average. Since students were pre-identified through a list provided by stakeholders, students received emails, and to decrease selection bias participants were randomly selected from the list. After students were selected for interviews, the next step entailed contacting them and setting up interviews. The interviews were conducted virtually and during a time that was convenient for the student. Participants were prepared to be interviewed for 1-2 hours with the understanding that the interview process could last longer. Conducting a virtual interview was done because of restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Rubin & Rubin (2016) explain that communicating with participants through the internet is helpful if people are unable or unwilling to talk publicly. These interviews are viewed as more private and give participants time to think about their answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2016). The student had the option to select a place they preferred that allowed for a quiet space to conduct an interview. Allowing the student to choose the area enabled the researcher to record through field notes information about the

environment. This also allowed me to understand the student and show the student's knowledge about James University as a college community.

Protocol for interviewing was used when meeting with participants. Jacob & Furgerson (2012) explain that an interview protocol is more than a list of questions; it helps with the procedural level of interviewing and includes a script of what to say before the interview, prompts, and reminders for what information is most important to the researcher. An interview design that focuses on the provocation of storytelling, of narration, can be called a narrative interview design (Wengraf, 2001). Part of the process of conducting a narrative interview is to ask a question, listen to the participant, and do not interrupt. The interviewee is encouraged to answer questions with necessary reassurances and prompts for more story (Wengraf, 2001). When I met with my participants, I introduced my study and an explanation of the purpose of the study. Students were asked to give verbal and written consent as a record to participate in the study. Since the interview was conducted virtually, the student was asked for permission to record our discussion. Participants were allowed to ask questions before the interview began to assist with understanding the process. The student was given the option to end the interview if they began to feel uncomfortable with questions that were asked.

Data Collection

This study utilized a narrative inquiry research method. Narrative inquiry involves the researcher retelling participants' life stories. There are four primary qualitative data collection types: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2008), with interviews being the most recommended method. Data collection included in-person interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). My interview protocol

consisted of me using semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Using an interview

protocol allowed me to create a script of what I wanted to say before, during, and at the

conclusion of my interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Two interview protocols were

created to reflect both the semi-structured and open-ended interviews. A limited number

of questions were prepared in advance, along with follow-up questions for my

participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These questions were created before initial contact

with participants. A researcher's interview protocol is an instrument of inquiry-asking

questions for specific information related to a particular topic (Patton, 2015). Follow-up

questions were used to help clarify information that the participants provided. Rubin &

Rubin (2016) suggest using main questions but also have additional follow-up and

probing questions. This assisted me with going more in-depth with the participants about

their experiences as first-generation transfer students at James University. Field notes and

notes used from my researcher's journal have been used as part of the data collection

process.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis develops an in-depth perspective of participants' experiences

concerning a particular phenomenon (Riessman, 2002). This type of analysis can help

offer additional forums for non-dominant populations or cultures to express their

perceptions. There are four narrative forms of analysis that researchers tend to use. These

are structural, functional, thematic, and dialogic/performance. According to Parcell &

Baker (2018), structural narrative analyses are conducted by examining particular

characteristics of a story, and functional narrative analyses involve identifying the

purposes of a given storytelling moment. The next narrative form of analysis is thematic

analyses that determine themes in a narrative, and what types of stories are told (e.g., stories of grief, master narratives, or counternarratives). The final narrative form of analysis is dialogic/performance which examines how, where, and to whom the story is told (p. 2). Each of these interpretations can be used separately or together during a research study. For the purpose of this study, using thematic narrative analysis was helpful. This type of analysis was an appropriate method for my research because it allowed me to explore the shared experiences of first-generation African American women attending a PWI.

Thematic narrative analysis allowed me to obtain information from participants and focus on the data's meaning. Parcell & Baker (2018) explain that the use of thematic narrative analysis helps a researcher to develop themes. These themes provide substance of narratives to look for across other stories and/or across cultures to describe similar life events. Using themes allowed me to recognize the differences in the experiences my participants have had. Also, through thematic narrative analysis, I was able to use this method for all forms of data collection. The use of thematic narrative analysis helped with my interviews and collecting data from journaling. Ravitch & Riggan (2012) argue journaling is an informal way to examine thoughts, questions, struggles, ideas, and experiences the researcher is learning during the process of research. I was able to document my thoughts about my research and reflect on what I had learned from my participants and their experiences. Maxwell (2013) further explains that journaling was another way to get my thoughts on paper and use my writing as a way to facilitate reflection and analytical insight.

Limitations

The limitations of this narrative inquiry study design was that it involved working with people's consciously told stories, recognizing that these rest on more profound stories of which people are often unaware (Bell, 2002). This study is a unique experience for first-generation African American women who transfer to James University, a mid-size, public research university located in a rural area on the East coast. This study's limitation is that while other studies may have common themes, those themes are not generalizable for different racial groups, men, or other types of college campuses. Meaning, if other researchers conduct this study, their findings may not show the same results if participants are from different racial groups, men, or are on campuses that are not predominately White. Also, this study may not be universal for students that transfer from one four-year school to another four-year school. This study looked at the experiences of first-generation African American women who transferred from a two-year school into a four-year school that is predominately White.

Another limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic that left colleges and universities providing online learning. The pandemic caused students to decide not to transfer to other schools or to take time off from schooling. The pandemic influenced the experiences of my participants. These experiences impacted the transfer process and the way the women were able to be engaged on campus. The majority of faculty and staff were tasked with working from home, which changed how schools welcomed new students to campus. James University typically offered on-campus events like orientations and tours. Since this could not be an option for new transfer students, it may have limited the number of students that transferred to the university. A lack of transfers could have limited my

participants or findings in this narrative inquiry study because of the uncertainty of being on campus.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were considered during the research phase of this study. The researcher was transparent throughout the data collection process and offered to share conflicts of interest with participants. Before data collection began, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The permission from the board assisted me with remaining ethical through the process of this study. The participants were given a consent form for interviews that I conducted via Zoom. Since participants were interviewed virtually, they were asked for their consent via email. All participants were aware their participation in this study was voluntary, and if they wanted to discontinue or stop the interview at any point, they could let me know. Multiple data sources were used to increase the reliability of the data collection process (Creswell, 2008).

It was essential to provide these students with confidentiality throughout this process. Confidentiality means that I may know the participants, but their identity would not be revealed in any way in my study (Polonsky & Waller, 2018). Since I am employed at the institution, my study was conducted at; I was conscientious of conflicts of interest. I was responsible for identifying myself as a researcher and an employee of the university. Also, to make sure my study remained ethical, I did not interview participants directly associated with the major or department I work with. Since I did not interview participants connected to my department, it helped avoid bias and keep my participants from feeling like they should answer my questions according to what they thought I may have wanted to hear. Since my role at this university is not one of leadership, my findings

will not negatively impact the university. This study can assist with making changes and providing more support for this population of students.

Quality and Trustworthiness

To maintain credibility and trustworthiness, participants were not made to feel forced to participate in this study. Creswell & Creswell (2018) explain that participation in a study should be seen as voluntary. The authors also share that a researcher should respect norms and anticipate any cultural, gender, or religious differences. Knowing these differences will allow the researcher to maintain consistency during researching, interviewing, collecting, and analyzing data. It was essential to keep the credibility of this research in mind. This was done through the handling of data and the way the participants were treated. As a researcher, bias can cause an issue, so remaining ethical through this research was of the utmost importance to me. Evaluating the quality of research is necessary if findings are to be utilized in practice (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 34). The authors argue that the quality of how research is conducted is essential because it helps avoid bias.

Conclusion

The methodology of this study has been described throughout Chapter 3. This chapter provided an overview of the research design, research site, participants, data collection, and Narrative Analysis. The research design consisted of two interviews one that used semi-structured questions and the other utilizing open-ended questions. The study was conducted with students from James University, a mid-size, public research university located in a rural area on the East coast of the United States. The participants consisted of four first-generation African American women who transferred to James

University, a predominately White institution. With the permission of the participants, the

interviews were recorded. The semi-structured and open-ended interviews were

conducted via Zoom virtual conference. The data findings will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Findings

My study focused on understanding the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. Research has shown the college success of African American women remains underexplored due to trends in research of examining students of color as a group that encompasses men, women, and multiple racial/ethnic subgroups (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Black women historically maintain a presence in higher education, but their experiences often are invisible or go unacknowledged. In this chapter, I present the findings from this study about four successful African American women. This chapter represents the narrative of these four women willing to share their experiences. The narratives were written by the researcher with the intent to maintain the integrity of the participants. Each interview was transcribed verbatim to assist with data analysis. A quote taken from the participants' narrative is used as part of their introduction, and pseudonym names were given to each woman. Each participant is introduced using their profile information gained from interviews. The names of university employees that participants mentioned were changed to help protect my participant's privacy.

In addition to sharing the narratives of these participants and the significant findings of this study, this chapter included detailed information regarding participant responses obtained from a two-part interview. The first interview consisted of demographic information and open-ended questions. The second part of the interview consisted of asking semi-structured questions. The women all shared their experiences as new students transferring to James University. Some had very similar experiences that

were not ideal for new students attending the university. Once they transferred to James, the women shared their experiences in the classroom and on campus with faculty, professional staff, and peers. The women are consistently working towards reaching their goals and being successful, so they have shared how they measure their success and feel fulfilled as Black students attending the university.

This chapter presents background information, and the stories told, retold, and relived of Charmaine, Ayanna, Alice, and Jean. The lived experiences of the African American women participants are discussed, focusing on their experiences of transferring to a predominately White institution. Through their experiences, they shared interactions with faculty, staff, and peers. The participants also discussed their awareness of negative stereotypes and the importance of education while being aware of White peer work ethic. Also discussed are negative experiences with communication issues on campus, exposure to positive institutional agents, the participants' measure of success, and how they navigated being students during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 1

Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Year	GPA	Major
Charmaine	28	Senior	3.9	Elementary Education
Ayanna	28	Senior	3.3	English/Education
Alice	24	Junior	2.6	Liberal Studies
Jean	30	Junior	3.5	Liberal Studies

Charmaine

"The importance of an education, I think for a Black woman is equivalent to power."

Charmaine is a 28-year-old African American woman who transferred to James University from a local community college. She had a previous career in healthcare but realized she would not be able to excel in the profession. This realization was not due to a lack of confidence but because she had watched other people earn promotions before her that did not have the same caliber of work ethic she had. Charmaine decided to attend college again to assist her with pursuing a new career. She went to her community college to take classes needed for her new major. She applied to James University and was accepted into the College of Education. Charmaine is an Elementary Education major at James University, and at the time of this interview, she had a 3.9 grade point average (GPA). Although she is currently a senior, she will need to student teach to earn her degree. To student teach, which is a three-semester sequence, Charmaine will need to pass Praxis Core Praxis II and maintain a 3.0 GPA or higher each semester she student teaches. Charmaine knows this is a lot to stay on top of, but she is determined to conquer these requirements.

When I first met Charmaine, we discussed her previous career. She shared that she had a good job working in a pharmacy, but she did not feel like the job was for her. She did not feel fulfilled in her role at the pharmacy, so she knew she needed to make a change.

> The medical field, I guess, kind of, there's a lot of things that went against, like my morals, my values, beliefs, and um, it's almost like dehumanizing, and I was like, what else am I good at? I try to be an honest person, and I just didn't feel

that's what that work was for me. I've been caring for kids since like the beginning

time, and I still had family that I was babysitting and nannying for. So, I was like,

let me look into education. I wasn't happy with what I was doing, and I was doing

it for like five years, and I'm like, it wasn't enough. Am I going to have to do this

the rest of my life? I did not feel content after five years so, it was time to go back

to school and keep reinventing myself.

Charmaine's decision to attend James University was led by her experiences in

health care and her work with children. This led us into a conversation about Charmaine's

transfer process. She was hesitant to discuss it at first. Charmaine described a challenging

transfer experience that was difficult for her to talk about. She had to stop a few times to

compose herself, but she eventually broke down in tears. She cried, vented, and explained

her frustration with the transfer process by sharing,

I just felt it wasn't a welcoming, and it was a, it wasn't like, welcome to James

University. Usually, I can give grace in situations, but I don't want to give back

grace. I can give maybe 50% of this to the pandemic. And then being

overwhelmed and dealing with a lot of new students, or a lot of transfers and, I

don't really know, but the um, admin ratio to student ratio is probably

overwhelming. So, it's not like I think I'm more significant than the next person,

but I just felt like I had to constantly stay on people, wear myself out in order for

them to do their job, to get the proper help that I needed. I was placed in a

situation which I had to write to teachers just to get into a certain class because

people were dragging their feet. I was doing whatever I was told that I needed to

do. I was getting passed around to multiple departments, and nobody seemed to

care. I had to just stay on it and create a paper trail, who I spoke with and what we

spoke about. All this just to be able to have classes in the spring. If that was

somebody that didn't care about their education and wasn't capable in life, they

just wouldn't have done it.

Charmaine goes into further detail about her transfer experience. She is frustrated about how the process went.

The school almost lost a student, and I feel like that shouldn't have been. That in

my case, they told me to do x, y, z. It's done! And I'm still not able to schedule

courses, or I'm having issues and like, you know, I think I find one person that I

think I really connected with, you just wanna hold on to them. This student is

calling every single day, and I'm asking, what are we doing here? I don't ever feel

covered. That's another thing this year. It's hard, so when you're dealing with

people that just wanna pass you around, you start feeling defeated. You almost

feel problematic for being like; I'm doing my part, just do your part. It wasn't a

good transition, and I'm like how, who is dropping the ball, what is happening

here, I don't understand. And then I felt like, I'm relying on financial aid and loans

but, is "Megan" who has her dad paying for school, is she your top priority?

Because that's what I felt like. I was being brushed under the rug. Or, if I had been

there the first two years and not been transferred in, would the experience have

been different going into this third year?

She describes her experience and how the treatment made her feel. Her voice becomes

shaky, and she takes a break before she gives more details.

It just wasn't a pleasant experience, and they just put a bad taste in my mouth about finishing here. But, at this point, I just wanna be done. I just feel like that's all I'm trying to do anyway. So, it's just like, work with me and get me out the door. Get your money and get me out the door. When you're pushing and advocating for yourself like, you know, you don't come from wealth, and you just continue to push to make you guys do your job. If I stopped calling, would I have been enrolled or pushed back a semester? If I stopped reaching out, would anybody reach out to me? Because of this experience, I already knew that I was going to have to go in and be on top of everything when it came to dealing with them. I was handling my business, I was on the campus, showing my face, and I was in and out of these offices. It's a whole lot easier for people to be inattentive over the phone or behind the screen, and I think people took advantage of that. Because, when I don't do the work or when I'm slipping, I'm responsible. Then, whose held accountable? If it was a mistake, it was a mistake. I was being rushed through this, the care, I didn't receive the help I should have gotten, I had questions, I was being rushed through the process. The lady in financial aid just wanted to get off the phone, and she ended up making a mistake. And all I get is, I'm sorry. I was passed around to different departments instead of people taking the time to help because I'm a new student. I feel like people only become serious when I ask for their names, but getting registered and getting help this semester as a current student, it was not a better experience. I just needed people to say that they did not know the answers to my questions but offer to find out and get back to me.

The frustration Charmaine feels is intense. As she's sharing this experience, her emotions go from angry to disappointed, and then she's crying. The memories of this particular experience were hard for Charmaine to detail, but she wanted to keep discussing them. She felt it necessary to share her experience, hoping that administrators at James University read about this exchange we had. She does not want another African American woman to go through this same experience. Charmaine further explains,

> I will say, I spoke to a guy in the technology center, and he helped me so much. His name is J'Von, I think, but he stayed on the phone with me and walked me through the portal, email, and stuff. He also shared he had an awful experience as a student and could empathize with me. It was because he had that, he knew, he had that experience of what I was going through. He was like, "I'm sorry." He explained it is a little complicated and walked me through and gave me the information I needed. He gave me so much information and then followed up with, "if you need any help, you can call back and ask for me." You don't forget people like that, you know? Even the secretary in the College of Education, Melissa, was so helpful and I appreciate her for that.

It's crucial for Charmaine not to be looked at as an angry person. She is well aware of the "Angry Black woman" stereotype, and she does not want to have that stereotype placed on her. She is just open and honest about how she feels about her treatment at James by some of the staff members. It is essential for her to share her experiences and be transparent about those experiences so she can help another Black woman avoid the same pitfalls. As previously discussed, she, with several of the other

participants, hopes their experiences are noticed, taken into account, and positive changes can be made.

Charmaine discussed James University and being a part of the college's community. She shared her positive and negative experiences as a student at the university. When we talked about her interactions with faculty members in the classroom, she shared positive stories. However, when we discussed peer and professional staff interactions at James, there was a mixture of feelings that ultimately showed the disappointment Charmaine felt with the staff at the college.

While every African American student has different experiences and perceptions of their experiences, the women I interviewed each shared similar aspects of being a Black woman in college. Charmaine enjoys being a student and learning about her future career, but she shared,

> I think sometimes I have to; I definitely feel like I have to present myself in a way that is very professional. I know professors and teachers don't necessarily look at their students as professionals, but as put together, well-spoken, I almost have to project that more than my peers. I have to show I deserve to be amongst you guys, and I'm worthy, I'm educated. Sometimes, it feels like not innocent until proven guilty. I feel like I am un-considered until you are until you prove that you should be considered. I get professors that don't even try to say my name, they will just use my last name, and when I pronounce it, they don't even try to say it correctly. When I schedule classes, I feel like there's at least one professor I'll have to prove myself to. Sometimes it just feels like your disregarded, or you're considered less than. I feel like they already know you're Black, and they already have

expectations that are negative, which I believe is unconscious bias that some of

the teachers bring to the table. I just feel like I can't struggle because they're

already expecting me to be a struggling student.

When Charmaine shared how she presented herself to her professors, she chuckled a bit

because she believed it is not every day a student professionally carries themselves at

school. We further discussed her on-campus experiences and talked about her interactions

with professors and peers. She starts describing personal exchanges with professors and

the university's technology software to praise students.

I've had teachers that they send those things to your email about doing well, or if I

email them, they have noted that I may be a stronger student. I know I can't do the

bare minimum to get by. My one professor last semester, she was great! She was

just very aware. I asked her to be my mentor throughout school, you know. The

discussions in class were very real because she was not ignorant to what goes on.

Knowing she had that level of awareness put me at ease, and it made me feel

relaxed because she understood what things were like. I also feel proud when

teachers recognize me by sending emails saying I'm doing well. I store those

emails because it's a struggle. I don't necessarily realize I'm doing well until I get

an email, and then it shocks me. It catches me off guard because I struggle, and I

work so hard that I don't think I'm doing well. It's not until I get that

acknowledgment that I realize how good I've done the work. Getting that

recognition that my work is meeting or exceeding expectations, that's good. You

hear more about when you're slipping than when you've done something good, so

it feels good to hear you're doing well.

Charmaine recalls a time a professor discussed her work in class. She details her experience and how it made her feel to have her professor point out her work.

> Most recently, my professor made an announcement to the class and pulled my work as an example. I felt that she appreciated the time that I put into the assignment, and I made valid points. That made me feel like a valued student that she appreciated the work that I put into the assignment. It's deeper than me, it's, I think it's deeper for me knowing I'm working full time and able to go into school full time. I have to divide my time and attention like that, and these are real-world things that hit different.

Getting positive feedback or recognition from her professors makes Charmaine feel seen in her classes. She appreciates her professors and how they use real-world issues in their classrooms. As a pre-service teacher, she acknowledged that her professors are teaching students to be prepared to teach and tackle societal concerns in their classrooms.

> Besides being actively involved in the classroom, I wanted to know how involved Charmaine has been on campus. She was honest about how she felt about being an involved student at James. She looked at this type of engagement differently from the other participants. Since she did not have a good transfer experience, she felt that being actively involved on campus was not important. She shared about her lack of involvement because she has not gone to events or joined clubs.

> I don't care to be involved. They don't deserve that from me. I'm not going to build into or help better the school. I put a lot of myself into everything I do, and I don't half-ass any of my pursuits. So, if I was going to even be in a group, I know what I have to give, and because of what I have gotten from the college if it was

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like one of those things where I was like, "oh my gosh, this is great," you want to be part of it. You want to be a part of what's going on in and on campus and in the college community. But I'm like, no. I haven't had a good experience with you guys. I'm not going to give to one of your programs because if I do, it's just going to push it in a better direction. That puts you guys in a positive way, and you don't deserve that from me. So, you can get that from the students that are graduating at a higher success rate. They just ought to do that for you because that's the least they can do. Let them run your clubs.

Earning a degree and settling into a career were essential to all my participants. As first-generation students, they either did not have parents who could expose them to college or siblings that could assist them with preparing for college. I discussed with Charmaine her perspective on being successful. She spoke about the influences of her family and the importance of working hard to earn her degree. She also had her sister in mind while discussing being a student at James University. She became emotional while speaking about her sister. Charmaine eventually composed herself and shared how she felt about being labeled strong.

I don't like to use the word strong anymore, not with how it's, how it's used to describe Black women. It's not good to be strong as a Black woman because that means that you're exhausted, that means you were kicking and screaming. That's what that means. I definitely want her to see somebody who, I think, is resilient in the midst of struggle and still being compassionate in caring for others. My sister just earned her degree, so she understands how much of a struggle this is. We never had the help or support from our parents. Even if they had lacked

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understanding like there is no financial help we can gain from them. There isn't

any emotional support there, and there isn't like, we'll go here with you to figure it

out. I said to my dad, sometimes I wish that were just more present because I'm

like, they (university staff) would respect you as a Black man. I believe I wouldn't

have it as hard. I see "Megan" have an issue at the school, and her dad, who pays

for her tuition, will yell and call the Dean or the President of the school and get

what he wants. Instead, I have to fend for myself, and I want my sister to see that

despite those struggles, I kept going.

This perspective allowed me to discuss the idea of being powerful as a Black woman. We

talked about what being powerful meant to Charmaine. She discussed how she believes

power is maintained as a first-generation African American woman who has transferred

to a predominately White institution. Obtaining an education can be a form of

empowerment and activism that will allow Black women to fight against the system of

oppression. For Charmaine, her sense of power comes from being a student and using her

voice. She shared an interaction with her professor and peers in the classroom.

The professor said to me, if I ever have something I want to say, just feel free to

say it. She said she wanted to allow me the space to get on my soapbox. Of

course, I would take a step back because no one wants to be a teacher's pet but,

the class was so engaging, and I was learning a lot. I didn't think I would be able

to impact my class, and because of our discussions every week, more and more

people started turning their screens on and participating in the discussions. I think

that was a pretty powerful moment for me. My professor taught me not to sit in

silence in the classroom. It's a powerful thing where people are listening to your

work. So, don't hold back, especially if it propels us in a direction that promotes learning, understanding, empathy, compassion of all that, so use your voice. And I think a lot of times, the Black community doesn't feel like they're going to be respected or heard. It helps when your professor is backing what you're saying or when others are agreeing with what you're saying.

Having these positive experiences and interactions with her professor and peers allows Charmaine to keep striving towards success. Success is viewed differently for each person. For the purpose of this study, success is not measured by the participant's grade point average (GPA). Charmaine viewed her success from different points of view.

Success means health insurance and comfortable living. I think it goes well beyond me that I can provide a decent life for my children, and then they can provide for themselves and their children. It's like, setting up generational success. I want to be able to pour my success into generations following me. I want to be able to break the cure or chain and make sure the struggle stops here type of thing. It is unfortunate that in America, success means healthcare. Or success means I can live a comfortable life which I believe is unfortunate. I also believe success means that I can have access to people and be in a room with certain people that I would never have had access to. I should be able to say success is, getting a good job and starting a family. Unfortunately, the American dream has definitely changed, and that's not it anymore. I feel like I have to show that I deserve to be amongst you guys, I'm worthy, I'm educated. Honestly, I believe using my voice is how I have been successful.

Charmaine, thinking about her younger sister shared her hopes of how she wants her sister to see her. She had to take a moment because it made her emotional to think about her sister, who is also in college. They support each other by checking on one another, and her sister sends her encouraging videos and memes. She explained that she had spoken to her father about it and said she just needed him to be more present, especially when dealing with her transfer experience. She felt if he was there to help her, as a Black man, maybe the departments that sent her back and forth, "they wouldn't have fucked with me." She is still very angry about her experience, and becomes emotional during the discussion. Charmaine explained to me that her tears are from still feeling frustrated about how she was treated during the transfer process. She just wanted to feel welcomed on her new campus, and since that did not happen, she remains disappointed.

Ayanna

"Opportunities don't come around that often for us."

This quote is based on Ayanna's perception of education and life. Since this is the knowledge that Ayanna carries with her in life, she takes full advantage of opportunities that arise for her. Ayanna is a 28-year-old African American undergraduate student dual majoring in English and Education. She started community college as a theater major. She loved acting and applied to James University after graduating from high school. She auditioned to be a theater major and was accepted, but she decided to start at her community college. At the time of this interview, she was a Senior with a 3.3 grade point average (GPA). She transferred credits from a community college and is on track to earn her bachelor's degree in a semester and her master's degree in two semesters. Gaining her

higher education was important to her because, as a first-generation student, she "knew she was going to college."

Ayanna and I discussed the importance of education to her, and she said, "I hold my education at a very high standard because I feel like without education, I don't want to say there's nothing because that's not true, but for me, without education, there isn't much for me to go off on." As a student, Ayanna loves to learn, grow as a person, and see things "from a different lens." It is important to Ayanna to do well in school to get a job in the career she wants where she feels fulfilled in what she is doing. We bonded because we attended the same community college and had a professor in common. The professor, Dr. Bond, is a person that encourages her students and goes out of her way to help them. She took a class with the professor and felt she learned a lot.

Ayanna and I spoke about her transfer experience to James University. She ran into some issues while she was going through the process.

The transfer process was actually a very hard time for me. I didn't apply to go to James until the fall of 2019, and then I started January 2020. When I started James, it was very difficult. I talked to so many different people, and unfortunately, the communication wasn't where I needed it to be. And I was told something by this person, and something by this person, and I met with many different advisors, and they're all telling me different things. There was this one advisor in particular who discouraged me from going to school because she's like, "You're older than everybody else, and you're trying to work full time. It's not going to work out." It was not a good experience. It wasn't until I met my advisor Emily (pseudonym) that I was like, okay, I can do this. She encouraged me. And

pretty much helped me along the way. So, my transfer journey was very difficult. Even my financial aid, contacting the financial aid office and trying to figure out funds. And then I was getting fined for things. I'm like, this is not making sense, and I'm like nobody has given me any information.

Transferring to James was not a good experience for Ayanna. She goes on to say, "to say the least, it was a mess. Unfortunately, everything was everywhere, and nobody knew anything, and it really almost discouraged me from continuing." Because of the lack of communication Ayanna further explains, "I was like, all right, when this semester's over in May, that's it. I'm done. I'm not doing it."

Ayanna has two older siblings who attended the same community college. She knew she wanted to earn her associate's degree and had always planned to attend James University. Although her parents did not pressure her or her siblings to attend college, she has always wanted to go to college. When she shared how difficult her transfer experience was, she showed frustration. Attending college was so important to her, but that she was willing to walk away from James because of her transfer experience. Ayanna had worked hard to do well and get to this next step of starting school at a four-year university, and between her experience and financial aid issues, she almost walked away. Thankfully, as she shared, she connected with her advisor and meets with her every semester. She credits her advisor for turning things around and making her feel like she could stay at the school and complete her program.

Ayanna talked about being a part of the campus community. She shared what it was like to be an involved student during the pandemic when everything was only offered virtually. She was very active with the James University community by attending six

events in one semester. She even joined an honor society because of her grades. She attended a cooking class which she credits the course for "helping to choose healthy options." One event that left a lasting impact on Ayana was a discussion about Black Lives Matter. Ayanna shared,

> The discussion about Black Lives Matter was really nice. A lot of students came out, a lot of students who weren't Black or African American came out, and they were speaking on things that they weren't educated about that they wanted to be educated about. So, it was really good to sit and listen to the different students who weren't African American. They wanted to offer their support and change their thinking and get a better understanding of how things work for African Americans in America. So that was a really cool event. Walking away from that event, I felt good knowing that there were people who weren't African American, who really cared. That was a big thing for me because a lot of times, you go on social media, and you see things. I have a lot of friends who I went to high school with, and to see the things they were saying online, it really hurt me. Like these are people that I talk to and I sat with at lunch, and to think they thought a specific way about African Americans, it hurt me.

Ayanna expressed her hurt to me. She had these people in her life that were her friends, and they showed a side of themselves she did not expect to see. We moved on from that conversation and talked about relationships she has developed with professors and her interactions with her peers. Ayanna shared she enjoyed her classes and professors. She discussed how she has felt in her classes by stating,

I have never felt not valued by any of my professors. Thankfully they've been very kind. There was a time last semester during the time we were remote (due to Covid), I hopped on Zoom before class started, and I was speaking to my professors. She's amazing, and she was just telling me how much she appreciated my writing. She was telling me that I'm a very strong writer and she really appreciated it. That made me feel very good. Because if she had said, "Oh, your writing's not that great," I would've been like, well, maybe being an English teacher is not the role for me. But she didn't say that. She valued me as a writer and encouraged me, so I'm like, okay, I'm in the right field. I'm headed where I'm supposed to be.

Ayanna also wanted to share about her interaction in class with a peer. This interaction left her feeling frustrated and disappointed in her peer. She was not comfortable with going completely into detail about what exactly was said, but she shared,

In my psychology class, we have a lot of discussions in that class. There was a student in the class, she spoke one day and didn't have nice things to say about African Americans. It was a very awkward moment in class because she was speaking based off her experience. But the way that it came out, it was very rude and disgusting. But, after that, another student who was not African American hopped in and defended us. I kind of felt not valued, but when the other student defended us, I felt valued, so I was okay.

Working towards being successful in college is important to Ayanna. She has the support of her family but explained to me that sometimes they do not understand how or

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why she is so busy all of the time. Ayanna also discussed the support she received from her family. Although her parents did not push her to go to college, both siblings attempted college. Seeing them attend school helped her decide to go to community college first because it was cost-effective. We spoke about her brother a few times since he's also still working on his degree. She shared a mini argument the two had about school. She loves her brother and wants to see both of them be successful. She stated,

> A couple of months ago, I had a mini argument with my brother at the beginning of the semester. He's attending Drake Community College after transferring from Raitman Community College to work on his English Education degree. The amount of work he has is not the same as the amount of work I have. And he just doesn't understand why I always say I have homework; I can't do this or I can't do that. He's just like, "You don't have that much work." He was trying to tell me, "You don't have that much work you have to do. Stop acting like you got so much you have to do." And I'm just like, "No, I have work." And he's like, "Are you trying to say that you're smarter than me?" And I'm like, "Whoa, wait a minute." Things just went to a whole other level. I'm like, no, that's not at all what's happening. I'm like, "Listen, I remember when I went to community and the workload is not the same as the university. And I'm, saying that because I went to community." I told him when he comes to James or goes to Bryant University or wherever he chooses to go, he is going to see. So, he's starting to see it now, he's like, "I think I'm going to change my major." It's a lot of work.

She expressed her love for her brother because he is supportive of her. When you are a student, you become very focused on school and doing well. Sometimes that focus on

school makes you less focused on your family and friends. Ayanna was taken back by where the conservation went between them. She explained to her brother that she understood his workload, and she talked to him about what he could expect his life to be like once he got to a university.

Ayanna was a good student in high, so she always knew she wanted to attend college. She explains, "When I was younger, I would always say, I'm going to get my doctorate degree. I'm going to go all the way up to the top." She was very open and honest with me about her desire to attend college. She shared that she wavered and went back and forth about obtaining a degree but knew she was going to college. She also had an internal battle over if she should major in education or become an actor. Ayanna further explained,

> I knew I was going to college either way. Whether it was for theater or for education, I knew that I was going to college. It was nothing that was forced upon me from my parents. They wanted me and my siblings all to go to college, but it wasn't like you have to go to college. It wasn't forced upon us. But I always knew I wanted to go.

Ayanna and I began to speak about being a powerful African American woman and what that looked like to her. She shared with me that she feels like "opportunity can be hard to come by as a Black woman." She explained that she works very hard not to lose an opportunity when one arises. Ayanna believes she has to work extremely hard because opportunities "for us are far and few." She shares that to be a powerful Black woman means taking advantage of the few opportunities that come her way. She also compares the pressure she will place on herself to put forth every effort to do well in her

classes to the work ethic of her White peers. She shared with me that her peers have bragged about reading right before their Literature class or if an assignment is due by 11:59 pm, they have told her they submitted at 11:00 pm. This shows a lack of effort and possible waste of an opportunity that if she did this, it could negatively impact her. When we discussed the topic further, Ayanna talked about her advisor, that has left such a positive impact on her.

> I felt most powerful after speaking to my advisor Emily in March of this year. I was talking to her about my classes and grades and things like that. She said to me, "You came in as a transfer student, and you're doing better than half of the students in your field." At that moment, I felt powerful because I'm out here doing my best, and my best is good enough for my advisor to notice it and to point it out in the middle of a meeting while choosing my classes for next semester. I felt really powerful in that moment and, as a Black woman, because I feel like a lot of times, we can point out each other's accomplishments. But then when you hear it from somebody who's not Black, it's like wow. You noticed me. That feels good.

This conversation led us into a deeper discussion about success as a Black woman, and Ayanna explained what success means to her.

> Success means a lot to me personally. I know everyone has different versions of what success is. I'm not someone who feels like money and fame is success for me. Success for me is going to class, passing my classes, and graduating with my degree. Once I accomplish that, getting a job in my career field where I'm fulfilled in what I'm doing. As long as I can make that goal, I'm fine. So far, every semester, I've learned a lot, and I've been growing as a student. I'm also in a

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National Honor Society for transfer students because of my grades and GPA.

That's something that I've been successful at, James. I also don't give up. I go for

what I want. I achieve my goals, and I keep pushing forward, regardless of my

age. I didn't look at my age as something against me when I decided to come back

to school.

As our conversation started to wind down, Ayanna discussed her siblings more.

She shared that if she had a younger sister, what she would want her sister to see when

she looked at her.

I would love for her to see me as a powerful Black woman who's achieving my

goals and going after my dreams. And pushing forward, no matter what.

Whatever obstacles come my way, I'm pushing forward.

Alice

"Everyone's experience is different."

When I sat down to speak with Alice, she seemed nervous at first, but eventually,

she warmed up to me. Alice is a 24-year-old African American undergraduate student

majoring in Liberal Studies. She lives an hour away from James University, so she takes

various online and campus courses. Alice attended a community college near her home

and transferred to James University because she felt the school's reputation would help

her when seeking career opportunities. At the time of this interview, she was a Junior

with a 2.6 grade point average (GPA). She transferred with credits from a community

college one hour from James University. Her motivation to attend James University was

to attain her degree and translate her degree into a career in the medical field. Alice has,

like most students, struggled while James University offered several semesters remotely

because of the Covid-19 pandemic. She was excited to be back on campus to turn her grades around and complete her education. When we discussed her grades more, she explained to me that although the pandemic was part of the issue, her priorities were more of an issue. She now feels like her "priorities are getting more straight."

Attending college allows Alice the opportunity to create a better life for herself. Alice believes that "jobs nowadays find your classes and internships important and jobs really want you to have a master's now" She did a medical billing and coding internship which is in the field she's interested in working in. Alice stated, "I want to go into data analysis with healthcare because I really like doing that type of work because it's interesting to me." Since she transferred from a community college to James University, we discussed her transfer experience.

> My transfer experience was okay. It was not too bad because I live an hour away. I live an hour away, and I work full time, so I'm not really on campus a lot to get that full experience and to be into a lot of stuff. But yeah, when I was on unemployment and I was able to get into all types of things.

Alice and I discussed if she ran into any issues or barriers during the transfer process, and she did not have any problems transferring to James. She explained that she believes it is essential to research the school you plan to attend. Researching the school can make the transfer process easier because she believes it will help make students more aware of the expectations of that school.

> I would definitely say to do your research to see if this is the school you want. If you're looking for a HBCU (Historically Black College or University), I don't think this (James University) would be the experience that you're looking for. It's

a diverse crowd, and I don't feel any racism, not towards me at least, but if you're looking for an HBCU, I would go to a different school. Otherwise, James is not a bad school to attend.

Alice spoke highly about her experiences at the university. She openly wondered if her experiences would be different if she lived on campus and was actively involved in clubs or a sorority. When she started discussing experiences on the campus and with her professor and peers, most of her experiences were through web conferences. Since students have faced education and learning virtually because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Alice took advantage of being engaged on campus. She had opportunities to attend events virtually, which helped her become involved with her peers. She described some of the events and her responsibilities during the events.

> I did the National Wellness Institution. I was the coordinator, and because of Covid, we had to work remotely. My group and I worked together for about two months to set the event up. I was also able to take advantage of a program called, Get fit. That was fun. I did it two days a week. It is an exercise program for people with disabilities. They come in, and you basically get assigned to a partner, and you go over different exercises with them. It was really fun because I was able to modify different exercises for them to do. They would pick what they wanted to work on, and I would do the exercises with them and end it with a 20-minute walk inside.

When Alice discussed working with others, she became very excited. When she has the opportunity, she enjoys helping people. We moved our conversation to her interactions with her professors and peers. Alice talked about her experiences with faculty and peers,

but she seemed indifferent to the discussion. It took her a moment to think about an interaction with a professor or peers that she wanted to share.

I don't really want to say I felt valued. I never had a time where I was like, "Okay, yeah, this professor values me." I don't believe I have really experienced feeling valued or not valued by a professor. There was a time in class when we were talking about commutes. Everyone was saying how far they commute, and I guess I had the highest one in the class, and they were just like, "Okay, yeah, I applaud you for doing that,' and I was like, "oh, thank you." That felt nice. Another nice experience I had was when the president of a club I belong to reached out to me to do a special project for their career fair. So, I thought that was nice. Like you reached out to me to do a specific project. So, maybe she thought I was responsible, she could count on me, I was reliable. So, that felt really good.

Alice further shares a story about a Black professor and his interactions with her White peers. Similar to Ayanna's interaction with a peer that disappointed her, Alice did not like how her peers treated the professor, which left her feeling upset about the situation.

There was a Black professor, and yeah, I felt like the students didn't really respect him at all. Yeah, they didn't respect him because he had; he was African, so he had a little accent. So, they weren't pretty nice to him. I helped him a couple of times, but yeah, it's not nice to do that.

She was visibly bothered that the professor experienced rudeness from her peers. It was important to her to show him support and respect. She did not sit silently in her class or

partake in disrespecting her professor. She instead stood firm to her beliefs that they were wrong and she would not be grouped with that type of behavior.

Alice has dreams and goals for her future, and with the support of her family, she can work towards her goals. Her family wanted to provide her with a good education. She was sent to a school outside of her community that was predominately White, but when she described the school to me, she described it as being a diverse school.

My parents, they really didn't want to send me to Trips High School. So, they sent me to a different school which was a little different for me. So, I adapted there a little differently. The school had better classes and teachers, which my parents felt would be best for me.

It was important to Alice's parents to give her an opportunity to attend a school that would allow her to continue her education in college. She also shared she was interested in going into the military at one point. We began to talk more about the military and the types of resources available to people that enlist. We discussed the different military branches, and Alice shared she was interested in the Airforce. Many high schools have Junior ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps), so we discussed the ROTC and military.

I was actually going to go to the military because since high school, I didn't feel like school was for me, but here I am. Including community college, I've been in school for about six years, but I'm happy about my decision. I took the ASVAB once didn't pass it in high school. They offered the test at my high school, but I didn't take it again. My school had a lot of military kids there, so they had an ROTC, but I didn't join.

Going to college was the better choice for Alice, and now she is at James University working on obtaining her degree. Her ability to earn her degree is a form of empowerment for her as a Black woman. Alice and I spoke more about what makes her feel powerful as an African American woman.

> When I have to stand in front of a diverse group of peers and give a presentation in class, that makes me feel powerful. Especially with me, I struggle with it. But, in general, I think that was powerful for me to do. I just got up and presented in this medical class. It also felt good to get feedback from my professor. She said my topic was good. I believe I was the only Black person, so that was powerful for me. Yeah, my dad was pretty proud of me too.

She also went further into detail about success and discussed how she advocates for herself and how that translates into success. When she began the discussion, I allowed her the opportunity to talk, but Alice shared something that I was intrigued by because she said several times.

> When I advocate for myself, it leads to me being successful. I will speak up for myself and not in a rude way. I am not the type of person that will stay mute so, I am very straightforward. I have had professors that will reach out to me to check in with me. I know that may not be their responsibility, and I appreciate that they would do that. But, if I'm in a situation in which I need to speak up for myself, I will do that but again, not in a rude way.

Since Alice mentioned a couple of times that she would approach a professor if she needed to, but not in a rude way, I asked her what she meant by that statement. She elaborated what she meant by stating,

Because if I raise my voice, I will be labeled as maybe an "Angry Black woman."

So, you need to know how to come correct at the opposite race. Or, with an older

professor, they might be thinking you're ignorant or something.

Alice does not want that distinction placed on her because it is important to her to

maintain respect between herself and her professors. She also openly shared about her

struggles in school and seemed a little embarrassed about her grades and GPA. She has

not given up, and that is what is most important. Part of her process towards striving for

success is to turn her grades around. This is a way for her to redeem herself in a sense

because she knows she can do better as a student. As previously mentioned, she shared

that her priorities were not straight, but she is actively prioritizing school and her grades.

Alice explained, "I would say, that's part of my success."

Jean

"You don't have to be your circumstances."

Jean is a 30-year-old African American undergraduate student majoring in Liberal

Studies. At the time of this interview, she was a Junior with a 3.5-grade point average

(GPA). She transferred credits from two community colleges and is on track to graduate

in two semesters. Jean is a mother of two boys and aspires to earn her degree for her

children. At the time of this interview, she was a few semesters away from graduating

with her bachelor's degree. The pure excitement when she shared this information was

heart-warming to see. Jean has lived with parents that did not finish high school. Her

father dropped out and her mom, but her mom went through the General Educational

Development (GED) program and earned her certification. Since her parents did not earn

hog school diplomas, she was encouraged to drop out of high school when she struggled in her senior year.

Jean decided to attend college to better her life and set a positive example for her children. She shared, "I never saw anybody go to college or graduate college. So, it's important for me to show my kids that I can do it so that they have somebody to look up to." Her children are 8-year-old twins so, they understand what Jean is doing and all of the hard work she is putting into college. As we continued to discuss her children, we talked about mom guilt and the responsibilities of being in school and being a mom. Jean has very strong views on the hard work it takes to be an African American woman in school.

And that's what we need. We need more hard work in our (Black) community. More. There is no easy way out. And unfortunately, in a lot of cases, we got to work ten times harder. So, you have to have that mindset that I want this.

When Jean and I discussed her transfer experience, she shared some positive experiences. She did run into a slight issue during the process that was disappointing, but she wanted to stay positive and enjoy the college experiences she was going to have.

My transfer experience was pretty cool. It was pretty easy because I actually graduated from Raitman Community College, and they did a lot of it for me. They helped me with the transfer process. There was only one hiccup, I was a part of PTK (Phi Theta Kappa) National Honor Society, and I was supposed to get a scholarship, but it never happened. I was never able to communicate with anybody or find someone to help me with it. So, I never got that scholarship, and

that was probably the only downfall of transferring. But other than that, it was
really, really easy.

Jean found a way to let the disappointment of not getting her scholarship go. She received
student loans to help her pay for her education. PTK is an honors program for community
college students. These scholarships through PTK are not easy to earn. You have to
maintain a high-grade point average (GPA) for the scholarship, which in some cases, the
scholarship could pay for the majority if not all of your tuition for the two years you are
expected to complete your degree. The scholarship's requirements and amounts change
based on the grade point average a student has at their community college. Being a
college student is important for Jean. She wants to experience all she can on campus by
being involved.

> Coming here has opened my eyes to a lot of groups that I would've never known
> before. I joined Habitat for Humanity, and I also joined a medical group for
> American women that gives back to the community. This group adopted a family
> for Thanksgiving and created a basket of food for them. I'm working on signing
> up to build a home with Habitat for Humanity. I am also in a club that submitted
> photos, colorings, and stuff to organizations for kids. I have also planted trees in
> my hometown. Being charitable and giving back are things that fulfill me.

The work Jean is doing at James University is meaningful to her because her children can
see her give back to others. This will one day prompt them to follow in their mother's
footsteps and do the same. She shared how she feels being an African American student
on campus at times.

It is important to me to get the most out of my opportunities. That is why I joined groups at James University. That's why I reach out and talk to my professors. That's why I'm active with my advisor. I don't want to just go to school and say, I went. I want to get the most out of my time here because I think college is more than an education. I feel like being at James University is an experience to help me grow within myself because it's a sense of independence. It's a sense of new community for me. Being a Black woman, I have felt like I had to bite my tongue a lot. So, there's been situations where I want to speak up in class, but it's almost like, you have to know, and when you don't know, you get judged. Sometimes, I really don't know what's going on, so I'll just wait and email the teacher instead of speaking up for myself. I see other people in class speak up all of the time, but I feel like I can't. I believe that's not just an African American thing; I just think I was conditioned to not speak too loud because you don't want to be labeled. You don't want to fit the stereotype, so mute yourself and then figure it out, and that's where you get your strength. So, what I want to take from here is just a better understanding of myself. A better understanding of me as a student, as a peer, as a charitable person, and just as a balanced person because I do balance work full-time. I balance school full-time; I balance being a single mother full time, and I think it has given me a sense of anything is possible. As long as you really want it and you really work for it, anything is possible.

We also discussed her experiences with her professors, and how she felt as a James University student. When Jean spoke about her interactions with her professors in the classroom, she became excited to share with me.

I've gotten positive feedback from every professor I've had so far, I've not had a bad experience with any classmates either. I would say probably my happiest moments have been when I've gotten feedback. I got letters from the Deans, and they say that my teachers had acknowledged my hard work, and I'm like, I was struggling because I'm tired and I'm studying. Just to see every last one of them have something positive to say about me. That really gave me confidence in myself because, like I stated before, this is my first time going to a university, and it was scary to me. It was a lot more work. It was more demanding than I was used to. So, to see that I was doing something right and to have teachers acknowledge that that was amazing to me. I hadn't experienced that. Even in community college, I hadn't experienced that. I was on the Dean's list, and I was on PTK. I hadn't had professors actually come out and give me acknowledgment.

Succeeding at James University is an essential priority for Jean. Everything that she accomplishes at school is because she is motivated by her children. She stressed the importance of showing her children going to college and being successful can be done. Since her father did not finish high school and her mother encouraged her to drop out of high school, it was important for Jean to set an example for her children. She wants her boys to do better than her.

As a single mom, I knew I needed more just to maintain my household as it grew. So, I decided to try going to school, and it's been going pretty well, actually. I have two boys; they're twins, and they just turned eight. So, for me, my education is really important because I never saw anybody go to college or graduate college.

So, it's important for me to show my kids that I can do it so that they have

somebody to look up to because they don't have a lot of outlets to see that.

Jean and I spoke about her experiences as a mom and Black woman. She shared her story

about biting her tongue in certain settings because she is a Black woman. Although she

believes this is not just an issue for African American women, she shared that she was

conditioned not to speak up for herself. Not speaking up is not just an issue within the

Black community. For years, women have been raised to be young ladies, speak a certain

way (no cursing), and be the opposite of what men are expected to be. Unfortunately, this

is not an isolated situation for us as Black women. Jean shared her views on how she

feels powerful as an African American woman.

I guess, in my head, I really don't feel like I've done anything to feel powerful. I

feel like everything I'm doing is because I'm supposed to do it. So, I think the only

thing that will make me feel powerful is when I finally get to walk across that

stage and have that sense of accomplishment. I feel like that's when I will feel

powerful because right now, I feel like I'm a...even as a student and I'm doing

good, and I have good grades, I still feel like I'm in a stance of struggle. I guess I

can say when I get my grades, and they're good, I feel powerful because I feel like

my work is paying off.

It is important for Jean to give back to her community, and ultimately, she just

wants to be successful for her children. Since she did not have anyone that could show

her how to be a college student, she is creating that blueprint for her children and future

generations of her family.

I believe success is an individual concept. It's not a required amount of money. Success is when I reach a level of fulfillment and happiness. So, even if I get my bachelor's and that's a success for me, as long as I find genuine joy and pride in what I do, I feel myself as being successful. Another aspect of success for me is to join groups and give back. I'm trying to build a better career for myself, so staying on top of my work, following through, and showing the pride I have in my education is success to me.

Jean was not able to see anyone in her life go to college. Being a college graduate is very important for this mother of two. She wants to show her children that if she can navigate college, they can do it too. As shared in her story, she has also stayed active on campus and taken advantage of virtual events because this will also show her children how to be well-rounded students.

Discussion of Themes

Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Inquiry

The three-dimensional space narrative inquiry is a research approach shaped by philosopher John Dewey. Dewey based his principles on the concept that personal, social, temporal, and situation were essential in describing the characteristics of an experience. This approach was used by Dewey to find meaning and became central to his philosophy of experience in personal and social context (Wang & Geale, 2015). The three-dimensional space narrative is structured from the researcher's point of view. It helps to identify the elements that should be considered if we look at the participants' knowledge from a holistic and critical perspective (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Based on the participants' narratives, their experiences ranged from the three-dimensional space of

personal, social, temporal, and situation that was important to the women. The themes

found in this study showed that the participants could share their experiences within a

personal context while also sharing narratives of holistic viewpoints. All themes

discussed are from a personal or social context, while the theme measuring success as a

Black student also focused on the holistic perspective of the participant's experiences.

Awareness of Negative Stereotypes

Each woman is aware of the labels placed on Black women, and they are

concerned about those labels being placed on them. If they speak up as Charmaine has,

there is an understanding that people outside of our race will look at us as the angry

Black woman. Several of the women discussed the stereotype of the angry Black woman.

Jean and I spoke about her experiences as a mom and Black woman. She shared stories

about biting her tongue in certain settings because she is a Black woman. Although she

believes this is not just an issue for African American women, she explains that she was

conditioned not to speak up for herself. Women have been raised to be young ladies, to

speak and carry ourselves a certain way, and be the opposite of what men are expected to

be. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated situation for us as Black women, but we get

accused of having a chip on our shoulders or being "angry." Two participants spoke

about being polite when addressing professors or staff so they would not be labeled the

"angry Black woman." As Black women, we carry a lot of labels on our shoulders.

Although these women, for the most part, shared positive experiences at James

University, one participant delved deeper into societal views of Black women. Charmaine

discussed the term "strong Black woman." This is a term often used to complement a

Black woman on handling life and work responsibilities without complaint. This woman

is known not to ask for help because she is strong enough to handle stressors independently. Charmaine takes offense to this term because she believes it puts Black women down and exposes the exhaustion Black women feel. These stereotypes acknowledge that as Black women, we are perceived by the dominant culture as loud, uneducated, unworthy, sarcastic women. So, although the stereotypes are there and being placed on us, we actively work against them. These stereotypes, at times, can play into our insecurities and do not allow us to celebrate our accomplishments.

Importance of Education and Peer Work Ethic

Each participant discussed the importance of their education and work ethic. They compared their high work ethic to White peers that did not always take class assignments or participating in class discussions as seriously as the participants. All of the women prioritized their education because they were aware of the opportunities education could provide them. Charmaine believes getting her education is a form of empowerment for her. It will allow her the opportunity to have a good career. She also shares that once she can maintain her career, she will eventually set up generational success for her future children and grandchildren. Usually, people discuss generational wealth, but for Charmaine, the wealth she wants to obtain is valued through her level of educational success. Ayanna also recognizes that her education is the opportunity that will lead her to her career. She believes that there is not much there for her without education. Another participant, Jean, also expressed the importance of education in her narrative. Jean is a parent, so she decided to attend college to better her life and set a positive example for her children.

The importance of education is so her children can look at her accomplishments and want to mirror her success. Alice values her education, and although she has had struggles, she is working harder to obtain her degree. All of the participants discussed interactions in their classes with White peers. Several addressed the lack of work ethic White students put into their classes because they bragged about putting little to no effort into their classwork. The women discussed that they put hours into studying or working on assignments. The participants shared that not putting forth much effort is not an option for them. The women did not want their professors to perceive them as lazy or question if they belonged in their class.

Negative Experiences with Communication Issues

Communication issues were another theme found in this narrative study. Two of the participants did not have good experiences while transferring to the university. There was a communication breakdown, and important information was not given to the students. Both Ayanna and Charmaine had such a difficult time during the transfer process that they planned to leave James University once they completed their first semester. Ayanna was given misinformation through the financial aid office. This caused her to have a large bill that she had difficulty paying. This bill could have also kept her from finishing her program at the university and graduating. It left both women disappointed in the university and the staff they encountered during their transfer. Jean had a better experience transferring to James University, but she lost a scholarship awarded at her community college. She did not know who she needed to speak to about obtaining her scholarship. Typically, conversations about scholarships or outside funding such as personal student loans are conducted by the financial aid office. Unfortunately,

these women did not receive the necessary help or communication as new students to the university. As shared by the women, this could have cost them their opportunity to attend college and earn their degrees.

Positive Engagement with Institutional Agents

An institutional agent is a person at the university that can provide resources and institutional support to students. All of the women discussed their relationships with their Academic Advisors and their professors. Although Charmaine, Jean, and Ayanna did not have the best experiences while transferring to the university, they and Alice all had positive stories about the faculty and staff they have encountered. Ayanna shared that the encouragement and support from her advisor convinced her she should stay at the university. This same advisor lets her know when they meet each semester that she is in a far better place as a soon-to-be graduate than students native to the university. Ayanna explained this to mean students that have been at James since their first year may not be at the same level of success as her. Charmaine also had a good experience with her Academic Advisor and the secretary for the College of Education advising center. She also found the empathy J'Von from the technology department showed her was encouraging. Each of these institutional agents made her feel welcomed. Her conversations about faculty members show how comfortable Charmaine has become as a student at the university. Jean also shared she has had positive encounters with her Academic Advisor. Her advisor has supported her since she started at the university and cheered her on for her accomplishments. Jean has also shared that although she does not always feel comfortable speaking up in the classroom, her professors make her feel like she belongs there. Alice also shared her professors made her feel like she belonged in

their classroom. The positive feedback and support she receives from her professors make her feel like she can turn her grades around and graduate from the university.

Measuring Success as Black Students

Like most institutions of higher education, James University measures the success of their students through grading, grade point averages, and student retention. After speaking with each of the participants, they measure their success differently. Several of women do not use money or material gains as a sign of success for them. The women described success as a life fulfillment. Success is measured as an accomplishment of their level of happiness. The women described their success as a connection to their emotions. While Charmaine also supported the idea of measuring her success based on her level of happiness, she first described success for her differently. She explained that success meant health insurance and comfortable living. She further explains that success for her in America means she will have access to people and be in the same room with people she would not have access to. Being educated but ultimately having the ability to use her voice will show how successful she has been. Jean described her success is an individual concept. She also believes that as long as she finds genuine joy and pride in what she does, she will feel successful. This is a woman that feels pride, joy, and fulfillment as a college student because she is able to set an example of being successful to her children.

Navigating the Covid-19 Pandemic

While conducting this research, the participants were trying to navigate the transfer process, be involved on campus, focus on their courses, and navigate a pandemic. James University adhered to a state of emergency and closed the campus. All employees, services, and classes were available remotely. This means students and employees

engaged with one another through the use of web conferences. The use of a virtual space while addressing the transfer process was difficult for a few of the women. Previously, before the pandemic, a student could come to campus to seek assistance from different departments at the university. This was not an option for the women once the university shut the campus down. Remote learning for students was offered in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester. Remote learning did not end until Summer 2021. The university welcomed students back to campus in the Fall of 2021. Faculty, staff, and students had to learn how to navigate this new way of education. It was shared in this study that some of the participants dealt with professors teaching while most of the students kept their cameras off. The level of engagement during class was different. As Charmaine explained, it was not until she started sharing more about her life experiences her classmates turned on their cameras and started engaging in the conversations.

Jean, Ayanna, and Alice became very engaged with the university's community through virtual events and activities. The accessibility to a web conference link allowed all three women to become involved at the university. Jean did not need to find a sitter for her children, Alice did not have to drive an hour to get to campus, and Ayanna was able to take a step away from schoolwork to attend an event. While being remote was positive for the women, Alice shared in her narrative that she struggled with remote learning. The structure of being on campus, going to classes, and having access to face-to-face resources was needed by Alice. Her grades suffered because she had to rely on herself to stay motivated to attend her virtual classes. This was not always easy for her because, as previously explained, her priorities were not aligned with school. Although the pandemic

is still an issue, classes are being offered on campus again, and all of the women were looking forward to seeing how much things have changed for faculty and students.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the participants' experiences as first-generation African American women who transferred to a predominately White institution. The findings of this study included themes to assist with data arrangement. There were six themes that were included in this study. These themes included The awareness of negative stereotypes, the importance of education and peer work ethic, negative experiences with communication issues, positive engagement with institutional agents, measuring success as Black students, and navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. All of the participants in this study experienced positive faculty interactions, but several had negative experiences during their transfer to James University. They also shared negative interactions with the professional staff at the university. These professional staff members assisted the participants with the transfer process. Now that they are current students at the university, the support these students have from faculty, staff, and peers has been impactful. The extra care these women received to help with their success has not gone unnoticed by them. The implications and conclusion of this study will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to examine and understand the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. In order to better understand the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution, I interviewed four women who met the inclusion criteria of being African American, a woman, a first-generation transfer student with at least a 2.0-grade point average or higher. Each woman participated in two interviews, which assisted with learning about their experiences. The first interview focused on open-ended questions, and the second interview focused on semi-structured interview questions. The findings revealed six specific themes. These themes were negative stereotypes, the importance of education and peer work ethic, negative experiences with communication issues, positive engagement with institutional agents, measuring success as Black students, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first theme identified in this study is the awareness of negative stereotypes. The concerns of negative stereotypes were discussed in Chapter Four with participants because since they use their voices in and outside of the classroom to speak up for themselves, there was concern about stereotypical labels being placed on them. Black women are often perceived as "angry Black women" or "strong Black women" when they speak up for themselves. The participants discuss these terms because historically, African American students are treated unequally, experience racism, and face the same negative stereotypes on a predominately White institution's campus as they do in society.

The second theme focused on the importance of education and peer work ethic. The participants discussed the high priority they placed on their education. It was shared by the participants that their education is a form of empowerment. Being an educated Black woman will open doors and lead to better career opportunities. While becoming educated is important to the women, they also discussed the differences in work ethic between themselves and their peers. The study findings suggest that while they put effort into their classwork, often, their White peers shared that they did the bare minimum and still managed to do well in class.

The third theme, negative experiences with communication issues, focused on several participants' issues during the transfer process to James University. The findings of the study suggest there was a breakdown of communication that caused several of the women to consider leaving the university. These issues could have also cost the participants opportunities to gain a post-secondary education. The fourth theme discussed is positive engagement with institutional agents that positively impacted the participants. The women shared their experiences with faculty, professional staff, and peers at the university. The participants all shared positive interactions with professional staff, specifically their Academic Advisor, and felt very supported by the professors. The fifth theme, measuring success as Black students, identified how the participants viewed their success at James University. Success is often used as a metric for an institution's performance or a student's persistence. The women described success as a life fulfillment. Success, for them, is an accomplishment of their level of happiness. The last theme in this study is navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic changed the deliverance of

education to the James University community. The women discussed how they navigated the pandemic and remained engaged as students.

Discussion of Research Questions and Findings

Within this dissertation, Chapter Two reviewed the existing literature on the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. What is available tends to focus on Black men or students of color as one population. It was noted within Chapter Two how limited the current literature is on African American women who transfer to predominately White institutions. The chapter also revealed the majority of literature reviewed discusses the deficits of Black students rather than their success. It was also found within the chapter that many colleges and universities have struggled to retain and graduate first-generation students. Retention has become a challenge for many higher education institutions because first-generation students may not have individuals in their lives (e.g., family) who can relate to their experiences (Glassgen et al., 2018; Green & Wright, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2013). The chapter also addressed limited research on transfer first-generation African American women attending predominately White institutions. Patton et al., 2016 argue that between 1991-2012, a 22-year span, only 48 articles were published on the experiences of Black college women. More specifically, if Black women are researched, they are grouped with Black men and people of color. However, most focus is on Black men because they finish college at a lower percentage than Black women. This is supported by researcher Winkle-Wagner (2015), who argues the college success of Black women remains underexplored due to research examining students of color as a group at the aggregate level (i.e., students of color encompass men, women, and multiple racial/ethnic subgroups).

Black feminist thought and Anti-deficit Achievement theory were used as conceptual frameworks for this study. The significance of these frameworks is the complementary alignment between the two. Both frameworks discuss the success of Black students and the ideology to push back against the oppressive nature of researching Black students through a deficit lens. Both frameworks acknowledge the minimalization of Black students in society. They both also encourage researchers to explore the experiences of Black students by making us the center or primary focus of research. Also, these frameworks complement one another because they challenge the dominant culture's views. This is done by challenging researchers to explore Black student success and how these students navigate an oppressive system in society and on campus.

With results presented in Chapter Four, this study focused on first-generation African American women who transferred to a predominately White institution and discussed their experiences at their institution. The findings of this study suggested that all of the students interviewed were motivated to attend college to obtain a degree. The motivation for obtaining a degree would help the participants create a better life for themselves and, for some, their families. The research questions in this chapter will be further reviewed. Once the research questions are addressed, implications will be discussed along with the study's limitations.

Research Question 1

How do First-Generation African American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution Take a Stance in Their Empowerment Towards Gaining a Post-Secondary Education? First-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution take a stance in their empowerment towards

gaining a post-secondary education by using their voices and pushing back against negative stereotypes. The women are able to push back against negative stereotypes by first acknowledging they exist and using their education to prove the stereotypes wrong. These key concepts emerged from this study because of the importance of using their voices and the women remaining conscientious of negative stereotypes. While they felt they needed to remain professional while interacting with university employees, the women were determined to be heard and respected for their opinions on their education. The study findings suggest that although the women did not want to be negatively judged due to negative communication issues, they refused to back down. They stood up for themselves and worked towards taking control of negative experiences at the university. The women were aware they could be judged as an "angry Black woman" while questioning university employees. They tried to remain calm as they navigated the communication issues and realized their education was more important than backing down. Standing up for themselves is a form of empowerment because the women are pushing back against an oppressive environment. The concept of empowerment shows how Black women can navigate inequities and racial gaps to be successful (Harper, 2010). Based on the findings of this study, the Black women also empowered themselves by understanding the world's perceptions but not letting those perceptions stop us from being who we are in the world. The women also took a stance in their empowerment through relationships with faculty and advisors. The participants felt faculty and advisors listened to them and supported them when they shared their experiences. It was discussed that faculty and professional staff did not view the women as negative stereotypes.

Several negative terms discussed by the women were the idea of the "angry Black woman" and the "strong Black woman." These stereotypes often cause insecurities in Black women, but the participants used their education as their stance against the stereotypes. The participants believe that their education will open doors typically closed for Black women. Rather than waiting to be invited into the conversation, the women will be empowered by being educated and contributing to the conversation. Black feminist thought is used as a path to address negative stereotypes that share a portion of the "general ideology of domination" that takes on a special meaning for Black women (Collins, 2001, p. 69). My findings support the literature that Black women are often negatively stereotyped. Because of this, it leaves an impact on Black women, which causes them to speak up for themselves. The negative image of the "angry Black woman" was depicted as hostile and nagging, which plays into African American women being overly aggressive and masculinized (Wally-Jean, 2009; West, 1995). This stereotype is used against African American women to put us in our place and stop us from questioning the dominant culture. Since their education was important to them, the women questioned the dominant culture and did not allow negative stereotypes to stop them from achieving their goals. Obtaining an education, earning a degree, and ultimately being able to provide for themselves and their family was a powerful motivator. The women refused to allow these stereotypes to keep them from striving towards success. Black women's empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge that perpetuate objectification, commodification, and exploitation (Collins, 2000, p. 289).

Black feminist thought clarifies the impacts of racism, classism, and sexism on the lives of Black women by challenging historical views about them and enables scholars to

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dispel subordination of some based on race, class, and sex (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). The negative stereotype found during this study, "the angry Black woman," is one stereotype, among others, that has permeated and influenced society's view of African American women (Walley-Jean, 2009). This concept views Black women as an always need to be in charge, argumentative, and threatening Sapphire (Collins, 2009). The second negative stereotype found in this study, "the strong Black woman," is a term that research shows are associated with negative psychological outcomes on Black women (Liao et al., 2020). This term, so much a part of U.S. culture (Liao et al., 2020), shows how Black women have been valued not for intelligence but our labor. This term for generations has been placed on Black women to describe how we do not express emotions, show vulnerability, or allow people to see our gentleness. There was a time when being labeled a strong Black woman meant we were resilient and capable. The study findings suggest that there has been a shift amongst Black women that when this term is used to describe us, it is negative and no longer a source of pride. The women pushed back against this stereotype through their engagement on campus and in the classroom. They had open dialogue with their peers and shared about themselves and their experiences as Black women. This allowed their peers to ask questions and to gain an understanding of who these women were on a personal level. It allowed for the women to show their feelings and views on their education, their lives, goals, and achievements. Being open about their lived experiences helped to combat the prejudged views that society often has about Black women.

Although Black women are viewed in society negatively, we can persist in our educational careers. My study expands on the literature about the impact of negative

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stereotypes on Black students. Harper (2015) explains that in a study conducted by Lewis et al. (2000), stereotypes led students of color to disconnect socially from their White peers. The findings of my study suggest the women did not disconnect from their White peers; they used opportunities in the classroom to share their experiences. This was done to remove the stigma of negative stereotypes. Harper (2015) argues that although most research focuses on deficits, there is evidence that points to possible coping strategies that result in positive outcomes for Black students. The participants of this study took a stance against negative stereotypes by not internalizing their harmful impact.

The findings of Black women using their voices as a form of empowerment expands on the current literature. It is understood that there is little known about Black women's experiences and challenges in college (Patton et al., 2016). The author further explains that most literature suggests that over the last 20 years, we are "okay" as Black girls because we fare better than Black boys. This thought process carries throughout our lifetimes. The lack of research on the higher education of Black women and the idea of speaking up for ourselves or using our voices to empower ourselves has not been discussed. I found that faculty members encouraged the women to use their voices and share their stories, which supports being empowered. This encouragement from faculty relates to the idea of culturally responsive teaching. Research has shown that culturally responsive teaching and practices are needed, which will place focus on collective and individual empowerment (Green, 2010; Green & Wright, 2017; Lane, 2006).

Black feminist thought was utilized to discuss the shared experiences of Black women. Black feminist thought privileges experiences and ideas of Black women, which are often minimalized or ignored by society (Collins, 2009). It can often be difficult for a

first-generation student to persist in higher education because they do not have the same support as a White counterpart or continuing generation student (Cataldi, 2018). The intention of empowerment is centered on mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and a process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Another finding of this study was the importance of the women getting an education, but they recognized the lack of White peer work ethic. White peers told the women that they put minimal effort into their classwork. The high standard these women placed on themselves supports the literature that students of color are forced to think about and speak on behalf of their race (Harris & Linder, 2018; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The participants did extra work because, in addition to the effort they placed in their classes, they also exceeded their professors' expectations. The women exceeded the expectations of their professors to combat the negative stereotypes about themselves. Black feminist thought was used as a conceptual framework to discuss societal views of Black women and how those views are seen on a predominately White institution's campus. The findings of this study support the fundamental concepts of this theory.

Research Question 2

How do First-Generation African American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution Demonstrate Success? First-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution demonstrate success through the fulfillment of happiness, being productive, giving back, and feeling

accomplished. The participants shared that achieving their goals made them feel successful. Success for the women is a life fulfillment that they measured as a form of accomplishment that made them happy. Providing a better life for themselves and their family is another measure of Black student success. While obtaining an education and college degree helps demonstrate success for these women, it is also another form of empowerment. The connection of success and empowerment allows the participants to continue to take a stance towards obtaining a post-secondary education. Moreover, the feelings of happiness, life fulfillment, and feelings of accomplishment as a measure of success is comparable to Black joy. Black joy is inspired by anything that uplifts or supports Black culture through Black excellence. Tichavakunda (2021) explains a student might be more likely to persist and achieve on campus if they find the campus experience joyous. The empowerment of success allows the women in spaces they may not always be welcomed in, and it helps them fight against the systems of oppression. Collins (2000) argues that the skills gained in school are part of focused education for Black community development and thus help centralize our worldviews, which empowers us more.

Terenzini et al. (1996) state that first-generation students are less likely than traditional students to have experiences connected to success and persistence in college. Harper's Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory was used as the framework to answer this question. This theory is used to place focus on the positive aspects of a student and their success at their college. The Anti-Deficit Achievement model suggests researchers should understand the African American college student experience from the standpoint of what works and what contributes to their success (Harper, 2006). Rather than look at the deficits of first-generation students or Black students, Harper challenges researchers

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to explore what helped these students become successful. This study found that faculty and professional staff support helped contribute to these women's success. The transfer process for several of the women was complex, and they planned to transfer out of the university. The support and recognition of their hard work from faculty members in the classroom motivated the women to persist. This study also found that Academic Advisors maintained assisted with persistence by keeping the women on track for graduation. This encouragement from staff and faculty supports the literature about institutional agents. Stanton-Salazar (2010) describes an institutional agent as a high-status, non-related actor occupying high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, which provides critical social and institutional support.

These findings also support the three researchable dimensions of success discussed by Harper (2012). Success influences students' college achievement through classroom experiences, out-of-class engagement, and enriching educational experiences (Harper, 2012). The findings of this study suggest that the participants' success was influenced by their experiences in the classroom. The women were able to have discussions in the classroom that engaged mutual understandings between the Black women, their peers, and their professors. If faculty are operating based on negative stereotypes in the classroom, whether consciously or not, minority students may feel uncomfortable, mistrustful, or demoralized (Davis et al., 2004). This, however, was not a finding in this study. The accessibility and support from a professor are crucial for students. The type of contact an African American student has with faculty help predict subsequent college persistence (Strayhorn, 2008b). This supports the findings of this study because encouragement from faculty was discussed, and it was shown that the students

maintained a positive rapport with faculty, which led to their success in the classroom. Another finding of this study related to Harper's three dimensions of success is the participant's out-of-class engagement. Several of the women were involved in clubs, charities, and volunteerism.

While getting good grades is a measure of success, Harper (2012) believes focusing on how a Black man can persist through graduation is necessary to investigate. Investigating how a Black woman can persist through graduation is also necessary to focus on. This study supports Harper's research because Black women participants demonstrate that GPA is not a predictor of persistence or graduation. The participants of this study had their own definitions of success, which likely compelled their academic achievement and accomplishment of traditional measures of success. Numerous researchers have pointed to the underrepresentation and racism Black students endure on predominately White campuses. While important implications for policy and practice have been generated from these studies, Harper (2015) maintains that much remains to be known about how students excel and persist despite these challenges. Based on the data obtained in this study, the demonstration of success for these students was their ability to attend college as first-generation African American women. The women measured their success through the level of happiness and fulfillment they felt as Black students. These women have shown that their success is based on their desires to keep striving for better in their lives.

Research Question 3

How do First-Generation African American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution Engage on Campus? First-generation African

American women who transfer to a predominately White institution engage on campus by participating in events on campus and building relationships with faculty and staff. Several women participated in events that discussed Black Lives Matter, health, and wellness and allowed them opportunities to give back. The findings of this study suggest that once the women became more engaged on campus, they felt successful, and they connected that success to their happiness. This study also found that although the university changed the methods of engagement by making events virtual because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the participants were still able to be involved with the campus community.

I found in my study that the more welcomed the students felt, the more engaged the students were on campus. Black women on a predominately White institution's campus are viewed as a population that does not need much support because of their success in college. However, when students are engaged, involved, and feel appreciated on their campus, they are more likely to be retained (Furr, 2002). This study supports these findings because participants that were very active on campus became more involved, felt appreciated, and enjoyed their experiences at the university. While it is imperative for Black students to feel welcomed on their campus, this is not always the case for Black women. This study has found that although the women did not feel welcomed initially, those feelings changed once they had more positive interactions with faculty and staff.

The women were able to build positive and supportive relationships with the faculty and staff at the university. The support of faculty and staff who are institutional agents can provide privileges, institutional resources, opportunities for career mobility,

wealth creation, political empowerment, and school achievement for students (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The relationships were established because faculty members and professional staff provided a safe space for the women. They were also comfortable sharing their experiences with peers through the encouragement of faculty. This encouragement to the women showed that faculty members trusted them to share in the classroom and supported the women's idea that many faculty members understood Black experiences in education. The women demonstrated a strong work ethic in their classes as well. The participants believed that the professors appreciated this work ethic, which also helped with the women's and faculty's relationships.

Research has shown that while Black women earn degrees at higher rates than Black men, Patton et al. (2015) maintain that Black women historically and currently maintain a presence in the academy. However, their experiences linger primarily invisible and unacknowledged. This insinuates a subtle yet direct link between their representation and engagement on campus (Patton et al., 2015, p. 59). My findings suggest that once students were assigned an Academic Advisor, the experiences for these students became even more positive. This is encouraging as research has shown that academic advising has consistently been reported to positively influence student retention (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). My participants each have shared positive experiences they had with their advisors. These experiences made the women feel appreciated and welcomed.

This study also found that student engagement on campus was attached to the participant's points of view on college success. Several of the participants wanted to feel like well-rounded college students. Doing well in their classes was important, but getting involved, volunteering, and giving back to others made the women feel like they had

gained a significant college experience. The measure of their success was not focused on how much they accomplished; it was based on an internal satisfaction of feeling happy. Research has shown that social support systems such as student organizations are generally used to facilitate African American students' adjustment, retention, and progress (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Williamson, 1999). Many African American students experience feeling isolated or alienated when they attend a predominately White institution. Being involved in student clubs and organizations has been associated with academic achievement and persistence (Guiffrida, 2004). The findings of this study support the literature on students being actively involved on campus. It has been found that through active involvement, the participants were excited to be college students and gain experiences on campus as a student.

Becoming engaged on campus can come in many forms. A student does not have to be actively involved in clubs or honor societies. Engagement can also take place in the classroom. The findings of this study suggest that classroom discussions with faculty and peers were another form of engagement for the women. They were able to share about their lives and educational careers. This made the women feel like their peers were able to understand the Black student experience. This study found that while there were negative experiences for some, the engagement received in the classroom helped with the participants' persistence. One of the most substantial impacts on student validation and retention is their relationships with faculty. Faculty, parents, classmates, and partners substantially affect student involvement and retention both in and outside the classroom setting (Hurtado et al., 2011; Kelly et al., 2019a). Research has found that students of color tend to have a more challenging time adjusting to the campus environment, are less

engaged, and are less likely to persist through college when professors do not consider the unique differences in their students (Holmes et al., 2000). The study findings suggest that several faculty members engaged students in the classroom and were open to diverse conversations. Because of these conversations, White peers became more actively involved in class discussions, allowing participants to feel heard during conversations surrounding diversity, equity, inclusion, and race.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was conducted at a mid-size, public research university located in a rural East Coast area. A delimitation of this qualitative, narrative inquiry study is the decision to exclude Black men, Indigenous, and people of color. For this study, I chose to focus on the experiences of African American women. Since there is research on the experiences of Black men, I wanted to share the voices of Black women. Another delimitation of this study was focusing on a predominately White institution. The experiences of Black women at HBCUs are very different; however, this study is in the context of a PWI, which represents the majority of post-secondary institutions. Also, this study is not universal for students that transfer from one four-year school to another four-year school. This study looked at the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer from a two-year school into a four-year school that is predominately White. This experience may be different because a transfer student does not know or understand the expectations of the four-year school. A transfer student from one four-year school to another four-year school could better understand the policies and procedures during the transfer process.

All participants of this study are non-traditional students. This study focused on the experiences of first-generation African American women who transferred from a two-year community college to a four-year university. The participants of this study ranged from ages of 24 years old to 30 years old. According to the NCES, traditional-aged students vary between 18-and 23 years old. While this can be seen as a limitation, it was expected that all participants would be non-traditional students. Most students who start their education at a community college and then transfer to a four-year college or university tend to be non-traditional-aged.

Implications for Practice, Research, and Policy

Practice/Leadership

The findings from this study had implications for practice. Through the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution in this study, James University must address the lack of communication, information, and help during the transfer process. Rather than having several different departments handle transfer students, I recommend creating a transfer department. This department should assist transfer students with all of their needs leading up to scheduling appointments with their advisors. Creating a transfer department would help new transfer students become more acclimated on campus. This department could also help with the retention of transfer students. The findings of this study show that because of communication issues, several students were considering transferring to another school. Since the university utilizes an embedded advisor model, once transfer students have completed their transfer requirements, they can expect to meet with their advisor for their major and discuss courses, future goals, and educational plans.

Another recommendation is that the university could start a peer mentor program. These mentors can be student volunteers that are familiar with the transfer process. New transfer students can be assigned a peer mentor as they are starting to transfer to James University. This would give the new transfer student a contact person to answer general questions about the university or their expected process. The findings of this study suggest that this program would be beneficial for transfer students. If the participants of this study had peer mentors, they could have obtained the information they needed easier. The participants may have felt less frustrated because they would have a contact person that could have provided the support they needed through the transfer process. I would also recommend appointing employees in key departments to become transfer liaisons. These liaisons would be the point of contact for a transfer student with questions or concerns. These key departments would be financial aid, bursar's office, wellness center, advising centers, and admissions. This would allow transfer students to ask questions or conduct business with each department but only be in touch with one employee in that department. This could also help avoid students getting sent to different departments and speaking to different people, confusing them. Creating this transfer liaison program could help diffuse the issues found in this study and help future transfer students feel welcomed to the university.

Another recommendation is that the university could build on its first-generation program. Although there is student outreach through the program, the participants in this study were not aware enough about the program to be involved. If the university created a center for first-generation students, this could positively impact students. It would help create a community and a safe space for first-generation students. As previously

discussed, these students often do not have resources or help, so they have various needs that the center could address. The university has an international office, a veterans office, and an honor's program with a center, housing, and programs for students in the honor's program. These same concepts the university has already created can be used to provide much-needed support for first-generation students.

The last recommendation I would encourage the university to consider is creating a safe space for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students. While the university has created a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) department to help address inequities. Higher education institutions need to designate centers that can meet the needs of first-generation students, Black, brown, and students of color. Often Black students feel marginalized by their White peers and have a difficult time navigating racial issues and the campus climate (Bourke, 2010). These experiences can negatively impact students who identify as first-generation African American students. If they feel like they are not supported on their college campus, it creates a feeling of not being welcomed at their school. Creating a center for BIPOC students would help them feel more welcomed and supported. Tichavakunda (2021) argues that Black cultural centers (BCCs) might also be considered pathways for greater Black student engagement and potential sites of Black joy. This center could create cultural programs open to the campus community. This could help start a dialogue amongst Black students, peers, and faculty members. Several participants felt disappointed by their White peers because of rude remarks about African American people or poor treatment of Black faculty members. Creating a space for all students to learn about BIPOC experiences can assist with a more culturally responsible campus community. Cultural spaces designed for students from different

racial and ethnic backgrounds will communicate those different cultural identities are acknowledged and welcomed (Rullman & Harrington, 2014; Yakaboski & Perozzi, 2014).

Research

This study aimed to understand better the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. There is a need to know how these women can navigate a predominately White institution campus while obtaining success. Further research can be conducted using Harper's Anti-Deficit Achievement theory but focusing the theory on the success of Black women. Based on the findings of this study, Black women are not researched as much as Black men. The findings suggest that while Black women are more successful than Black men, the women gauged their success from an internal satisfaction rather than GPAs or grades. The transfer process from a two-year institution to a four-year institution should also be explored more to further the research. The findings of this study suggest since the participants were non-traditionally aged students, further research could look at the impact of the transfer process between traditional-aged women and non-traditional-aged women. Data analysis made it evident that there was a breakdown of communication and support for these women while transferring into the institution. Although the transfer experiences were not negative for all participants, it is essential to recognize that student enrollment can be impacted if these types of experiences continue.

Another suggestion for further research is to continue to explore the experiences of African American women. Current research will discuss Black students as one group, or if the group is explored further, research has focused on men. While it is clear that Black

women are more successful than Black college men, there is not enough research exploring why Black women are more successful than Black men. The study findings suggest that family helped inspire the participants and keep them motivated to pursue their education. Further research should focus on family influence on their college choice and experience. Since this study focused on students transferring to a predominately White institution, school choice could impact future research.

Also, researchers and administrators are often looking to obtain statistical data to measure Black students' deficits but exploring the success of Black women could be researched differently. This is based on the understanding that most published evidence on Blacks at predominately White institutions makes clear why these students fail but reveal too little about what can be learned from those who craft productive responses to racism and other environmental factors that undermine success (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2013). As a researcher, I found that investigating environmental factors can explain how Black students can maintain success at a predominately White institution. Success in Black students has been measured from the dominant cultures' perspectives of what success should be and how success should look. It is essential to understand that one size does not fit all. Further research can focus on the role of a broader success definition in promoting students' persistence. Gaining an understanding of how Black students define success for themselves could help to explain the retention and graduation rate of Black women.

Policy

The findings for this study had implications for policy for the colleges and universities in the state of New Jersey. The Lampitt Law supports transfer from

community colleges to four-year institutions in New Jersey, and my research has demonstrated how complex transfer is, particularly for Black women. Under the Lampitt Law, community college students who complete an Associates of Arts or an Associates of Science degree will receive half of the credits they need to graduate with a bachelor's degree. While the law was created to facilitate an effortless transfer from a community college to a four-year college, this is not happening at James University. Although New Jersey has a state policy that guarantees transfer of all credits for students that complete an AA or AS at a community college, the policy does not address the transfer experience. It is recommended that the state update the Lampitt Law and policy. State lawmakers could implement a policy that requires all New Jersey colleges and universities create a transfer department that will assist students while they are transferring. Implementing this state policy could help to assist with making the Lampitt law more effective.

The findings for this study had implications for policy at James University. My findings suggest that deans, stakeholders, and higher education leaders consider reviewing the transfer process and policies. Revising current policies at the school should be considered to help students feel more welcomed and included on campus. The revision of the transfer process would allow Black women to make a smoother transition to the university. Based on the findings of this study, the participants were not informed during the transfer process and had issues with communication. The university could establish an institution policy to assign transfer facilitators. The facilitators would be assigned to the transfer student and become a direct contact for the student while the student is initiating transfer from their community college to James University. This person would be with the student through the whole transfer experience from the moment the student

applies to the university until at least their first semester. Once they have started the first semester, they would then be able to start meeting with their Academic Advisor. This will give transfer students one person they can contact if they have questions or concerns.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry study was to examine and understand the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. Six themes emerged from the findings: negative stereotypes, the importance of education and peer work ethic, negative experiences with communication issues, positive engagement with institutional agents, measuring success as Black students, and the Covid-19 pandemic. These findings have expanded upon the limited current literature that is available. The findings further provide insight into the transfer process, motivation towards success, and the engagement of Black women on a predominately White institution's campus. One primary way for Black women to be acknowledged is through pushing back against the dominant culture, obtaining an education which can be a form of empowerment and activism that will allow Black women to fight against the system of oppression. These students should not feel alone in their activism. As leaders, we need to support Black women in higher education by letting them know they are welcomed. Nelson Mandela (2003) once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

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Research Title

Her-Story: A Narrative Study of the Lived Experiences of First-Generation African American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution

Research Questions

1. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution take a stance in their empowerment towards gaining an education?

2. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution demonstrate success?

3. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution engage on campus?

Introduction

My name is DeLithea Davis, and I am a current doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Rowan University. I am conducting a narrative study for my dissertation under my dissertation chair Dr. Monica Kerrigan. Thank you for choosing to be a part of my study. This study aims to understand the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. There are gaps in research about Black women that attend a predominately White college or university, and your perspective is valuable, especially when looking at the success you have experienced. These questions aim to understand further how you perceive your experience at your university. I am asking you to participate in two interviews which is voluntary.

Video Recording

I will conduct our interview on Zoom. Our meeting is password protected and is locked so that no one else may log on during our interview. With your permission, I would like to record our interview. The purpose of this is to go back if needed to make sure I have as much information as possible and focus on our dialogue. Our conversation will be confidential, and no discussions will take place outside of dissertation purposes. As an added measure, I will use a pseudonym to protect your identity and the identity of the university you attend. This interview may take 1-2 hours or more, and you are free to answer these questions in whatever capacity you are comfortable. Before we move further, please let me know if you have any questions.

Interview Protocol
Interview 1

Date:

Interviewee:

Time of Interview:

Main Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How many semesters have you been at Rowan?
3. How many classes do you take each semester?
4. What is your current GPA?

Interview Questions

5. Can you tell me about your decision to attend college?

6. Tell me about the importance of your education.

7. I want you to tell me about your transfer experience to Rowan.

8. Tell me what success means to you.

9. Can you tell me how have you been successful at Rowan?

Research Title

Her-Story: A Narrative Study of the Lived Experiences of First-Generation African

American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution

Research Questions

1. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately

   White institution take a stance in their empowerment towards gaining an education?

2. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately

   White institution demonstrate success?

3. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately

   White institution engage on campus?

Introduction

My name is DeLithea Davis, and I am a current doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Rowan University. I am conducting a narrative study for my dissertation under my dissertation chair Dr. Monica Kerrigan. Thank you for choosing to be a part of my study. This study aims to understand the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. There are gaps in research about Black women that attend a predominately White college or university, and your perspective is valuable, especially when looking at the success you have experienced. These questions aim to understand further how you perceive your experience at your university. I am asking you to participate in two interviews which is voluntary.

Video Recording

I will conduct our interview on Zoom. Our meeting is password protected and is locked so that no one else may log on during our interview. With your permission, I would like to record our interview. The purpose of this is to go back if needed to make sure I have as much information as possible and focus on our dialogue. Our conversation will be confidential, and no discussions will take place outside of dissertation purposes. As an added measure, I will use a pseudonym to protect your identity and the identity of the university you attend. This interview may take 1-2 hours or more, and you are free to answer these questions in whatever capacity you are comfortable. Before we move further, please let me know if you have any questions.

Interview Protocol
Interview 2

Date:

Interviewee:

Time of Interview:

Interview Questions

1. In what ways have you been involved on campus?

2. What are moments when you have felt most proud as a student at Rowan?

3. Can you tell me about a few times you have felt valued or not valued by peers
   and professors at Rowan?

4. Based on your experiences, what advice do you have for other first-generation
   African American women who transfer to Rowan?

5. How if at all do you think your experiences have been influenced by you
   being an African American woman?

6. What are moments when you have felt most powerful as an African American
   student at Rowan?

7. Can you tell me how you maintain that sense of power?

8. How do you advocate for yourself?

9. What is most important to you about your Rowan experience?

10. If you had a little sister, what do you want her to see when she looks at you?

Appendix B
Document Protocol

Research Title
Her-Story: A Narrative Study of the Experiences of First-Generation African American

Women who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution

Research Questions

1. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately

   White institution take a stance in their empowerment towards gaining an education?

2. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately

   White institution demonstrate success?

3. How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately

   White institution engage on campus?

Date:

Document:

Document Questions

1. Who created this document?

2. What is the goal of this document?

3. How does this document support student learning?

4. Does this document provide insight into student resources?

5. Does this document reveal any information that assist with student success?

6. Does this document reveal any barriers for students?

Appendix C
Alignment Matrix

Research question	Theory	Data source detailed (e.g, Interview question 3 fully written out)	Analysis technique (e.g., process coding; paired t-test of pre- and post)
How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution take a stance in their empowerment towards gaining an education?	Black feminist thought	1. Can you tell me about a few times you have felt valued or not valued by peers and professors at Rowan.

2. What are moments when you have felt most powerful as a Black student at Rowan?

3. What are moments when you have felt most proud as a student at Rowan? | Transcribing and coding interviews. |
| How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution demonstrate success? | Anti-Deficit Achievement | 1. Tell me what success means to you.

2. Can you tell me how have you been successful at Rowan?

3. If you had a little sister, what do you want her to see when she looks at you? | Transcribing and coding interviews. |
| How do first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution engage on campus? | Black feminist thought | 1. How if at all do you think your experiences have been influenced by you being an African American woman?

2. In what ways have you been involved on campus?

3. What is important to you about your Rowan experience? | Transcribing and coding interviews. |

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Appendix D
Interview Consent Form

This consent form will consist of two parts. One part will be for your consent to participate, and the second part will be your permission to record our interview. We will both have a copy of this form for our records.

This study aims to understand the experience of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution. Should you have any questions regarding this study, you can contact me at 856-256-5819 or you can email me at davisde@rowan.edu.

Research Title: Her-Story: A Narrative Study on the Lived Experiences of First-Generation African American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution

I _____, give my full consent to participate in DeLithea Davis's research study on the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution.

I understand I will be answering questions about my perceptions of my experiences as a student at Rowan University.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw myself from the study at any moment without penalty or retaliation. There is no known risk associated with my participation in this study.

I understand that my confidentiality is a priority, and to protect my identity DeLithea Davis will use a pseudonym. Any information obtained from my participation will be securely stored electronically and locked with a passcode. DeLithea Davis will not share my information outside of the purposes of the study.

I understand that my participation in this research will require participating in two interviews that will take 1-2 hours. For safety during the pandemic, DeLithea Davis will conduct this interview over Zoom. I may refrain from answering any question at any time during the interview without facing any repercussion.

Signature _____

Date_____

Informed Consent Form
Video Recording Consent Form

ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by DeLithea Davis. We ask for your permission to record our video interview as part of that research study.

You do not have to agree to be recorded to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for information gathering and analysis purposes only. Specifically, as the principal investigator, I will be transcribing the audio and then looking for emerging themes and patterns that come out of the interview.

The recording(s) will include your name and an audiovisual of you answering the interview questions. However, your identity will not be used during the analysis of data.

The recording(s) will be stored electronically on a personal laptop locked with a passcode. The recording will be retained until the end of the study. Once the study is complete, I will discard the recordings.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Signature _____

Date _____

The Lived Experiences of First-Generation African American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution

Volunteer to be a part of an important qualitative research study to understand the lived experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to a predominately White institution.

I am seeking participants who meet the following criteria:

1. First-generation college student

2. African American woman

3. Transfer student from a community college

4. Full-time student at Rowan University

5. 2.0 GPA or higher

I am specifically exploring the experiences of first-generation African American women who transfer to Rowan University. There is no compensation, but your participation is valued and may directly impact the understanding and future trajectory of resources and services at Rowan University.

This study will include two interviews that will roughly take 120 minutes. The study will take place online using videoconference applications, like Zoom or Webex.

Please note: First-generation is defined as students with parents who never attended college or students with parents that have some college experiences but never graduated.

Contact information:

Principal Investigator: Dr. Monica Reid Kerrigan-kerrigan@rowan.edu

Co-Investigator: DeLithea Davis-davisde@rowan.edu

This study is approved by Rowan University's IRB (Study # Pro2021489)

DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier: FWA00007111
IRB Chair Person: Dr. Ane Johnson
IRB Director: Eric Gregory
Effective Date: October 15, 2021

Notice of Approval - Initial

Study ID: PRO-2021-489
Title: Her-Story: A Narrative Study of the Lived Experiences of First-Generation African
American Women Who Transfer to a Predominately White Institution
Principal Investigator: Monica Kerrigan
Study Coordinator: DeLithea Davis
Sponsor: Department Funded

Submission Type: Initial Submission Status: Approved

Approval Date: October 15, 2021 Expiration Date: October 14, 2022 Approval Cycle: 12
months Continuation Review Required: Yes Closure Required: Yes

Review Type: Expedited

Expedited Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings
made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited
to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication,
cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey,
interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or
quality assurance methodologies.

Pregnant Women, Human Fetus, and Neonates Code: N/A Pediatric/Children Code: N/A
Prisoner(s) – Biomedical or Behavioral: N/A