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A Critical Race Examination Of The Lived Experiences Of Persistent African American Students At A Predominantly White Community College

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A CRITICAL RACE EXAMINATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PERSISTENT AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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Elena Favela Naca
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ABSTRACT

For well over a century, African Americans have fought for equal rights to employment, prosperity, political power and freedom. Earning an education was the way forward. Over time, legislative and institutional policies have created greater access to education for racialized individuals. Yet, African American students remain the most underserved population, and among the lowest in degree attainment across ethnic groups. Decades of research literature places blame on students and families, highlighting student deficiencies. Far fewer explanations in the literature point to institutional barriers that perpetuate practices that place African American students at a disadvantage. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a lens to examine ways in which race continues to be a prominent component of inequality throughout education, and allows researchers to critique deficit theorizing that may be limited by the exclusion of voices of people of color. Using CRT as a theoretical framework, and phenomenology as a methodology, this study examines the lived experiences of African American students who have persisted beyond their first year in a predominantly white community college. A student who has persisted has re-enrolled, transferred, or graduated by the second fall or spring term following the initial fall or spring term enrollment. Further, this study illuminates institutional factors that have both supported and hindered their progress.

Five themes emerged as a result of in-depth interviews with seven self-identified African American research participants: *influential others, high school programs, early choice major and path to the profession, dispelling and overcoming imposed stereotypes, negotiating the PWI using self-identified strengths and strategies*. Participants shared the difficulties and triumphs they experienced on the predominantly white community college campus, as well as strengths and strategies they used to work through challenges. An analysis of participant experiences using three of Ladson Billings' (1998) tenets of critical race theory; *exposing racism, counter-stories,* and *critique of liberalism*, is provided, allowing for further explication of the ways race and racism take form and influence outcomes for marginalized students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges represent the most diverse sector of higher education, serving the highest proportion of low-income students and students of color in the United States. Historically, community colleges have been a welcoming entry point to higher education and achievement of postsecondary credentials, providing open access to millions of first-time students seeking affordable education, opportunity and greater personal freedom, especially those most marginalized by society (Jain, 2010; Long 2016). Community colleges play a vital role in the U.S. education system, serving as the first point of contact for individuals who may not in any other way pursue a postsecondary education (Young Invincibles, 2017).

For decades, community colleges have served students seeking vocational and technical education, general education in the liberal arts and sciences, and developmental education. Today, they remain a principle source of degree programs, with a focus on skill building, and entry into the labor market. Students attending community colleges benefit from low tuition costs, a range of course offerings, and convenient locations (Woods, 2016). Success at these institutions often leads to short-term certificates or degrees that prepare and place students in specific occupations, or opportunities for bachelor's degree completion, graduate credentials, and higher wages (Iloh & Toldson, 2013; Long, 2016). For students of color, however, persistence beyond the first year has proven to be a significant challenge.

In 2017, Shapiro et al. conducted a study examining bachelor's degree completion rates of students entering college in the fall of 2010. They found that the rate of college enrollment and completion by white individuals far outpaced that of African American students. One in twelve African American students who started at a community college completed a four-year

degree in six years. One in five white students were able to do so. African American students, are among the largest groups seeking improved opportunities for economic and social mobility through community college persistence and completion. Low community college persistence and completion rates pose an urgent issue to many individuals seeking upward mobility and higher social positioning, as well as employers who rely on an educated workforce.

College completion benefits individuals, families, and communities by improving quality of life through job satisfaction and higher wage employment, civic engagement, access to the labor market, and on a larger scale, national economic progress and global competitiveness (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Prior, Tran, 2011). The education disparity however, between racial groups is stable, and in some cases widening, even though the gap in educational aspirations by race, ethnicity, and income is shrinking (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). African American youth are as likely as their peers from other racial groups to aspire to earn a college degree, yet these students fail to persist, and leave with no degree or credential. They remain underrepresented in postsecondary enrollment, and experience lower levels of educational achievement than any other racial group (Holland, 2017; McMahon, 2008; Moore & Bush, 2016). The disparity between aspirations and the realization of their ambitions, in part is due to minimal knowledge of college enrollment and under-participation in college preparatory activities, caused by historic and existing systematic disenfranchisement and marginalization of underrepresented groups (Holland, 2017). So long as these gaps in access, persistence, and completion remain, socioeconomic inequities will too.

Regarding these forces, Walter C. Bumphus, President and CEO of American Association of Community Colleges stated, “America needs a highly educated population to strengthen our place in the world market, grow our economy, and engage in our democracy. But

we cannot have an educated workforce and citizenry if our current reality persists" (as cited in Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014, p. 2). Disproportionate persistence and completion rates emphasize the demand for researchers, educators, and policymakers to develop systems that increase engagement of African American communities, and rectify racial disparities. This study offers empirical data, highlighting the experiences of African American students who have persisted beyond their first year in a predominantly white community college. The data presented identifies areas for needed improvement to advance persistence among African American students.

Statement of the Problem

Since the 1960s through the 1980s and today, African American students represent one of the largest subgroups of students at community colleges, and continue to be among those most underserved by these institutions. Lack of prioritization of proper resources to effect change, poor racial campus climate, and lack of adequate support in a collegiate environment, are among the reasons African Americans continue to struggle to achieve degree completion (Bivens & Wood, 2016; Harper, Smith & Davis III, 2018; Lark, 2012). Close to 50% of all students entering community colleges drop out within the first twelve months of enrollment (Mertes, 2013; Bivens & Wood, 2016; Long, 2016). In spite of myriad efforts to increase college access and success, these numbers are higher for African American students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012).

Difficulties among African American students persist due in part to the prominence of deficit narratives and beliefs held by their instructors, peers, and other members of the predominantly white college environment, which emphasize all that students lack, and how their deficits contribute to their poor academic status (Harper, 2013). Beliefs and practices in the

academic environment stem from deficit-based research literature. Deficit-based research stems from deficit theory, which holds that poor and minority group students, their families, and communities are primarily responsible for their own school problems and academic challenges. It omits structural inequities, and institutional barriers faced by students, as contributors to their difficulties, and rarely examines the campus context to gain a better understanding of racism within institutional structures, policies and practices (Harper, 2012; Harper, Smith & Davis III, 2018; Valencia, 1997).

On campus, Black students regularly suffer consequences from structural inequalities and barriers pervasive in predominantly white institutions. Among these consequences are, minimal exposure to afro-centric curricula which further marginalizes African American student experiences, faculty bias and the deleterious disconnect between African American students and non-African American instructors, colorblindness, and unwillingness of administrators, faculty, and/or staff to address racial matters on campus (Adams, 2005; Moore & Bush, 2016). Other aspects beyond the classroom include food choices at campus cafés, race-neutral campus activity options, campus art and décor that fails to reflect their experiences, stereotyping or pigeonholing by advisors and counselors when discussing career or transfer options. As Moore and Bush (2016) so pointedly state, “Something structural exists within the foundation of our colleges that is impeding the success of African American students” (p. 58). These structures preclude African American students from gaining equal access to their learning, alienates them from educational experiences, and subordinates them within white institutions (McClure, 2006; Moravek, 2010; McClain & Perry, 2017).

In order to address these structures, more prominent scholarship on higher education that is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) is needed. CRT is useful in investigating structural

and racial inequities in higher education policy creation, and the experiences of racially minoritized students across campuses. Few race-related research studies use CRT to interpret research findings (Harper, 2012). Consistent among CRT scholarship is a focus on K-12 education. In the last decade or so, more scholarship on CRT in higher education has been published, however, little scholarship on CRT in community colleges exists, even though students of color are highly represented in two-year, undergraduate colleges.

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, Community Cultural Wealth describes forms of wealth, or assets that students bring from their homes and communities to the academic environment, that bolsters their achievement. It shifts the research focus away from deficits, to acknowledgment and appreciation of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by marginalized groups that often go unrecognized (Yosso, 2005). Examination of the experiences of African American students in predominantly white community colleges using an assets-based perspective remains underexplored in educational research, and is needed, so that practices that support these students' achievement can be adopted in institutions. CRT invites voices from minoritized communities to share their experiences in order to recreate and challenge dominant narratives that inform policies and practices within institutions. Researchers and practitioners have much to learn from the voices of African American community college students.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of successful African American students in a predominantly white community college in Minnesota. It is also a critical race approach to studying African American student success using narratives that question the validity of dominant discourse around deficit-based research and practice. Using a qualitative

research approach to collect rich descriptions of student experiences, the goals of the study were to:

- examine the lived experiences of African American students who have been successful in a predominantly white community college,
- explore the challenges African American students face in predominantly white community colleges,
- examine the impact of the predominantly white college environment on African American student participants, and
- contribute to the assets-based research on African American student experiences in higher education.

With these goals in mind, I hope to prompt researchers and educators to think and act in ways that empower communities of color.

Research Questions

The focus of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American students who have persisted to their second year at a predominantly-white community college. The goal is to capture essences of their lived experiences from an asset-based frame of reference. Critical Race Theory and phenomenology offer frameworks to examine the following foundational research questions: What are the lived experiences of academically successful African American students at a predominantly-white community college? What strategies or resources did these students use that demonstrate effectiveness in negotiating the institutional structures at the predominantly white institution? For this study, persistence is defined as first year completion at the community college in which participants are enrolled. In other words, participants in this study have completed at least their first year of college at the institution where

this study takes place, and have enrolled in their second year at the same college. Refer to Appendix A for definitions of terms.

Frameworks

Community colleges provide open access for all students. Yet, African American, and other students of color are continually marginalized by their institutions, and are not presented with benefits and opportunities afforded to white students. That is, students who are familiar with, or aligned with middle class, dominant, white norms, are likely to be viewed by the campus as academically prepared and more likely to be successful (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Long, 2016). The predominantly white college environment caters to this dominant orientation, and students of color find few channels of support (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Carter, 2005; Chambers & McCready, 2011). Further, Hagedorn and Tierney (2002) discuss the notion that low-income, first-generation, and/or racial and ethnic minorities lack forms of capital privileged in predominantly white institutions. The most socially and economically recognized forms of capital are those possessed by middle and upper classes (McDonough, 1997).

Students of color possess a wealth of experience, assets, and knowledge that they contribute to their campuses, which positively impact their development in college, and greatly influence their ability to navigate the collegiate environment. These assets can be described as cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which is described later in chapter two. The assets of students of color are often under-acknowledged or disregarded by college staff, faculty, and peers because they are perceived as characteristics that negatively impact student progress. Steele (1992) states, "For too many Black students, school is simply the place where, more concertedly, persistently, and authoritatively than anywhere else in society, they learn how little valued they are" (para. 44). All students need encouragement to succeed. By devaluing the assets that African American

students possess, institutions make it difficult for African American students to gain a sense of belonging, and to feel valued and supported. Critical Race Theory (CRT), introduced below, is a theoretical framework that places the lived experiences, and voices of racialized groups at the center of the research, thereby working to value their experiences, and highlight their assets (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Developed in the legal field in the 1970s, CRT was inspired by the negligence of legal research by minority scholars and the absence of minority individuals in legal case studies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This persistent negligence contributed to the perceived failure of civil rights litigation to produce revisions to law that would change the subordinated status of people of color in the United States (Love, 2004). CRT therefore seeks to challenge dominant discourses about people of color in law and other fields. In its evolution, CRT extends to offer a broad literature base of critical theory from fields such as sociology, history, ethnic studies and women's studies (Yosso, 2005). In education, it is a framework that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform the structures of educational systems that maintain and minoritize racialized individuals inside and outside of the classroom (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race scholars argue that students of color and other socially marginalized groups possess non-dominant forms of capital, or strengths that they employ and contribute to educational institutions that help them navigate systems of schooling. Examples of these strengths include, resilience, bi- or multi-lingual abilities, aspirational capital, social capital, and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005).

Using CRT as a conceptual framework for this qualitative research study offered perspective for data collection and subsequent analysis (Glesne, 2006). Methodologically, CRT inspires a shift in the traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used for conducting educational research regarding race and other socially constructed categorizations (Solorzano & Yosso,

2002; Love, 2004). In conjunction with phenomenology, CRT provided a guide for selecting the concepts to be examined, crafting research questions, and analyzing and framing the research findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Following this process using a CRT lens offers continual awareness of how race remains a characteristic of inequities in schools. Wellman and Kruger (1999) state, "phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (p. 189). Using phenomenology and CRT, I sought to understand, from an assets perspective, the experiences of African American students who have persisted in a predominantly white community college. CRT is consistent with a focus on asset-based research, in that it challenges dominant discourse regarding African American student achievement in college, which has been traditionally explored from a deficit standpoint.

To date, scholarship on Critical Race Theory in higher education has focused on the academic persistence and achievement of African American males (Harper, 2008; Strayhorn, 2006). African American male students who scored high in "grit," for example, earned higher grades in college than their less gritty, same-race peers (Strayhorn, 2014). Further, African American males who are actively engaged in extracurricular activities that promote citizenship, leadership, and the acquisition of practical competencies, to name a few, achieve higher GPAs than their non-engaged peers (Harper, 2005; Wiggan, 2008). Other research highlights resilience, positive sense of self, positive interactions with faculty, staff, and peers, and familial engagement (Cooper & Jordan, 2003; McGee, 2009; Morgan, 2013). Cooper and Jordan (2003) argue for the need to restructure norms of schooling in ways that value and celebrate contributions and learning styles of students of color. This involves racial affirmation, studying students' cultural histories, and viewing family backgrounds of students as assets to their intellectual pursuits. Challenging dominant discourses with assets-based research is important in this work, because it

redirects the research lens away from communities of color as deficient, impoverished, and disadvantaged, and instead focuses the cultural wealth of skills, knowledge, and abilities possessed by marginalized individuals and communities. This research study focuses on assets of students of color who have historically been marginalized in U.S. education systems.

Significance of the Study

On a practical level, this study challenges educators, parents, policy-makers, community leaders, administrators, and students to rethink the characteristics that African American students possess that support their pursuit of a degree. It prompts them to gain a better understanding of the experiences of African American students and opens their minds to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that they posses. This wealth of knowledge, skills, and abilities not only benefits the student who possesses it; entire communities of color are uplifted, and college campuses are enriched with enhanced racial climate for underrepresented groups on campus. Further, peers, faculty, and administrators benefit from a raised consciousness, and become more responsive to the needs of students, particularly those from marginalized communities (Perez, 2014). This study can be significant to education practitioners and policy-changers interested in improving college completion rates among African American students and other minoritized groups.

On a theoretical level, a critical race framework was used in this study to focus on racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of people of color as sources of strength and empowerment, and to challenge deficit-informed research that contorts the experiences of, and silences communities of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). By listening to, and recording the voices of successful African American students through their narratives, I call awareness to the strengths and assets students of color use to persist, that have historically been viewed as

deficiencies in postsecondary institutions. This study contributes to the emerging literature on African American students using an asset-based framework that focuses on their academic persistence and achievement. It is my goal as a researcher to gain as much insight as possible into the experiences of participants in my study, to better understand how institutions, and individuals within institutions can better understand how to promote and empower marginalized individuals and communities to reach their goals. The drive to conduct this research comes from my own experiences as a racialized, classed, and gendered individual, which have informed my beliefs and perspectives about environments and structures that influence and shape people's lived experiences.

Researcher Positionality and Lived Experience

Phenomenological inquiry is established when the researcher has an understanding of the phenomenon, as well as a personal connection (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research states that the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis. Therefore it remained important throughout the study to address my assumptions, worldviews, and connection to this topic of research, and to continually pursue deeper understanding and knowledge around culture and race as it relates to myself and the community of participants in this research (Milner, 2007). Further, it was imperative to remain circumspect of any power dynamics, throughout the research process, between the participants and myself. My own background shaped my perspective and positionality of this research.

I grew up in San Antonio, Texas, a large city comprised of over 60% Latinos. My family not wealthy by U.S. class standards. We were on the cusp of working- and middle-class. At various times, my parents struggled to make ends meet. The idea of obtaining a college education was introduced to me at a very young age, and the messages that I would attend

college, both from my parents, and school teachers was echoed throughout my formative years. I am a first-generation college student, and although my parents did not make it much of a choice for me to go to college, we did not exactly know how it was going to happen, who was going to pay for it, or what options we had. They knew a college education would allow me to progress and advance into a better career, make a better life for myself, and share what I learn with others in our community. In spite of the encouragement I received throughout my life to attend college, as a female, I also experienced gender bias. Latinas in a predominantly Latino, Catholic, and very patriarchal community, are filtered into careers such as teaching, nursing, cosmetology, or clerical work. I wanted to be a psychologist. In high school and throughout my twenties, I unwittingly resisted the path set out for young women like me in my community. Consequently, after earning my bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology, I obtained part-time jobs with titles like waitress, hostess, and after-school teacher. In considering my options for graduate school, a male faculty member in the psychology department of a university near San Antonio discouraged me from pursuing a career as a psychologist. He insisted the counseling or social work department might be a better fit. Viewing him as an authority, I settled for a counseling program. I do not remember any male classmates in my two and a half years in the program.

When I moved to Minnesota, I accepted a counseling position at a technical college. In 2009, there were few people of color working in the Minnesota State system, that I was aware of. After a few months of counseling, I was offered an interim dean position. I worked in community college administration from 2010 through 2019. As a two-year college administrator in the Minnesota State College system, I hold power because of my position title, Dean of Student Development, as a leader within the system, that is based on the hierarchical structure within each college. I am aware of my privilege in this position, and the automatic respect it pays

me when one becomes aware of my title. As a person of color, however, I am keenly aware of the struggles that individuals of color face in predominantly white institutions in a predominantly white system of colleges and universities. I am also aware of the privileges associated with having light-colored skin, and the discrimination individuals with darker-colored skin experience, known as colorism. I am aware of classism, and the ways in which working class and low-income individuals struggle to achieve a higher education.

The impetus for my study comes from my work in predominantly white community colleges in both rural and urban settings in Minnesota, and witnessing how African American students are treated within the institution and within the community in which the institution is situated. African American students struggle to persist in higher education institutions, often because they are stereotyped and are subjects of racial microaggressions. Consistent exposure to stereotypes and microaggressions cause these students to endure race-based stress, and racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue can be characterized as "the cumulative psychosocial-physiological impact of racial micro and macroaggressions on racially marginalized targets" (Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016, p. 4). Prolonged experiences facing these threats begin to negatively impact academic progress among marginalized students, and detrimentally impact individuals' health and wellbeing (French, Lewis, Mosley, Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, Chen, & Neville, 2020).

I believe that marginalized students possess forms of capital that support their success in higher education institutions. I was exposed to and influenced by Positive Psychology during one of my assignments as a Dean of Student Success. Positive Psychology can be summarized as, "the scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000

as cited in Boniwell, 2006 p. 1). As a counselor prior to the dean assignment, I worked with marginalized students who were afflicted with forms of oppression that stigmatized their identities and thwarted many aspects of their development in college, including their academic progress and educational aspirations. They struggled to overcome challenges, sometimes unaware of the institutional barriers that imposed prolonged stress, mental and emotional disturbances, and an increased likelihood of physical ailments. From a critical race standpoint, this unawareness can be due to the idea that race and racism are so deeply rooted and embedded in ways of knowing and experiencing life, that individuals from various ethnic and racial backgrounds do not often recognize the prominence, results, and consequences of the ways in which race and racism play out in everyday life, in society, and particularly in the education setting (Milner, 2007). By listening and responding to the accounts of students in my teaching and counseling, I employed positive psychology in my work with these students by centralizing their experiential knowledge as sources of strength, and highlighting the resiliency they demonstrated to overcome past challenges. This assets-based approach offered a converse to focusing on student issues as pathologies, and instead allowed students to reframe their experiences as sources of empowerment to move them through difficulties.

My own experiences, as well as my experiences working with marginalized students in two-year colleges has shaped my beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions regarding race and privilege in our education systems. My epistemological standpoint is that of a social constructionist with a critical race lens. I am a social justice advocate, and I fight for equity with regard to race, class, and gender in my work and in my life. Through my research I hope to illuminate voices of African American students who experience alienation, marginalization, and oppression. Educational institutions have the power to uplift and improve the quality of life for

many individuals and communities. However, without the ability or will to invite and welcome whole individuals to campus, and honor their backgrounds, knowledge, and skills they bring, we have great potential to oppress and marginalize, placing individuals further back than when they began their postsecondary journey. Systematically, higher education needs to change the way we work with individuals so that societal transformation can take place.

Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) propose, "Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist" (p. 62). Given that all individuals in this study voluntarily participated and had the option of withdrawing from the study at any point and for any reason, and given that participant confidentiality and anonymity was preserved, I drew the assumption that participants were open and honest in their responses to interview questions. To mitigate any potential dishonesty, I crafted my interview questions in a way that encouraged participants to share honestly, and worked diligently to build rapport with participants.

In terms of limitations, the study was conducted at one community college in Minnesota with a small number of participants. Results may be applicable to other African American students in predominantly white community colleges in Minnesota, but not generalizable to other African American community college students. Additionally, as the sole researcher in this study, who is a Latina administrator in the college system where the study was conducted, participants may have been somewhat reluctant to share their thoughts and opinions with me because I am not African American, and represented an authority figure within the Minnesota State system. To mitigate this delimitation, I was as open as possible about the study and its purpose, and worked diligently to build trust with participants. Finally, I assured participants of confidentiality throughout and after the study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one highlights the purpose of the study, as well as an overview of the problem statement, significance of the study, and conceptual framework. Research questions were presented as well as definitions for terms used in the study. Limitations and assumptions are also presented. Chapter two discusses a more in-depth overview of the theoretical framework as it pertains to this study. A review of the literature relating to African American student experiences and persistence in community colleges is provided. Chapter three describes the methodological approach, data collection methods, and analysis procedures that were used in this study. Chapter four presents narratives of the students who were interviewed, and the findings. The results of the study will provide an understanding of the experiences of successful African American students in a predominantly white community college in the Minnesota. Chapter five discusses a Critical Race analysis of selections from the data, conclusions and recommendations, implications for practitioners and decision-makers, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Summary

In spite of their aspirations, many African American community college students continue to fall short of college degree attainment, which inhibits opportunities for upward mobility and higher wages over their lifetime. Decades of research literature point to deficit-based theories that place blame on marginalized individuals and families, and ignore institutional and systemic factors that contribute to academic challenges among these groups. Using a critical race theoretical framework, my goal was to examine the lived experiences of successful African American students at a predominantly white two-year college in Minnesota. The impetus for this study came from my own educational experiences as a marginalized student, as well as my experiences working with African American students in predominantly white community

colleges in Minnesota. The purpose of the study is to understand African American student experiences at a PWI, and identify, from the participant perspective, barriers that PWIs have placed on African American students, and the assets they used to persist in spite of those barriers. Finally, my hope is that this research will contribute to the assets-based research literature on African American students in higher education in a way which prompts educators and policy-makers to think and act in ways that empower communities of color.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the literature as it relates to the experiences of African American students at a predominantly white community college. In reviewing this literature, I hoped to gain insight to answer the questions, what are the lived experiences of academically successful African American students at a predominantly white community college? What strategies or resources did these students use that demonstrate effectiveness in negotiating the institutional structures at the predominantly white institution? An overview of Critical Race Theory is described here in order to provide a theoretical lens to gain an understanding of the educational experiences of African American students. This theoretical structure provides a means for understanding the role that higher education institutions play in supporting or hindering persistence among students of color.

Following the overview of CRT, a review of the literature is presented on the African American community college student population, their college entry characteristics, and enrollment patterns. CRT dictates that in order to better understand the impact and scope of racism on people of color, researchers must challenge ahistoricism, by placing race and racism in both historical and present-day contexts (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Doing so allows individuals to examine the failure of the education system in "properly educating the majority of culturally and racially subordinated students" (Lynn, 2007, p. 131).

CRT analysis of education begins with the understanding that education, as we know it, does not often lead to, and was never intended to lead to liberation and prosperity for African Americans. Instead, schooling has served as a stratifier, which actively subordinates culture, language, social, economic, and political positions of people of color (Lynn, 2006). It is

important to include in this literature review the dominant discourse from decades of research about African American college students, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences, and the challenges faced historically and current-day. Chapter two, then, is organized in a manner delineating that which exists from decades of research literature regarding African American achievement in college, which has predominantly been developed from a deficit theoretical approach. Deficit research literature sets the stage for what we have come to understand about this population of students. Deficit theory is a blame-the-victim view purporting that poor and minority group students are primarily responsible for their own school problems and academic failure. Further, it holds structural inequities blameless, and omits critical information such as racist stereotypes and other structural and institutional barriers these students face, and blames the students, their families, and their communities for poor performance (Harper, 2012; Moore & Bush, 2016; Valencia, 1997). This review of literature includes research on a few of those barriers, as well as their impact on students and their academic progress.

Finally, congruent with the conceptual framework that challenges the dominant discourse regarding African American (under)achievement in college, I discuss the literature pertaining to asset-based research using a critical race lens. Asset-based approaches center the research lens on the lives of people of color and attempt to expose accumulated assets and resources in the histories and experiences of marginalized communities. The assets are brought by students of color to the classroom from their homes and communities. Shifting the lens from deficit to asset allows scholars and practitioners to develop institutions that serve a greater purpose towards racial and social justice in education. Until recently, there has existed a paucity of research literature focusing on the strengths and assets of African American communities that support

their success in postsecondary education, and particularly in community colleges. In order to frame my study, it is important to understand these factors that contribute to our understanding regarding the plight of African American students.

A Brief History of African Americans in U.S. Education

Since before the Reconstruction Era, African Americans have placed dire importance on educational attainment for themselves and their children. Literacy and formal education persisted as core values, and were viewed as a means to obtain liberation, and ultimately employment and political and economic influence (Anderson, 1988; Duster, 2009; Franklin, 2002; Freeman, 2005). As a result, African American communities went to great lengths to collectively provide scarce financial and other material resources to support public and private schools established in Black communities from the early nineteenth century to the height of the Civil Rights Movement throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision, in which Supreme Court justices unanimously declared that separate public schools for Black and white students was unconstitutional, brought hope for improved educational opportunities for African American students (Love, 2004). Many individuals in African American communities believed they would no longer have to fight for equal funding and fair treatment in U.S. education systems (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2010; Franklin, 2002; Love, 2004). In the last several decades however, amidst the myriad life-changing implications of desegregated schooling, the *Brown* decision has done little to eradicate discriminatory practices in public education and has had consequences and unfulfilled promises that have directly impacted African American communities in U.S. education system (Eckes, 2004; Fine, 2004; Harper, 2008; Harper, Patton, Wooden, 2009; Johnson, 2005; Love, 2004; Tillman, 2004: Washburn, 1994).

The fallout of the desegregation legislation affected African American children in ways

that made them invisible, unwanted, and unappreciated. Bell (1987) argued that African American culture and language were grossly "misunderstood and pathologized as deficient" in school settings (Allen, 1992; Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). This perceived pathology has become pervasive in educational settings across the U.S. in the K-12 system where African American students still attend economically distressed schools in poor, racially homogenized neighborhoods and classrooms. These schools tend to have outdated course materials, limited resources, and inadequate facilities, which lead to high rates of dropout and underachievement as measured by college entrance exams and other institutional standardized measures, lack of appropriate job training, and disparities in rewards for achievement (Harper, 2008; Guinier, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, Parker, Solorzano & Lynn, 2004). Further, because the *Brown* decision was geared toward desegregating K-12 schools, it did little to address racial integration of colleges and universities. Desegregation legislation in higher education came by way of decades of litigation, and even violence that spurred the involvement of the executive branch of the federal government. In response, states have been involved in remediation of desegregation in higher education for over sixty years.

Protest and violence. Following the *Brown* decision, adamant refusal to end segregation in Southern colleges incited protest and violence. In 1956, Autherine Lucy enrolled at the all-white University of Alabama after the court granted her the right to attend. Following her enrollment, white students and non-students began rioting and shouting racial insults, and burning desegregation literature. Attending classes at the university posed a threat to Lucy's safety. White rioters continued to harass her throwing objects at her and threatening to kill her. To protect her safety, the university expelled her just three days after enrolling (Library of Congress, n.d.).

Not unlike Alabama, a federal court ordered the University of Georgia to admit Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter in January of 1961. This decision would end 160 years of segregation at the university. Holmes and Hunter's enrollment triggered angry mobs of rioters comprised of students and local residents including the Ku Klux Klan. The mobs gathered outside of Hunter's residence hall, shouting and chanting obscenities, starting fires, and throwing bricks, breaking windows of residence hall rooms, specifically targeting Hunter's room. State troopers took their time responding, and dispersed the mob using tear gas and water hoses. Following that weekend in January, Hunter and Holmes resumed their coursework and completed their degrees. Other universities in the South experienced violence resulting from desegregation efforts, prompting involvement from the executive branch of the federal government (Hatfield, 2008).

In 1962, President Kennedy worked with the Governor of Mississippi to admit James Meredith, an Airforce veteran, after a U.S. Supreme Court ordered his admittance to the University of Mississippi. The indignant Governor Ross Barnett refused to adhere to this order, and personally blocked Meredith's enrollment, upholding the tenth amendment and his oath to state law upholding segregation. Robert Kennedy, the then Attorney General called on federal marshals to escort Meredith each time he tried to register at Ole' Miss. Barnett, aware that integration was inevitable did not want to lose the support of his white, pro-segregation contingent. Further, he promised the people of Mississippi that no school in the state would be integrated during his time as Governor. He continued to publicly and adamantly oppose Meredith's enrollment. Over several days, President Kennedy and Governor Barnett privately attempted to devise a detailed and amicable plan for Meredith's registration, mindful that violence could erupt at a moment's notice. Meanwhile, newspapers and radio stations got wind

of the activity and blasted information, which stirred up supremacist activity toward the campus. Soon, a mob of students and non-students gathered at Ole' Miss, and began hurling glass bottles, bricks, and lead pipes at the federal marshals who were escorting Meredith. Tear gas was used by the marshals to quell the violent activity, to no avail. State patrolmen assigned to help keep peace began fleeing the area. Two individuals died as a result of the racist rioting on the Ole' Miss campus. Violence continued and President Kennedy had no choice but to call on U.S. Army troops to stop the violence. The following Monday, Meredith enrolled in courses. Although he was never directly physically harmed during his time at Ole' Miss, he experienced harassment and verbal attacks regularly. Other cases not involving race-related violence and rioting occurred in the aftermath of *Brown.* Litigation surrounding affirmative action policies in admissions illustrates resistance and refusal on the part of colleges and universities to accept African American students despite federal laws (Smith & Ellis, n.d.).

Litigation. In 1956, with *Florida ex rel. Hawkins v. Board of Control* the Supreme Court first exercised the *Brown* decision in higher education, after Hawkins, an African American man, was denied admission to the University of Florida law school. The court ruled that Hawkins be admitted to the university immediately. In this case, the *Brown* decision was readily applied to higher education. Yet, there remained a lack of clarity on desegregation rules that applied more broadly to public colleges across the U.S., which resulted in no clear remedy moving forward. (Stefkovich & Leas, 1994). In the 1960s and 70s, affirmative action was envisioned as a strategy to develop integrated higher education institutions, and thus began providing opportunities for racially underrepresented individuals interested in pursuing a college education. Since the late 1970s, however, the Supreme Court has consistently narrowed the scope of Affirmative Action in practice. Cases like *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* set a precedent for

Affirmative action policies in admissions. Using the rule of strict scrutiny, which is a practice of judicial analysis used to determine the constitutionality of certain laws (Simmons, 1996), the Supreme Court invalidated the use of racial quotas in admissions, but ruled that race could be used as a factor in admissions processes. The policy could be used to achieve a diverse student body, which constitutes "compelling interest," as long as racial diversity was not the only factor considered by an admissions program of a public college or university (Bloom, 2004, p. 464, Shraub, 2017). Several years later, the *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* decisions affirmed the legitimacy of diversity as a compelling interest. The Supreme Court made it clear that affirmative action programs are constitutional only if, upon reviewing applicants' attributes and qualifications, race is considered as one of many factors in individualized evaluation. Additionally, the practice must achieve class diversity (Garfield, 2005). Finally, with *Grutter* setting the standard, *Fisher v. The University of Texas* determined affirmative action constitutional, because it supported the compelling interest argument that race-conscious admissions create a diverse student body (Shraub, 2017).

Decades of litigation exemplify that uses of race in educational policies are met with astounding skepticism. Admissions programs must be very narrowly tailored and must have a compelling interest. Affirmative Action policies, have therefore only been realized in institutions with the resources to follow the narrowly defined affirmative action policies defined by the court (Perry, 2014). Therefore, a majority of public colleges and universities, particularly those who serve large numbers of African American and Latino students, are thwarted in their attempts to equalize educational opportunities among these groups, because resources are limited, or not prioritized to affect change. As a result, African Americans continue to struggle to gain access and achieve degree completion at four-year, public institutions (Lark, 2012). Community

colleges however, are not bound by affirmative action policies. As open door institutions, many students of color begin their college education at a community college and then transfer to a four-year college or university to earn a bachelor's degree.

For well over half a century, community colleges have been and are still open access institutions for students seeking affordable education, and/or who do not have the academic qualifications to enter a university. Students can enroll in these institutions as a means to gain job specific training, complete coursework to transfer to a four-year institution, or brush up on academic skills. Since the civil rights movement, and in the sixty-five plus years since *Brown,* community colleges have enrolled more students of color than any other type of postsecondary institution (Moore & Bush, 2016). For this reason, community colleges are uniquely positioned to address the persistent inequities in degree attainment. Yet, in spite of many access, persistence, and student success initiatives, community colleges still struggle to close the gap in degree attainment by race, leaving many aspiring graduates of color with no degree or credential (Long, 2016). CRT offers a lens by which to examine these inequities by exposing the ways that racism, white power and privilege are perpetuated in the structures of education systems and institutions that subordinate students of color.

Critical Race Theory

CRT was developed in the legal field in the 1970s, due to the negligence of legal research by minority scholars and the absence of minority individuals in legal case studies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT therefore builds upon and draws from the Critical Legal studies movement, which offers a broad literature base from scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams. The commitment to their work comes from "the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law" (Bell, 1995, p.

898). These scholars, grouped together by similar concerns and theoretical and practical challenges in the law, were committed to resistance of scholarly work and legal systems that disempower people of color. In its evolution, CRT extends to offer a broad literature base of critical theory in fields such as sociology, history, ethnic studies and women's studies (Yosso, 2005). In education, Daniel Solorzano and Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced CRT to the K-12 and higher education systems. Solorzano (1997, 2000) focused on racial microaggression and campus racial climate. Ladon-Billings (1998) contributed the basic tenets of CRT as follows: First, racism in United States society is an accepted standard and has been normalized in this culture. It is part of the social order, which refers to a system of social structures and values that maintain, protect and perpetuate racialized patterns of behaving, relating, and interacting (Hechter & Horne, 2003). Due to the embeddedness of racism in our culture and our social order, it must be exposed, and unmasked in its myriad forms. Second, CRT, at times, utilizes storytelling, or first-person accounts by othered individuals with shared experiences, to demonstrate the ongoing efforts to dismantle ideals supporting racial hegemony. These stories are used to scrutinize myths and assumptions that construct beliefs about race that render African-Americans, Latinos, Native-Americans, Asians, Pacific Americans, and other marginalized groups. Stories also expose hierarchical relationships of power and privilege that work to "deconstruct and reexamine existing notions of education" (Lynn, 2006, p. 117; Matsuda, 1987). Third, is the critique of liberalism. Critical race theorists argue that overcoming racist norms requires abrupt and sweeping change, rather than incremental, slow and steady progress toward elimination, which is a characteristic of liberal practices as seen in legal proceedings to gain rights for people of color. Fourth, and related to liberalism, is that white people have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislations such as affirmative action,

a liberal policy created to provide opportunities for underrepresented communities in employment and education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Crenshaw, 2007).

CRT frameworks challenge existing modes of scholarship in various fields of research. In education, it denounces dominant theories and white privilege while focusing on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of people of color. In doing so, it offers a liberatory and transformative method for analyzing discrimination that is based on race, class, and gender (Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000). Through these methods, CRT seeks to develop conditions within educational systems that remove race as a means to dictate educational and life outcomes for people of color (Love, 2004). It seeks to expose and challenge the hidden, yet pervasive ways that power and privilege are perpetuated and rooted in our systems (Hernández, 2016). Utilizing CRT as a lens through which to view the experiences of African American students in community colleges validates their everyday realities as students of color (Jain, 2010).

Review of Literature

Persistence Strategies

Persistence can be defined as "continued enrollment or degree completion at any higher education institution – including one different from the institution of initial enrollment – in the fall semesters of a student's first and second year" (National Student Clearinghouse, 2014, p. 7). Postsecondary persistence strategies developed in the last several decades have been based on theoretical concepts using four-year college student populations (Mertes, 2013; Woods, 2016). Several scholars however have studied the usefulness of some of these practices in the community college environment. These studies suggest that academic integration, characterized by small and interactive classes, office hours, mentoring, accessibility and involvement of faculty, and social integration, characterized by campus activities like student clubs and

organizations, and forming relationships with peers outside of class have been found to greatly influence persistence in the community college (Halpin 1990; Karp, Hughes & O'Gara, 2008; Sorey & Guggan, 2008). Participation in TRiO Student Support Services, number of semester credits enrolled and dropped during the first semester, parents' education, and receipt of federal financial aid were also found to assist in first year retention of community college students (Fike & Fike, 2008).

Community colleges have integrated intrusive or proactive advising, which is an action-oriented, early and often intervention approach to advising using deliberate strategies to connect with students before challenges arise, educate them on options, and heighten their motivation with the goal of increasing student success (Varney, 2012). Other strategies include summer bridge programs that are designed to help recent high school graduates develop the academic skills needed to be successful in college (Canales, Gardner, Hughes, & Weissman, 2010). Since 2015, Guided Pathways reform has become a national movement in community colleges, with over 250 community colleges committed to redesigning their policies, programs, and services to support students in choosing and mapping their goals and programs of study, keeping them on track, and ensuring their learning (Bailey, Jaggers, Jenkins, 2015). Other initiatives include re-designing developmental education course sequences in math, writing and reading (Edgecombe, 2016; Finnegan, 2018; Hodara & Petrokubi, 2017; Reed, 2019), and initiatives aimed at supporting low-income students such as campus resource centers and food cupboards. Tierney's 1992 assessment, that many community college retention and persistence programs are focused on the experiences of white students and lack awareness or acknowledgement of the experiences of students of color still rings true today. As race-neutral practices, these approaches have achieved moderate success in community colleges. However, more intention during planning and

implementation is required so that institutions do not continue to ignore the needs and experiences of students of color (Bensimon, 2017; Mertes, 2013). While many of these initiatives address issues facing African American communities, few of them directly discuss or address race explicitly. The results of these efforts may create higher success rates for students of color, but white students also achieve at higher rates, sustaining the gap in degree attainment.

Enhancing African American Student Persistence. In 1985, Jacqueline Fleming published a book, *Blacks in College,* which compared the experiences of African American students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities to the experiences of African American students at predominantly white institutions. She found that students who were most motivated to persist had established a sense of belonging at their institutions by building relationships with their faculty, advisors, counselors and peers. More recently, there has been a growing body of research with a focus on African American male persistence and retention specifically in community colleges (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001; Flowers, 2006; Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Turner, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2013). Studies indicate the importance of personal agency, such as motivation (Ingram, Williams, Coaxum, Hilton, & Harrel, 2016), commitment to academic goals (Perrakis, 2008), self-efficacy (Wood, Newman & Harris, 2015), aspiration (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014), met with institutional responsibility such as campus climate (Wood & Newman, 2015), supportive resources (Moore & Bush, 2016), and formal and informal interactions with faculty and classmates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Clark, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012).

Success at community colleges for African American students is in large part due to a sense of belonging, in the form of engagement with faculty early in their time in college, high levels of peer support, and validation from college faculty and staff (Astin, 1999; Hausmann,

Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Harrison & Palacios, 2014). Additionally, student-centered course scheduling has been found to positively impact persistence of adult community college students, which can accommodate students who work and/or care for dependents (Capps, 2012; Bivens, 2016). Many persistence strategies pertaining to African American students however, focus on changing or "fixing" the student to meet the needs of the institution, as opposed to changing or fixing institutional inequities by designing and redesigning policies and practices to meet the needs of African American students (Love 1993).

Postsecondary Enrollment Characteristics and Achievement Impact

In recent years, at both two- and four-year, non-profit colleges and universities, the race gap in college enrollment has narrowed, but the gap in bachelor's degree attainment between white and African American students remains wide and has persisted for decades. Between 1996 and 2012, African American enrollment in college increased by 72% among 18 to 24 year-olds. White student enrollment in this age range and during this sixteen-year period increased by only 12% (Pew Research Center, 2014). In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 22.7% of African American students between the ages of 25 and 29 held a bachelor's degree or higher, while 42.9% of white Americans in this age bracket held a bachelor's degree or higher. Shapiro, et al. (2017) reported that 25.8% of Black students who entered a two-year college in 2010 earned an associate's degree within six years. For white students, the figure was 45.1%.

African American students enroll in community colleges at high rates. In fall of 2014, 44% of African American undergraduates enrolled in community colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016). The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) reported fall 2015 to fall 2016 persistence was 55.1% for African Americans entering their first year at a community college, compared to 67.8% for white students, 74.1% for Asian students, and 64.9% for Hispanic

students. With such significant numbers of Black students starting their postsecondary education in public, two-year colleges, they are among the lowest achievers in this higher education sector. For decades, these trends have persisted, and two-year public institutions have yet to address these achievement gaps adequately, in part because community colleges have fewer resources than four-year, private, or for-profit institutions. Additionally, resources are not prioritized to advance the achievement of students of color within the institutions. These gaps in resources shortchange students of color, and impact their persistence and completion (Garcia, 2018). In attempt to uncover explanations for this gap in persistence, the following sections will provide an overview of the literature related to the characteristics of African American students who enroll in community college, a vast majority of whom are also first-generation, low-income, who are enrolled part-time, and often additionally required to complete developmental coursework in order to move on to college-level coursework. Following, I will discuss additional factors that disadvantage African American students, such as institutional barriers and campus climate, and differential treatment of students of color (Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, Andrews-Guillen, 2003), as well as additional socio-political factors that African American students have had to overcome.

Intersecting Factors: First Generation, Low-Income, Part-Time Attendance

First-generation students are disproportionately students of color who also come from low-income families (Huerta, Watt & Reyes, 2013; Jehangir, 2008; Nomi, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Strayhorn, 2010). Students with these characteristics tend to enroll in community colleges, and struggle to acquire the information and support they need to make informed decisions about attending college (McKinney & Novak, 2013).

Many first-generation students who belong to low-income households, for example, must

take on full- or part-time employment while in college likely because they are the primary wage earners. 63.8% of African American women who attend community college work while attending college. This figure is 59.8% for African American men. 49% of African American students attending community college work full-time. Further, 28.3% of African American men in community colleges have dependents. For women, that number is more than double, 66.7% (NCES, 2012).

These additional responsibilities at home and at work often dictate that first-generation college students have no choice but to enroll in college part-time. Roughly 53% of African American students in community colleges are enrolled part-time, thus taking a longer time to complete a degree (McKinnley & Novak, 2013; Nomi, 2005, Pike & Kuh, 2005; NPSAS, 2012). Additionally, they are at high risk for not completing at all (Complete College America, 2011; Greene, Marti & McClenney, 2008; Huerta, et al., 2013; Nomi, 2005; Petty, 2014; Randall, 2012; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes & Klingsmith, 2014). To better illustrate that risk, across all ethnicities only 7.8% of students who attend part-time earn a two-year associate's degree in four years (Complete College America, 2011). In addition to the difficulty of timely degree attainment due to part-time enrollment status, myriad challenges exist for students who are first-generation and low-income.

First-generation. First-generation college students face a number of challenges in the collegiate environment, including financial instability, low standardized assessment scores, academic underpreparedness, lack of familial support, low academic self-esteem, lack of participation in extracurricular activities, and isolation (Garriot, Hudyma, Keene & Santiago, 2015; Hicks, 2006; Huerta, et al., 2013; Jenhangir, 2008; League for Innovation in the Community College, 2015; Nomi, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, Terenzini, 2004; Pike &

Kuh, 2005; Stephens, Hamedani & Destin, 2014). These difficulties often negatively impact first-year persistence, because during the first two semesters of college, students experience the strain of what seems like living in two disconnected worlds. In the academic environment, their ideas and life experiences are not valued. In their homes, their studies and academic interests are not valued, nor do they fit into conversations with family members. These challenges are often compounded when students are low-income and Black (Jehangir, 2008).

Approximately 77% of African American community college students are first-generation college students. While first-generation students may receive emotional support from their families, they do not receive inherent knowledge of how college works nor how to navigate those complexities (Tucker, 2014). Parents of first-generation college students may be less aware of practices and structures on the college campus such as opportunities for financial assistance. Not only is knowledge about college funding absent, but the connection between taking rigorous high school courses and college readiness is also lacking. Parents who did not attend college themselves may not encourage or insist their child take advanced placement courses. They may overlook, be unaware of, or devalue the impact of bridge programs that prepare students to enter college academically prepared (League for Innovation in the Community College, 2015; Petty, 2014). Isolation for these students occurs due to a limited understanding of the collegiate environment and the unwritten, implicit expectations inherent in academia.

Parents of first-generation community college students have less authority or influence on educational decisions made by their child, and they are less likely to contribute toward college-related expenses compared to parents with a college degree (Hicks, 2006; Nomi, 2005; Pascarella, et al., 2004; Petty, 2014; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, Klingsmith, 2014). First-generation, low-income students from marginalized ethnic and racial groups find difficulty in

bringing their life experiences to the college classroom, and therefore feel they cannot fully engage in the curriculum, leading to isolation, and mental and emotional distress (Jenhangir, 2008). Their life experiences are seldom, if ever, reflected in their course curricula, which can discourage them from participating in class activities and discussions altogether (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

Stephens et al. (2014) discuss the need for psychological resources for first-generation students to support their mental and emotional well-being. These resources include the belief that individuals with backgrounds similar to theirs are worthy of a college education, or the belief that they are able to thrive in a collegiate environment. Hicks (2006) noted that first-generation and low-income students have low self-esteem. Low self-esteem inhibits feelings of self-confidence and self-worth, and hinders students' academic progress and success (Petty, 2014). Other research (Davis, 2010) discusses impostor syndrome among first-generation students, noting that first generation students demonstrate higher levels of anxiety due to feelings of inadequacy that persists even though there is evidence that suggests otherwise. These feelings negatively impact academic performance, social integration, and emotional health (Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, Russell, 1996). First-generation students find it difficult to find their place, and often feel left out because they are unfamiliar with the environment and culture of higher education institutions. Acculturation is vital to first-generation students and their sense of belonging, as well as their ability to navigate college culture (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Pope-Davis, Liu, Ledesma-Jones, and Nevitt (2000) characterize acculturation as a psychological adaptive process whereby an individual interacts with another culture, such as the college campus, and incorporates college cultural values and behaviors into their own values and behaviors. Without this, students may take longer to access the resources that will enable their success, such as

getting help with choosing a major, or finding an internship (Stephens, 2014). These impediments can significantly thwart the academic achievement of first-generation students.

Low-income. Financial difficulties are inherent in the issues associated with first-generation college student success in community colleges, and are among the reasons associated with constraints on full-time attendance. The Institute for College Access and Success (2009) stated "forty percent of community college students have such low incomes that they have no resources to pay for a college education" (p. 1). Inability to pay for college related expenses, and inadequate financial assistance can impede acculturation into the college environment, and academic and social integration. Personal financial problems, unaffordability of computers to complete coursework, and family responsibilities were among the major challenges confronted by first-generation community college students. By comparison, non-first-generation college students rely more on parent's income and savings as a major source of funding for college related expenses (Nomi, 2005).

Inequitable patterns in policy related to federal and state education funding disproportionately disadvantage students of color whose populations are concentrated at lower-resourced institutions such as community colleges. For example, in the fall of 2015, 48% of black students were enrolled in public two-year colleges, compared to 39% of white students. Many states provide funding to public institutions in a way that provides more money for elite, four-year, research institutions. To illustrate this trend, from 2001 to 2011 total funding at public four-year institutions increased by $2,700, while funding at community college decreased by $1,000.

Nationally, the average annual spending per full-time student is 45% higher at public four-year colleges than at two-year public colleges. As a result, the resources available at

community colleges are more limited than at public four-year institutions, leaving students at community colleges with fewer opportunities and access to important and necessary elements of their college experiences, such as tutoring or mental health services (Garcia, 2018). Without adequate financial resources, students do not have access to the full range of college experiences and therefore cannot benefit to the same extent as their peers who attend a four-year college or whose parents benefitted from a college education (Pascarella, et al., 2004).

Intersecting first-generation and low-income. Across two-year public institutions, approximately 40% of first-generation college students received a Pell Grant. Whether or not a student qualifies for a federal Pell grant is an indicator of low-income status in postsecondary financial aid policies. Another 33% received financial aid with no Pell Grant, accounting for 73% of first-generation students who relied on Federal and State student financial aid as the main source of funding for college related expenses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). McKinney and Novak (2013) state, students who apply for and obtain financial assistance are more likely to achieve semester-to-semester persistence. The authors note a positive impact on retention and persistence of students who apply for financial aid, particularly need-based aid. However, a significant number of community college students, particularly those from low- or moderate-income households, who would be eligible for financial aid are not likely to apply for various reasons including, assumptions that they are ineligible, lack of information on how to apply, lack of basic understanding of financial planning for college, lack of consistent, early, and accurate information about financial aid prior to college enrollment, reluctance to borrow or take on debt, and mistrust and misunderstanding of government agencies that request personal financial information to determine eligibility (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2010; Nomi, 2005).

By not filing the Federal Application for Student Aid, many community college students miss out on opportunities to obtain grants, loans, or federal work-study. These opportunities, when accessed and utilized, can significantly lower a student's out-of-pocket expenses. Lower income students who access financial aid are often dependent on that aid to remain enrolled and graduate or transfer to a four-year college. While dependence on this aid is not a detriment, high levels of unmet financial need remain even with aid, and continues to be a factor in determining persistence and completion (Garrett-Lewis, 2012; Pascarella, et al., 2004).

Systemic, institutional challenges. The onus for underachievement among African American students in higher education has been laid unfairly on families. Studies attribute students' failure to low expectations of family members, lack of familial support, mother's lack of commitment to education, and instability in the home (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Brooks-Gunn, Guo, & Furstenburg, 1993; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Garrett-Lewis, 2012). This research fails to place the experiences of African American students in a historical context, leaving out unequal treatment within educational institutions (Garrett-Lewis, 2012). Rather than place full blame on families, students, and communities, Bryant (2015) places equal responsibility on institutions and school structures that fail to provide adequate courses, resources, and support. These insufficiencies result in students entering college underprepared. Funding of high school programs serves as a stark indicator of African American preparedness.

African American high school students are less likely to be college-ready. While those in high poverty schools are among the least likely to be college-ready. This phenomenon has been measured through SAT and ACT scores, advanced placement course enrollment, high school graduation rates, and high school exit exams (Camara, 2013; Musoba, 2011). In 2014, only 5% of African American students who took the ACT met the College Readiness Benchmarks in

English, Math, Reading, and Science, compared to 26% of students of all other races (ACT, 2014). Additionally, nearly 50% of Black students in the United States attend high-poverty high schools (NCES, 2014), and high school graduation rates among low-income students attending these schools are 14% lower than students who are not low-income (America's Promise Alliance, 2016). In under-funded schools, there are no available resources to teach low-income students at a high level of instruction (New York Equity Coalition, 2018).

Three disparities exist in schools and school systems in high poverty areas with high percentages of students of color. These three disparities are: 1) level of coursework available at high schools, 2) experience level of teachers (black students attend schools with higher concentrations of first-year, uncertified teachers compared to white students, because schools cannot retain or afford experienced teachers), and 3) access to guidance counselors. (The United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Vast disparity exists in accessing these three components among schools with high poverty and schools with low rates of poverty. Fully understanding college preparedness among low-income, African-American students requires a comprehensive analysis of personal and systemic influences that includes individual and community poverty, school structures, and family stability (Bryant, 2015; Stewart, 2007). Entering a community college academically underprepared often requires that a student enroll in developmental or remedial level coursework. The next section highlights the effects of developmental course placement on African American students in community colleges.

Effects of Developmental Course Placement

Institutional and systemic factors place African American students deficient, and less likely than their white counterparts to earn a degree or credential (Harper, Patton, Wooden, 2009; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2010). A high number of African American students enter

college underprepared and are placed into developmental courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). They are often first-generation, low-income, and need to attend college part-time in order to work a full- or part-time job or jobs. Students who attend college part-time, are close to three times less likely to achieve an associate's degree in four years compared to students who attend full-time (Complete College America, 2011). Those placed into developmental courses are at a higher risk for non-completion.

Developmental education has been an integral function of community colleges since the mid- to late- twentieth century, when these institutions experienced an influx of student enrollment (Lundell & Higbee, 2002). Historically, developmental education was designed for high school students who were not academically prepared for college-level courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). The enrollment make up of these classes has been students of color and low-income students. African American and low-income students are over-represented in developmental education courses in community colleges, and are significantly more likely to enroll in these courses than their white counterparts. Roughly 68% of African American students in community colleges require, by placement exam standards, some type of remediation of basic skills. Fewer than 15% of these students earn a degree or credential (Complete College America, 2012). The Center for American Progress (2016) attributes this to disparities in K-12 academic preparation.

Many low-income, minority populations live in communities with under-resourced K-12 schools, leaving students with limited academic and non-academic support, large class-sizes, and aging facilities. These structural issues, largely outside of a student's control, leave significant numbers of students underprepared for college-level coursework, and required to take developmental courses. Many states have their own regulations for placing or requiring students

to take developmental courses. During the enrollment process in community colleges, students take a standardized course placement exam. Based on their scores they can enroll in college level courses, or they may be required to enroll in developmental coursework in math, reading, and/or writing. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, 92% of community colleges have administered these placement exams. In the last decade or so, other measures, such as high school grade point average have been used in conjunction with placement exam scores to more appropriately place students (Cohen & Brawer, 2014).

Developmental courses are designed to assist students in acquiring skills to excel in college-level coursework. Enrollment in these courses can negatively impact enrollment, and greatly diminish persistence and the likelihood of completion (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Long & Boatman, 2013; Preston, 2017; Public Policy Institute of California, 2016; United States Department of Education, 2017). To illustrate the impact, the National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported, roughly 60% of all community college students require at least one remedial course, and fewer than 25% of those students earn a degree in eight years. African American students report lower high school achievement in reading, writing, and math, and subsequently have low rates of academic success in college. As such, African American students must work harder and longer than their more academically-prepared counterparts to achieve a degree, often resulting in a lengthier time to graduation, lower self-esteem, higher psychological burden, and increased potential of dropping out (Bettinger & Long, 2007; Green, et al., 2008; Long & Boatman, 2013).

The Public Policy Institute of California (2016) reported that students who place into lower levels of developmental math take an average of two and a half semesters to complete the courses in the developmental math sequence, increasing their time to graduation by that long.

Time to graduation increases if students place into additional areas such as reading and/or writing. African American students in community colleges are often enrolled in multiple developmental courses across disciplines. During the 2011-2012 academic year, 30.4% of African American women who were enrolled in developmental English took two or more developmental courses. 36.4% of African American women took at least two or more developmental math courses (Bivens and Wood, 2016). Potentially, students who test into multiple discipline areas of developmental coursework may be required to take seven or eight semester-long developmental courses, increasing their time to completion and drastically increasing cost of attendance, and weakening their self-confidence in academic abilities (Bailey, 2009; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Bivens and Wood, 2016; Long & Boatman, 2013; Randall, 2012). This literature on college readiness indicates that African American students enroll in college underprepared for college level coursework, creating barriers to their academic achievement and acculturation. The following section addresses barriers placed by institutions that impact success for this population.

More Institutional Barriers to Academic Achievement

Colleges and universities have a long history of racial discrimination impacting students of color. The Higher Education Act of 1965, and campus-based affirmative action efforts contributed to increased accessibility to a higher education for African-American students (Harper, et al., 2009). Shortly after, in the late 1960s and 1970s, predominantly white institutions of higher education began to see a large increase in the number of African-American student enrollees (Brown-Nagin, 2014). Institutions however, hardly accepted these students with open arms. African American students were not socially accepted on campuses. They were met with racial hostility, and white students, faculty, staff, and administrators unabashedly challenged

their right to attend college, as well as their intellectual aptitudes and abilities (Reaves, 2013). As a result, African American students felt unwelcome in student life activities and organizations, sororities, fraternities, academic associations, and other co-curricular activities. They experienced a lack of sense of belonging, isolation and emotional distress (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996; Williamson, 1999). However, in attempt to assuage their own isolation, improve their chances of success, and promote resiliency among one another, African American students made the educational environment more relevant to their experience by organizing demonstrations against discriminatory school policies, and creating social and academic support mechanisms designed to ensure their progress in predominantly white schools (Williamson, 1999).

Racial discrimination at the institutional and interpersonal levels continues to exist in myriad forms (Chang 2000; McGee & Stovall, 2015), such as disproportionate resource distribution (Harper, 2008; Yosso et al, 2004), non-inclusive campus climates (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, Hagedorn, 1999; McGee & Stovall, 2015), underrepresentation of faculty of color (Taylor, Apprey, Hill, Loretta, McGrann, Wang 2010; Turner, Gonzalez, Wood, 2008), policies and practices that advantage some groups and disadvantage others (Harper et al., 2009), McGee & Stovall, 2015), culturally monolithic classroom practices (Garret-Lewis, 2012; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996), stereotypes (Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Garrett-Lewis, 2012; McGee & Martin, 2011), and racial microagressions (McGee & Martin, 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000). Discussion around stereotype threat and racial microagression exists in early literature on racial campus climate. On the college campus, Black students experience various forms of racial microaggression and stereotype that interfere with their well-being and contribute to isolation from the campus community (Cabrera, et al, 1999).

White peers, faculty, and administrators are often the purveyors of these forms of discrimination. African American students encounter negative stereotypes regarding their intelligence, low expectations from faculty, misinterpretations about affirmative action, tokenism by others who consider them to be experts on topics of race, and hyper-surveillance at campus events. These seemingly innocuous encounters and events communicate racial hierarchy, Eurocentric values as dominant, and reflect systems of privilege. Over time, the cumulative weight of these burdens, and the need to overcompensate in order to avoid perpetuating racial stereotypes, becomes exhausting and stresses one's mind and body (Cohen and Garcia, 2005; Harrell, 2000; Jones, 2000; Perry, Steele, Hilliard, 2003; Solorzano, et al., 2000; Watkins, Labarrie, Appio, 2010). Other researchers expound upon the psychological and physiological effects of these factors on students of color in higher education, such as race-based stress, and ensuing physiological wear and tear caused by stress. The impact to students can be deleterious to their achievement because it "erodes individual sense of value" (Jones, 2000, p. 1214), affects brain-functioning, and leads to depression and other mental and emotional conditions (Clark, Anderson, Clark, Williams, 1999; Harrell, 2000; Levy, Heissel, Richeson, Adam, 2016; Nyborg & Curry, 2003; McGee, Martin, 2011; McGee, Stovall, 2015). The literature on racial campus climate highlighted below demonstrates the institutional barriers affecting African American students. It is important to note that few studies exist regarding campus climate at community colleges in particular.

Racial Campus Climate. Studies over the years, regarding ethnically diverse student perceptions of campus climate support a correlation between negative perception of campus and low rates of academic success. Campus racial climate greatly influences the ways in which African American students navigate their experiences in predominantly white campuses. They are less likely than their counterparts to access counseling, workshops, tutoring, instructional

labs, or student activities because they perceive these support mechanisms are prejudicial and are not built with their best interest in mind. This absence of engagement is often viewed by campus communities as apathy, opposition, or disinterest in academic success. (Bush & Bush, 2010; Moore & Bush, 2016). In order for students of color to feel a sense of belonging, institutions must honor students' cultural differences, experiences, values, victories, and struggles. Chatman (2008) found that African American students felt lower levels of campus belonging than other ethnic groups. Perceptions of belonging among students is linked to academic performance, persistence, and success (Edman & Brazil, 2009; Gopalan & Brady, 2019). African American students perceive more interracial tensions and report less satisfaction with institutions. They report a climate of prejudice and discrimination in the classroom, such as negative assessment of their academic performance by faculty, compared to white students (Cabrera, et al, 1999; Lau 2003; Suarez-Balcazar et. al., 2003; Tierney, 1999; Thompson, Orr, Thompson & Grover, 2007). Further, African American males at predominantly white institutions perceive adversarial environment, unfair treatment, and a devaluing of their talents and skills (Moore & Bush, 2016).

Solorzano et al. (2000) define campus racial climate as the overall racial environment of the college campus, and state it is a critical piece in understanding college access and success among African American students. When students perceive their campus environments are discriminatory and unreceptive to their experiences and contributions, their social and intellectual development suffers as well as their academic achievement (Solorzano, et al, 2000; Greene et al, 2008). Edman and Brazil (2009) found that African American students experienced lower levels of campus belonging than other ethnic groups due to negative campus racial climates. Racial microaggressions, insensitivity in the classroom, and discrimination from faculty all contribute to African American students' perception of a negative campus climate.

Solorzano et. al. (2000) examine ways in which race and racism "in their micro-level forms, affect the structures, processes, and discourses of the collegiate environment" (p. 63). The findings of their study suggest that racial microaggressions occur verbally and nonverbally and include assumptions and lowered expectations of African American students. The subjects of the study reported a negative campus climate in both classrooms and social spaces on campus. Examples of this include, stereotyped experiences of African Americans in course curriculum, accusations of cheating when high exam scores are achieved, and disbelief by peers that Black students are intelligent. Similar to the participants in this study, other African American students at predominantly white institutions feel intentionally "weeded out" of, and discouraged from upper division courses by mentors and advisors, particularly in STEM fields (McCoy, Luedke, Winkle-Wagner, 2017). McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, and Luedke (2015) purport, faculty mentors in STEM fields are overwhelmingly likely to be white, and, to-date, there is little research or evidence suggesting these mentors engage in reflection on their approaches to mentoring students from racial or ethnic backgrounds different from their own. As a result, faculty mentors continuously highlight students' of color lack of preparation and low aspirations, ignoring or minimizing structural inequities Black students may have experienced in prior years of schooling. They admitted to not nurturing their relationships with Black students because students "did not seem to be interested" (p. 234). Outside of the classroom, students report feelings of discomfort and racial tension in disciplinary departments like business and the sciences. They perceived being over-policed at Black social functions, and remained acutely aware of the perceptions and stereotypes others had about their intellectual capabilities (McCoy, et al., 2015; McCoy, et al., 2017; McGee & Martin, 2011; Solorzano, 2000).

Coping Methods and Impact of Negative Climate. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) described the burden placed on African American students of disproving stereotypes regarding their academic abilities. Over time, these stereotypes often thwart students' confidence to the point where they feel intellectually inferior, alienated, and marginalized (McCoy, et al., 2017; Nora & Cabrara, 1996; Solorzano, et. al., 2000; Suarez-Balcazar et. al., 2003). McGee and Martin (2011) studied stereotype management among African American math and engineering students. Stereotype management is a means to combat, respond to, and manage the negative perceptions of peers and faculty to maintain high academic achievement in rigorous and competitive fields. Participants in this study learned early on in elementary school that excelling in math was a low expectation for them, and they were consistently reminded of the perception that Black students are at a disadvantage in engineering and math simply because they are Black. The authors found that stereotype management was highly effective in combating these stereotypes. However, this extrinsically motivated behavior proved exhausting. Before long, participants in the study were able to adopt more self-defined motivations for high achievement, rather than taking on a "prove them wrong attitude." Before long, students began to understand these negative perceptions would persist regardless of how they performed. Although stereotype management was found to be a useful tool in combating negative perceptions of peers, faculty, and administrators, it is not without cost. Students dealing with the hassles and fears that accompany racially stressful environments often deal with emotional and mental strain that over time, can cause physical strain and even illness.

The phenomenon "weathering," put forth by Arline Geronimus, is characterized by long-term physical, mental, emotional, and psychological effects of racism. Weathering challenges and threatens an individual's health and ability to respond to their environment. It can be

detrimental to one's mental and physical wellbeing, and lead to ailments such as heart disease, hypertension, and accelerated aging (McGee & Stovall, 2015). Among African Americans, weathering accounts for early health deterioration due to the cumulative effect of recurrent experiences with social and economic adversity and marginalization. Physiologically, "persistent, high-effort coping with acute and chronic stressors can have a profound effect on health" (Geronimus, Hicken, Keene, Bound, 2006, p. 826). McGee and Stovall (2015) argue that these physiological ramifications of social inequity among marginalized groups, are unrecognized and under-acknowledged when examining academic outcomes of students of color.

African American college students are perceived as less capable than white students, and must constantly strive to achieve while weathering stereotypes and other slights regarding their intellectual and social capabilities (Garret-Lewis, 2012; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Microaggressions and stereotypes contribute to a hostile campus climate for students of color, and are likely to be delivered on campuses where the majority of students are white with a high concentration of minoritized students, such as community colleges. These microggressions are frequently delivered by instructors who negatively assess academic performance of Black students and devalue their intellect. Further, faculty restrict academic opportunities for African American students by assuming they are disinterested in research, mentoring, internships, or further schooling. (McCoy et al., 2015; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2015).

The studies summarized above highlight the institutional barriers imposed on African American students in college leading to students' feelings of isolation, alienation, and marginalization. Other researchers found that exposure to racism can, over time, cause anxiety, paranoia, anger, hopelessness, depressive symptoms, and even suicide (Clark, Anderson, Clark, Williams, 1999; Graham, West, Martinez, & Roemer, 2016; Harrell, 2000; Jones, 2000; Nyborg

& Curry, 2003). Levy, Heissel, Richeson & Adam (2016) contends that race-based stress has implications on students' of color psychological and biological responses to stress. These responses, such as changes in stress hormones, sleep and sleep quality, have a deleterious effect on motivation and cognitive functioning, which leads to disparities in academic achievement. Their investigation is placed in the context of other stressors such as SES, access to resources and opportunities, and employment structures. The authors warn that cumulative effects of race-based stress contribute to physiological wear and tear over time and affect multiple systems in the body, which lead to impairments in executive functioning, and physical and mental health issues such as depression, hypertension, and diabetes.

Existent literature includes few studies that examine racial campus climate at community colleges specifically. However, community colleges enroll a high percentage of students of color who also come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and have had to combat social and economic strain throughout their lives (Malcom, 2013). By examining the persistence and success statistics of African American students at two-year colleges, as well as the research literature on studies conducted at four-year PWIs, it is logical to infer, from a CRT standpoint, that African American students at community colleges experience negative racial campus climates, and must weather persistent and pervasive stressors. Further, since community colleges enroll many students of color, issues of race and racism tend to be stifled, and it is assumed that a critical lens on race is not needed (Jain, 2010).

Assets-Based Persistence Factors

Overwhelmingly, the literature on African American student persistence indicates that human contact, or interpersonal relationships by way of engagement in extracurricular activities, and relationships with faculty and peers are the main contributors that lead to success and

persistence for students of color (Barbatis, 2010; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Harper, 2005; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer and Young, 2009; Sandoval-Lucero, et. al., 2014; Tinto, 1975; Wiggan, 2008). Other factors contributing to persistence for African American students include resilience and grit (Sandoval-Lucero, et. al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2014; Wiggan, 2008), familial support (Palmer, Davis, Hilton 2009; Sandoval-Lucero, et. al., 2014), religion and spirituality (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006) culturally relevant and engaging pedagogy (Barbatis, 2010; Wiggan, 2008), emphasis on students' assets and potential, and their ability to overcome experiences with racial and cultural stereotyping (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014).

Community Cultural Wealth is a framework grounded in Critical Race Theory. This framework provides an assets-based perspective on African American student college experience by recognizing wealth found in communities of color and validating everyday realities of students of color (Jain, 2010; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) challenges the dominant discourse around Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital, by debunking the assumption that students of color come to the college campus with cultural deficiencies because they may not express forms of capital outlined by Bourdieu. Further, she argues that cultural capital is narrowly defined by white, middle class values and is more limited than wealth, which includes an individual's accumulated assets and resources. Definitions of cultural capital vary widely across educational research. Guided by the field of sociology, higher education utilizes Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as an analytical framework for studying myriad phenomena in educational settings (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). To explain the phenomena of success as it relates to cultural capital in higher education, Valadez (1993) states that adjusting to college life requires that

students possess requisite knowledge and skills for navigating the higher education system. He defines cultural capital as:

> The specific skills, knowledge, and modes of communication associated with college-going behavior [that] are given status by the dominant groups in society and are transformed into cultural capital that may be used by students from the upper social classes to their advantage.

Forms of capital may be seen in the form of parental encouragement and high parental expectations, financial planning for college, and standardized test preparation (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). When students display forms of capital defined by dominant groups, privilege and higher SES are rewarded, reinforced, and perpetuated in institutions, thus playing an integral role in the social reproduction of inequality (Holland, 2017; Jayakumar, Vue & Allen, 2013).

Bourdieu's theory has been a dominant framework through which the college-going process is examined. Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth asserts the existence of alternative forms of capital that students of color acquire and posses, through their experiences in their racialized communities, and use it to gain access to higher education (Jayakumar, et al., 2013). This assets-based framework is designed to prompt examination of the experiences of students of color from a liberatory and transformative framework instead of a deficit framework. Using an assets-based approach, Yosso (2005) expounds on forms of wealth that students of color bring to the academic arena that recognize cultural wealth within communities of color.

African American students and other racially minoritized groups achieve their educational aspirations through non-traditional methods, including the utilization of forms of community cultural wealth outlined by Yosso (2005). These forms include, aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, linguistic capital, and linguistic capital.

While each form can be an independent strength for an individual's upward mobility, the individual forms are dynamic forces in that they build on one another to form an individual's and community's cultural wealth.

Community Cultural Wealth is applied in a few different experimental settings in the research literature. Sandoval, et al., (2013) ask the question, "What cultural resources do community college students bring to the college experience that can positively impact their college success and do these resources influence their overall retention within a higher education environment" (p. 525)? Reviewing this asset-based body of research literature informs my research question, what strategies or resources did African American students use that demonstrate their effectiveness in negotiating the institutional structures at the predominantly white institution? Below is a summary of related literature in which Critical Race Theory is applied using an asset-based framework.

Using an assets-based approach, Perez (2014) explored connections between community cultural wealth and Latino males' academic and social experiences, and found that Latinos achieved advantageous outcomes in college despite unfavorable conditions existent on campus. Similarities in college-going behavior exist between African American students and Latino students such as lower rates of high school graduation and matriculation into college, compared to white students and other ethnic minorities. Linguistic capital minimizes the effects of racial microaggressions by establishing diverse and nurturing peer networks. Establishing and strengthening same-race peer networks provides confidence for students to interact with diverse peers, and navigate other arenas both on and off campus. Additionally, students who spent time with same-race role models benefited from aspirational capital, because these role models provided an example of what students could aspire to (Jayakumar, et. al., 2013; Samuelson &

Litzler, 2016). Navigational capital/wealth empowered students to benefit from engaging in environments with individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including majority cultures.

Holland (2017) found that familial capital, among marginalized and historically disenfranchised groups, allowed participants to recognize the support and encouragement gained from family members. Additionally, it allowed them to acknowledge their family histories, and apply more purpose and meaning to their pursuit of a college degree. Some students believed they had to continue the tradition of attending college, and others believed they had to begin the tradition in order to set an expectation for future generations, and build upon a college-going culture in their families. Similarly, participants in Samuelson and Litzler (2016) drew familial capital through frequent communication with family members, who offered support and motivation.

Resistant capital or wealth is another asset utilized by students of color as a means to overcome systemic issues that discourage students from earning a college degree. Supporting students in their development of resistant capital helps them understand systemic issues that disparage students of color, and enables a sense of agency, and coping skills in overcoming obstacles. In this way, it supports student persistence because it acts as motivation to succeed. Some students demonstrate this form of wealth through oppositional behavior toward white peers and faculty. This behavior demonstrates a critique of oppression by dominant groups, as well as a desire for social justice. When students take on the responsibility of challenging the status quo in these ways, it not only enhances their own college experience, it enhances the climate for underrepresented peers on campus, because it raises the consciousness of peers, faculty, and administrators, and has the potential to reduce negative stereotypes about students of color. The

concept of resistance, or transformative or transformational resistance is an act whereby students of color demonstrate a critique of oppression, a challenge to social reproduction, and a desire for social justice (Jayakumar, 2013; Perez, 2014; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Solorzano & Diego Bernal, 2001). Jayakumar, et. al. (2013) examined the impact of a community-initiated academic enrichment and support program for Black high school students designed to address the underrepresentation of Black students in higher education. The authors noted the program helped students deal with racism in their schools by teaching them about their historical and social situations as people of color, and teaching them to leverage their community cultural wealth, thus leading to transformative resistance.

The findings of these studies illuminate a major difference between Community Cultural Wealth and Cultural Capital. Perez (2014) explains, Cultural Capital is accumulated and collected to facilitate a student's educational attainment. Cultural Wealth is meant to be shared, and is used to facilitate social mobility for one's self, for family, and community. Marginalized communities lack the forms of capital that are privileged in predominantly white institutions, such as parental education, navigating the financial aid or admissions process, entering college academically prepared for college-level coursework, asking for help, or using faculty office hours, to name a few (Nuñez, Crisp, 2012; Perez, 2014). However, the Cultural Wealth they possess is shared with their families and their communities as a means for social mobility. Underrepresented and marginalized students not only measure their success through academic achievement, they equate their success with their ability to support and serve others, which suggests that these achievers embrace a broader conceptualization of achievement and accomplishment.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the literature as a means to examine and support my research on the experiences of African American students at a predominantly white community college. It summarizes the literature on the characteristics of African American students at two-year colleges pertaining to their SES and academic preparedness, and offers data on enrollment attributes and degree completion for this student population. Critical Race Theory is explicated as the lens by which I will examine these experiences. CRT dictates that we must examine historical and present-day systemic forces, such as social, political, and economic factors that impact the academic persistence and success of minoritized individuals in our higher education systems. These forces influence dominant discourse that places African-American students at a deficit upon college entrance. Critical race literature identifies institutional barriers placed on students of color, and focuses on assets students bring to the institution to combat race-based stressors, and negative campus-climate. The chapter offers a review of the damaging impact of these stressors on a student's mental, emotional, and physical well-being, and inevitably their motivation and academic progress. Finally, I conclude with a review of asset-based research literature from a CRT framework, that highlights forms of capital and wealth among communities that supports determination and persistence among students of color.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study will use Phenomenology as the research methodology and a Critical Race lens to examine the lived experiences of African American students at a predominantly white community college. Specifically, I addressed the following research questions: what are the lived experiences of academically successful African American students at a predominantly white community college? Secondly, what strategies did these students use that demonstrate effectiveness in negotiating the institutional structures at the predominantly white institution?

The chapter provides justification and rationale for using qualitative inquiry, particularly phenomenology, as the framework for this research study. The chapter also addresses rationale for data collection methods used, participant selection, analysis, and reliability and validity. Finally, limitations of the study are discussed, as well as resources required to conduct the study.

During the process of qualitative research, the researcher is able to access the inner experience of participants. This approach allows the researcher to determine how meaning is formed through culture, and to unearth variables, rather than test them (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research employs direct contact between the researcher and the participant as a means to collect data, organize, and interpret information obtained from participants using the eyes and ears of the researcher as filters (Lichtman, 2013). In contrast to quantitative methods which rely heavily on hypothesis testing, cause and effect, and statistical analysis (Lichtman, 2013), qualitative research captures thick descriptions of experiences from the voices of participants (Geertz, 1973). A qualitative approach allowed me to uncover the complexities of

African American student experiences, and understand the phenomenon of African American students who persist in a predominantly white community college.

Methodology

The methodology I used for this study was phenomenology, which provided the tools to gain a deeper understanding through description, conceptualization, and construction of meaning (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson and McSpadden, 2011). Phenomenology dictates that our ideas of reality are formed by our assumptions, lived experiences, and by the ways in which we interact with our environments. Individuals construct meaning and apply values and cognitive schemas in different ways, even when experiencing the same phenomena (Crotty, 1998). Phenomenology allows researchers to understand the lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), and unlike other methodologies, the researcher reflects directly on first-person conscious experience, utilizes nonverbal expression, and collects verbal description (Wertz et al, 2011). It captures the essence of a lived experience of persistence. Inquiries such as, "What is this experience like?" attempt to uncover meanings lived in everyday life. Within educational research, phenomenology provides a means for researchers to inquire, examine, illustrate, and understand the human experience in the educational context. The overarching question focuses on how certain individuals experience a particular phenomenon. It asks the researcher to respect the unique meaning-making structures of the participant (McPhail, 1995). This approach allowed me to explore the personal construction of the participant's world (Tesch, 1990), in order to understand, not just explain the phenomenon under study.

This methodology guided my examination of African American community college students' lived experiences, and the ways in which the participants of this study have constructed meaning around their experiences of persisting in a predominantly white community college.

Understanding these experiences requires in-depth exploration and considerable reflection on the meaningful structure of the concrete and intentional lives of study participants (Wertz et al, 2011). Participants were encouraged to describe their experiences of persistence in a predominantly white college, so that I, the researcher, could understand their experiences, and the strategies they used to negotiate the institution in order to achieve their objectives. To date, there is little in the literature that examines this phenomenon in predominantly white community colleges from the voices of African American students directly.

Use of Narrative Descriptions

In addition to phenomenology, I used narrative to retell the stories of participants, and as a tool in the process of meaning-making. These narratives were a collection of descriptions of events, happenings, and actions that produced storied accounts. The stories themselves, offer access to the details and interpretation of the participants' lived experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilbar, 1998; Hendry, 2010). A narrative approach allowed for the exploration into the lives of participants as individuals, which can include their backgrounds, personal, social, and historical conditions that mediate their stories. Phenomenology allowed me to understanding the essence of their shared experience of persisting at a PWI as an African American student (Creswell & Poth, 2018), while narratives assisted in the process of analysis and interpretation, and allowed for further development of themes that emerged from the data. Through the process of writing narrative descriptions I was able to better understand the phenomenon under study, and to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon for the reader of this research (Kim, 2016).

Counternarratives, or counter-stories as referred to in CRT, strategically utilize the voices of marginalized people to describe their racialized realities, and cast doubt on widely accepted

assumptions held by majority groups (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). They are told by marginalized people to describe their racialized realities while challenging dominant narratives (Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Counter-stories center the narratives of participants from non-dominant groups, from their perspectives, and offer access to the characteristics of their experiential knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Using narratives in the context of CRT as a theoretical framework created an opportunity to "conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23), and allowed me to "better understand the role of race and racism" (Love, 2004, p. 228) in the lived experiences of the African American research participants in this study.

Gaining insight into experiences of African American students from their perspectives aligns with my social constructionist worldviews, in the sense that individuals' construct their own meaning as they engage with and interpret the world within a social context. Further, to fully understand "how race and racism affect higher education and perpetuate various forms of oppression, students' of color lived experiences in academia must be viewed as "valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data" (Yosso et al, 2004, p. 15). For African American students, the social and educational context, more often than not, involves systems of oppression, dominance, suppression and alienation. As a social justice advocate, my goal with this research is to provide a voice for marginalized African American students who navigate these systems to gain success in college and in their lives. By learning from these voices, I hope to call attention to the need for relevant reform to improve educational policy and practice which historically and presently work to thwart the aspirations of African American students. These worldviews influenced my choice of research topic, as well as the methodology used to guide the research

process. In the next section, I describe the philosophical foundations that influenced my choice to conduct this study using phenomenology.

Research Paradigm

Critical theory is used as a paradigm in research, and has similarities with interpretivism. In fact, there are no clear or distinct boundaries around paradigms or categories of paradigms. Each are loose affiliations of assumptions, philosophies, and theories that continue to develop and evolve over time. One somewhat distinct difference between the interpretivist and critical theory paradigms, however, is that the interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand "what is" as opposed to describing "what could be," which is sought by the critical theory paradigm (Glesne, 2011). Using the interpretivist paradigm, my research study focused on "what is," in an attempt to understand the phenomenon through description of participants' experiences. The goal of inquiry using an interpretivist paradigm is to understand and interpret meaning of phenomena through joint construction of meaning of lived experience. This joint construction occurs through the interaction between researcher and participant, and can inform improved practice. Listening can be a revolutionary act when using inquiry to view the stories and lived experiences of individuals whose voices have historically been and are marginalized, ignored and silenced. Thoughtful interpretation by the researcher can inspire others to perceive, think, or act in different ways (Glesne, 2011).

In conjunction with interpretivism, a critical race lens was applied throughout data analysis and interpretation. CRT provides a firm lens to analyze qualitative research findings (Catlin, 2008). It allows for and justifies conducting research within a social justice framework. Specifically, it utilizes narratives and stories to obtain understanding of the experiences of minoritized groups by listening to their experiences from their perspectives. By using a critical

race theoretical lens with qualitative research, I emphasized the importance of race, and also examined the phenomenon under study from a social justice perspective. The choice of grounding phenomenological methods and narratives within the social view of critical race theory supports my research design, as well as my epistemological stance.

Epistemology. Constructionism rejects the view that human knowledge is objective and free of human consciousness. It claims that meaning is constructed by individuals as they engage with the environment they are interpreting. Construction of meaning may occur in different ways, by different individuals, even as it relates to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). This construction of reality is shaped by individuals' unique understanding and experience of the world around them and is greatly influenced by cultural, historical, political, and social norms (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Research findings using a constructionist epistemology occur through the interaction between researcher and research participant, and assumes that individuals cannot separate themselves from what they know. The researcher and the participant are therefore connected by the centrality of how they understand themselves and others in the world (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Although the participants in this study have experienced a similar phenomenon, they have undoubtedly had diverse experiences in the ways they have experienced the phenomenon and constructed meaning of their experiences. Both myself, as the researcher, and the participants are grounded in our beliefs and views based on our experiences, and are unable to separate ourselves from what we know. My experiences working with African American students in community colleges, as well as my understanding of systemic and historical inequities existent in educational institutions guided my research, and allowed for the creation of a combined understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Ontology. Phenomenology is an interpretivist methodology, used to understand the lived experiences of individuals from their own points of view (Halldorsdottir, 2000). Interpretivist conventions represent a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever-changing (Glesne, 2011), and "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). The ontological beliefs that follow the interpretivist paradigm depict a world where reality is socially constructed, complicated, and constantly evolving (Glesne, 2011). How people interpret and make meaning of phenomena is of great importance when interpreting the social world from the perspectives of those who live in it. Further, multiple realities exist and are dependent on the individual's understandings, which are developed socially and experientially. Individuals construct knowledge through interaction with other individuals and groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to fully engage throughout the research process with participants to ensure the knowledge produced is reflective of participants' reality (Lincoln, et al., 2017, p. 103). This ontological view is in line with the methods I used to gather data and interpret new knowledge. In line with CRT, I believe knowledge, beliefs, and ideas are socially constructed through interaction with others in our societies. This perspective informed my research as I interacted with participants though in-depth interviews and data interpretation, to more deeply understand their lived experiences.

Theoretical Framework

As discussed in chapter two, the Critical Race Theory framework challenges existing modes of scholarship. In education, it challenges dominant theories and white privilege while centering the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of people of color. CRT seeks to expose and challenge the hidden, yet pervasive ways that power and privilege are rooted in our

systems. By using CRT as a theoretical framework for this study, I examined, challenged, and theorized ways in which race and racism influence social structures, policies, practices, and discourses (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Yosso, 2005). With this theoretical lens, I then began to discover how these practices impact African American students' lived experiences in a PWI, and the ways in which they have overcome challenges imposed by these social structures. A component of CRT focuses on assets of underrepresented groups in education. Using this framework along with phenomenology, I was able to more closely explore multiculturalism by attempting to maintain the "true voice of those who have used their assets to survive in their chosen environments" (Treviño, 2000, p.19). By understanding the lived experiences of persistent African American college students, my study highlights assets, as opposed to pointing out ways in which African American students are deficient, and the myriad reasons they fail to persist in college, which has been highlighted as the dominant narrative in decades of research literature (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, Harper, 2012; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Valencia, 1997; Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan & Foley, 2001). As marginalized individuals, the participants in this study work to constantly define their own social constructions of reality. CRT privileges their experiential knowledge and places high value on their voices and experiences (Love, 2004). This centrality of the participant voice as a unit of analysis was central to gathering data, and is in line with phenomenology's focus on the lived experiences of participants.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Conceptualized by German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), interpretive, or hermeneutic phenomenology moves past ordinary descriptions of concepts and seeks meaning that is incorporated and embedded in everyday life experiences. This meaning is often unidentifiable to research participants, but can be extracted from their accounts and described

experiences during the interview process (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Heidegger believed that humans are interpretive beings able to discover meaning and significance in their own lives. Context was of particular importance to Heidegger's ideas of phenomenology. He also believed that, "understanding of individuals cannot occur in isolation of their culture, social context, or historical period in which they live" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 174). Similar to Heidegger's beliefs, the CRT framework requires the researcher to account for participants' culture, social, and historical contexts, in order to better understand the experiences of racialized individuals. In this study, African American students in their cultural, social and historical contexts undoubtedly influence the ways in which they interpreted their realities, and described their experiences. Further, these factors influenced the process of interpretation of meaning and understanding during data analysis.

Hermeneutics, a discipline applied to interpretation, was brought to modern use in the seventeenth century to interpret biblical text, and has since been used to interpret various other texts in many different areas of study. It is also applied to unwritten sources, such as human practices, events, and situations in an attempt to evaluate them for meaning and understanding (Crotty, 1998). The hermeneutical approach requires the researcher to engage in an ongoing process of considerable self-reflection or introspection, to determine and explain ways in which their own experiences connect with the matter under study (Laverty, 2003). It can include personal assumptions of the researcher as well as the philosophical position supporting the researcher's interpretation (Allen, 1996).

The use of Critical Race Theory as the guiding theory for this research justifies consideration of critical hermeneutics throughout data collection and analysis. Critical hermeneutics is the idea that any interpretation is consistently impacted by socially accepted

ways of viewing reality, which represent values and standards of privileged groups and individuals. Therefore, the experiences and voices of individuals who are not members of privileged groups, such as the participants in this study, are often discounted, overlooked, or ignored (Thompson, 1990). Critical hermeneutics requires that the researcher probe beneath the surface of participant narratives to discern historical bases of deeply rooted issues of power. Further, the researcher must be willing and ready to critique historically embedded dominant ideologies and how they shape the experiences and day-to-day lives of participants (Lopez and Willis, 2004). According to Jacobs (2014), critical hermeneutics can be understood as a marriage between hermeneutics and critical theory. That is, the interpretive nature of hermeneutics enables the researcher to expose hidden meanings, while critical theory allows for examination of history and its impact on the role of the social, or the campus environment on an individual. Together, these aspects can promote a better understanding of the social realities of African American student experiences on a predominantly white community college campus. This form of analysis and interpretation was utilized during in-depth interviews, and guided by the principles of interpretive phenomenological analysis.

The key elements of interpretive phenomenology that differentiate it from other forms of qualitative research methods include:

- The goal of interpretive phenomenological analysis is to capture and investigate the meaning and significance that participants apply to their lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003).
- Research participants offer their personal and subjective perceptions of their lived experience as opposed to attempting to gain or describe an objective view. They are the experts of their lived experiences (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

- The methodology emphasizes language as interpretive, and not exclusively descriptive (Giorgi, 1992).

In contrast to descriptive phenomenology, the interpretive phenomenological researcher's goal is to "argue for our embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships, and the inescapable historicity of all understanding" (Finlay, 2009, p. 11). Understanding individuals requires that we consider their social context, culture, and historical period in which they live (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Critical race theory supports this by demanding that we evaluate issues of power from a historical perspective in order to fully understand experiences of underprivileged individuals and groups. For students of color, culture and history is represented through language and has the ability to incorporate identities around gender, immigration status, sexuality, race, and ethnicity (Yosso, 2005). Through language and discourse, it is possible to critically examine lived experiences so that participant experiences that are fraught with power imbalance can be identified. Counter-stories are the centerpiece of CRT, and are used as a powerful method to analyze and challenge the stories of those in power, the majoritarian story.

Counter-stories can build community among marginalized individuals and show them possibilities beyond the ones they live. Further, these stories challenge the perceived wisdom of those placed at the center of society, and provide a context to comprehend and change established belief systems (Delgado, 1989; Lawson, 1995; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Site Selection

The College

Participants for this study were recruited from Lakerock College, a predominantly white, two-year college located outside of the metropolitan area of Minnesota. The metropolitan, or

metro area, consists of two neighboring cities, St. Paul and Minneapolis. The name Lakerock is a pseudonym for the college. The college was selected based on its status as a predominantly white institution. Lakerock is one of the largest two-year colleges in Minnesota, and is located in a suburb approximately eleven miles from one of the state's most densely populated cities. During the 2018-2019 academic year, Lakerock enrolled approximately 12,500 students, roughly 6,000 of whom were enrolled full-time. 39% of students were students of color, and 10% were Black or African American. The average age was twenty-five. 46% were first-generation college students. 56% of full-time students, and 41% and part-time students who entered in the fall of 2017 returned in the fall of 2018. The student-to-faculty ratio was 24 to 1. Participants recruited from Lakerock College were contacted, and arrangements were made to accommodate their chosen interview location. All participants chose to interview on the Lakerock campus.

State and Local Context

Lakerock College is located just outside of the metropolitan area of Minnesota, or the Twin Cities, where racial disparities impact every facet of life for African American communities. Over 85% of the state's Black population resides in the Twin Cities. Nationally, Minnesota is among the states with the largest disparities in housing, income, education, and arrests and incarceration. Access to higher education, hiring and workplace discrimination historical and present-day, contribute to great wealth and income inequality. Below are some statistics illustrating the conditions for African American communities in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and in Minnesota at large.

Education. During the 2016-2017 school year, in the Minneapolis Public School District, African American students accounted for 76% of all suspensions, even though they only made up 36% of the student body. White students accounted for 34% of the student body, but only

seven percent of the district's suspensions. For St. Paul public schools, 12.7% of Black students had been suspended, compared to 2.6% of white students (Johnson & Russell, 2019).

On standardized test assessments, graduation rates, and college readiness, Minnesota performs well when compared nationally. However, the state has some of the largest gaps in the U.S. on these measures by race and socioeconomic status (Grunewald & Nath, 2019).

Minnesota has the second lowest high school graduation rate for Black students in the nation. In 2018, Minnesota's overall high school graduation rate was 83%, compared to 67% for Black students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). In the Minneapolis public school district, 57% of African American students graduate high school within four years compared to 84% of white students (Johnson & Russell, 2019). Of those who finish high school, 25% of Black students are college ready compared to 69% of white students (Grunewald & Nath, 2019).

In 2014, 49% of African American college students and 19% of white students enrolled in developmental education courses (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). These developmental courses impact time to completion. In a 2017 report, 60% of African American adults, age twenty-five or older had completed some education beyond high school, compared to 75% of whites (Johnson & Russell, 2019). As for bachelor's degree attainment, 20.8% of Black individuals completed a degree, compared to 45% of white individuals. These education outcomes impact unemployment disparities as well. Between 2012 and 2016, the unemployment rate in the metro area was 12.4% for African Americans, and 4.1% for whites (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2018).

Homeownership and income. In the Twin Cities in 2017, 25.6% of African Americans own their homes compared to 76.8% of whites. At over fifty percentage points, this gap is the

third largest in the nation (United States Census Bureau, 2019). A 2014 report published by the University of Minnesota Law Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity noted that shortly before the 2008 housing crisis, high-income Black residents in Minnesota were 3.8 times more likely to receive subprime loans than low-income white residents. Subprime loans were woven into the mortgage market and were targeted toward communities of color regardless of income status.

In 2018, the median income for Black families in Minnesota was $36,000 compared to $83,000 for white families. This is one of the largest income gaps in the nation, second only to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Poverty among Black people in Minnesota is roughly 27 percent, compared to seven for white people. This is the third largest gap in the country (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2018).

Incarceration and arrests. As for the criminal justice system, the incarceration rate for African Americans in Minnesota is eleven times the rate for whites. African Americans make up only six percent of Minnesota's population compared to whites, who make up 80% of the population. African Americans are also arrested at a higher rate (eight times that of whites) than any other racial or ethnic group (Johnson & Russell, 2019). Minneapolis police reported more than 10,700 uses of force (i.e. using body weight to pin, taser, use of baton, kicking, use of mace) between 2015 and 2019. Of those, Black people were the subject of 6,245, or nearly 66% of uses of force (Minneapolis Police Department, 2019).

Target Population

Purposive sampling was used for participant selection for this study. Purposive sampling identifies a closely defined group for whom the research questions will be significant (Smith, 2007). It allowed me to choose participants based on particular characteristics of interest and relevance to the study. Because the objective of the study was to examine the lived experiences

of African American students who persisted beyond their first year at Lakerock, it was important that participants possess certain characteristics or criteria, and that they had experiences relating to the phenomenon under study (Kruger, 1988). Therefore, the target population for this study included individuals who identified as African American (of African descent and grew up in the United States), were eighteen years of age or older, and completed at least one year of college at Lakerock College and, at the time of interviews were still enrolled at Lakerock as students.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

Following IRB approval (Appendix B), I recruited individual participants by placing recruitment posters on campuses in high traffic areas such as Student Life Offices, Diversity and Equity Offices, eating areas, and boards where job postings were placed. A snowball recruitment method was also used to recruit participants. The snowball method is used when existing participants recruit other participants from their peers. The first research participant was recommended by her advisor, who saw a recruitment flyer in the hallway of the college. Upon completion of the first interview, this first participant introduced me to two more prospective participants, whom she had told about the study. The two prospective participants were interested in the study, and met the criteria for participation. Thirty dollar gift cards were offered as an incentive to participate in the study. Incentives are useful in attracting study participants and retaining them for the duration of the study.

Once I identified seven participants, I screened them for eligibility. Participants who identified as African American were included in the study. This included Black participants who were born in other countries, but had been in the United States since they were small children. Each participant was asked to verify that they had completed at least one year at Lakerock College and were still enrolled at Lakerock. Once the screening was completed, and participants

agreed to participate in the study, I provided the details of the study and the opportunity to ask questions prior to signing the consent form (Appendix C).

The participants in this study are seven self-identified African American, female and male, full- or part-time students who, at the time of the interviews, had completed at least their first year at Lakerock College, and were still, at the time of the interviews enrolled at Lakerock. Their enrollment demonstrated that they had persisted, and completed their first year at Lakerock. Statistically, only about half of all students persist beyond their first year at community college. African American students have persisted at the lowest rates across underrepresented groups (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017, 2019).

Regarding sample size, Patton (2002) states that qualitative research does not set specified rules for sample size. Rather, the nature of the qualitative study should determine the sample size. Interpretive phenomenological analysis studies typically are conducted using small sample sizes consisting of six to eight participants, because the aim is to provide rich detail about the perceptions of participants and understandings of the particular group under study, rather than make general claims (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Smith (2007) suggests the sample size depends partially on the degree of commitment to the level of analysis and reporting, the richness of the individual narratives, and the constraints under which the researcher is operating. Further, for students such as myself, conducting interpretive phenomenological analysis for the first time, a small participant sample size is useful, because it allows sufficient, in-depth engagement with each participant, as well as a detailed examination of similarities and differences between individuals (Smith, 2007).

Data Collection

Using a critical race framework, the goal of this research was to elicit rich, detailed, first-person accounts of individual experiences and phenomena under examination, in order to a) identify power structures inherent in educational institutions that work to impede the success of African American students, and b) identify the assets they have exercised that have enabled their persistence. The research utilized two face-to-face, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, as well as follow up phone calls and emails as agreed upon by participants. Phone calls and emails were used for clarifying questions about information shared in the first and second interviews. During interviews, I allowed space and time for participants to talk at length, and encouraged them to follow tangents to better and more holistically describe their lived experiences in a predominantly white two-year community college. A general interview guide with a prepared set of semi-structured questions guided the interviews (Appendix D), but these questions were not read verbatim (Silverman, 2013). This ensured that the same general fields of information were collected from each participant in a systematic manner, yet still allowed freedom and adaptability during the interviews.

Congruent with emergent design, which allows the researcher to adapt to new ideas, concepts or findings over the course of the study (Creswell, 2014), I determined that follow up questions were necessary in order to gain depth of understanding. Because all interview questions from the interview protocol (Appendix D) had been answered in the first two interviews, no face-to-face third interviews took place. For follow up questions, participants agreed to be contacted via phone and email. Each full-length interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. The length of interviews and number of questions varied from one participant to another (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). All participants answered all

questions included in the the interview protocol, however, some follow up and clarifying questions were asked during interviews, making some interviews longer than others.

The first interview consisted of open-ended questions, and an informal, conversational line of questioning designed to gain in-depth descriptions of personal experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). As an example, the following interview question was asked during the first interview: Tell me a little bit about growing up? a) Describe the characteristics that were instilled in you that got you where you are today. b) What were your goals and aspirations growing up? c) Who or what influenced your belief that you could successfully accomplish your goals? This introductory question elicited a broad range of answers form participants.

The second interview consisted of open-ended questions about campus climate and institutional barriers, as well as information pertinent to my study that I did not learn from the first interview. The following question was asked during the second interview: In what ways do you feel your racial identity has impacted your interactions with the college campus? a) With your peers/classmates? b) With faculty/your instructors? c) With staff? Additionally, clarifying questions about first interview responses took place during second interviews.

The third interview served as a follow-up interview, intended to clarify any responses provided by the participants during the first and second interviews, as well as verify accuracy of information and interpretation. No face-to-face third interviews took place. All participants were contacted via telephone and email. Using phone and email, participants were presented with a preliminary analysis of emergent categories and themes from all data collected during face-to-face interviews, phone calls and emails. Member checking was used as a method for investigating the credibility of results, and to confirm the interpretation of the information shared

by participants (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). This supported their responses, and provided further perspective for the study.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to text for the analysis of the data. Groenwald (2004) recommends interview transcriptions and notes be stored electronically on external hard drives. External hard drives have been kept in a locked file box located in my home office. They will remain there for a minimum of three years. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Institutional Review Board require that research records be retained for at least three years after completion of the research before they are destroyed (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Data Analysis

In a research project involving six to eight participants, Smith and Osborn (2003) advise the researcher to begin by looking in detail at the transcript of one interview in its entirety before moving on to examine the others. The authors state, "This follows the idiographic approach to analysis, beginning with particular examples and only slowly working up to more general categorization or claims" (p. 67). Based on their suggested approach, the following process was used to conduct data analysis for this study.

Interviews were transcribed and read multiple times. With consideration to the research questions, I highlighted and recorded information, statements, and stories that described how participants experienced their first year persistence at the PWI. Each statement was treated with equal value. Repeated readings permitted new insights to arise from the data. Highlighted data and codes were created and entered into NVivo to assist me in keeping the data organized. Each code was tied to significant statements from the data.

Following this process, I looked for connections from the list of codes created. In trying to make sense of the connections between codes, some naturally clustered together and some emerged as subordinate or superordinate concepts. For example, 'campus support resources' emerged as a superordinate concept or code. This code was placed in a folder labeled *Utilized Campus Support Resources* in NVivo. In this folder was a list of the various campus support resources discussed by participants such as, *Black social events, Financial Aid, POC staff person, TRiO, Writing Center,* along with their associated significant statements. Throughout this process, it was imperative to continuously check the transcript to ensure that my sense-making remained congruent with the participants' accounts of their experiences. From this process, categories and themes were developed from the codes. Table 3.1 details an example of how one of the five themes emerged from a sampling of participants' significant statements, codes and categories.

Using the aforementioned process as a template, I began analysis on subsequent transcripts from scratch. I carefully discerned repeated patterns while noting new, emerging concepts in the data. Doing this enabled me to be cognizant of similarities and differences in participants' accounts.

The basis of this study is processed through the lens of issues impacting the persistence of African American students in predominantly white colleges. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, it was essential to practice the interpretive process by continuing to be aware of my own thoughts and reflections with consideration to the research questions. Research maintains a balance between descriptive and reflective notes, and therefore, memoing, or reflective note-taking was an important data source throughout this qualitative research project (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Through journaling and memoing I wrote down my reflections,

thoughts, negotiations, hunches, and interpretations in order to recognize and manage the differences between my own reflections and the participant's descriptions (Bhattacharya, 2017). Through this active reflection, narratives emerged.

Table 3.1 Example of Select Significant Statements Through Theme

Significant Statement	Codes	Category	Theme
When I start doubting myself, I clear my mind. I write poetry, short stories, music. I sing.	Writing as expressive outlet	Strategies and Coping	Negotiating the PWI Using Self-Identified Strengths and Strategies
I like writing. I like the creativity of writing.			
When I leave my house, I'm really good at leaving home at home. School is like my escape.	Escape from challenging realities		
I read a lot to help me escape sometimes. Just like, immersing myself in a story, some made up random dystopian world.			
I confront racist people but I have to choose my language carefully. Language is important especially when you're Black and you're talking to a dominant white professor.	Activism. Empowers self with language choice		
I like to think about how I can turn tough experiences into, "What did I learn from this?" So, there's really no "bad" experience. Just a learning one.	Positivity. Growth		
I like to observe what's going on in my environment, making sure I understand what is happening before I jump into any situation.	Judicious. Discerning	Characteristics and Strengths	
I'm very strong and wise. Like mentally strong. I mean physically too. I'm very confident in myself and try not to let things tear me down.	Self-confidence		
I don't give up on things if I want something. And I don't take no for an answer.	Persistence. Excellence		
I have so many goals I want to accomplish and I'll do whatever it takes. That's why I'm so persistent. 'Cause I don't just want to be average.			
Some people just naturally grab people and they listen to you and follow you. I feel like I give a lot of people that. I feel like I'm a natural leader.	Influencer. Leader		

Validity and Reliability

Moustakas, (1994) states, "establishing the truth of things" begins with the researcher's perception, recognizing that truth is a matter of perspective. The researcher must reflect, first, on the meaning of the experience of oneself, work toward revealing preconceived notions that are part of their being, and thus experience change and growth in the research process (McPhail, 1995). The researcher must then turn outward, to those being interviewed, and establish "intersubjective validity," the testing out of this understanding with other persons through a back-and-forth social interaction (cited in Creswell, 1998). This process can be characterized as the Hermeneutic Circle, whereby the researcher and participant engage in dialogic exchange to facilitate understanding of the parts that construct the whole (Wertz et al, 2011). As an example, the term *successful college student* was used on a recruitment flyer (Appendix E) to identify participants for this study. The definition of *successful college student* was determined by the researcher based on my own experiences working in community colleges, and in studying theoretical literature around success in community college. No participant disagreed that success was indeed part of their lived experiences. However, the term may have been viewed, defined, and experienced differently by participants. Therefore, through dialogic exchange during interviews, the term was shaped through a co-construction of meaning by the participant and researcher. This process of gaining intersubjective validity and trustworthiness was critical to understanding and interpreting the phenomena, which I employed throughout the study.

The aim of validity in interpretive phenomenological analysis, is not to prescribe "the singular true account," but to confirm credibility and trustworthiness of the participants' final account (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 31). Glesne (2006) refers to validity in qualitative research as trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to the idea that interpretations of the research data are

affirmable by individuals who may use this work in the future as trusted outcomes that describe, confirm, expand, and inform the field. In my approach, I practiced trustworthiness by continually challenging my research process, reflecting on my own subjectivity in terms of what I hear and see, challenging my own assumptions and biases, and engaging in member checking (Glesne, 2006). Part of this process was remaining respectfully neutral throughout the data collection process, to ensure that participant responses were genuine, and not influenced in any way by my verbal or non-verbal communication cues.

For interviews, I began with a small number of thoughtfully designed questions, beginning with a broad question about participants' personality characteristics, goals, influences, and overall experience in college. I then encouraged participants to describe interactions, relations with others, experiences of time, place, and experiences in the context of school practices and socialization (Smith, 1987). I allowed the discussion to generate additional or subsequent questions. This technique assured that the data represented participants' views and reduced the odds of me asking leading questions of the interviewees. My intention, throughout the process of interviewing, was to gather as much candid information from participants as possible. After each round of interviews, I sought participant validation by returning to my them to determine whether the essence of the interviews had been accurately represented. For example, after the participant narratives were written, I presented each to them, and asked them if what I had written accurately described their experiences. Modifications were made to reflect their feedback.

Trustworthiness also involves time spent getting to know participants through the process of interviewing. Using two rounds of face-to-face interviews and subsequent phone calls allowed me to build depth of data and to analyze, throughout data collection, what I was missing as it

related to my research questions. Depth was achieved during the process of interviewing, by gaining deep understanding of the phenomenon, or the *how* and *why* of a particular issue, organization, process, situation or social interaction (Charmaz, 1990). During the first interview, participants were just getting to know me, and familiarizing themselves with the process. Some of their responses may have been less elaborate or detailed. After some level of trust had been established in the first interviews, and during the second interviews, I presented follow up questions that prompted participants to delve deeper into a particular issue or interaction mentioned during the first interview. This required great awareness and sensitivity on my part, to ensure that participants did not feel pressured or obligated to share any information they did not feel comfortable sharing. This process was used to establish credibility of findings, and to understand the relevance, meaning, context, emotion, and intention so as to provide a clear picture and thick descriptions during the process of writing narratives (Denzin, 1989, Schwandt, 2001). Additionally, I cross-referenced my data collection with related literature, as well as my own experience working with African American students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

During data analysis, Hycner (1999) recommends repeated listening of the interview audio recordings in order to gain familiarity with the interviewee and develop a holistic sense of her/his experience around the phenomena. I shared my transcripts, narratives, and analyses with the research participants to make sure I represented them accurately and fairly (Glesne, 2006). To preserve anonymity, I used pseudonyms for participants, their instructors and mentors, and for the college. Participants chose their pseudonyms. Each stage and method has been documented, which permits replicability of my study by others. One strategy for obtaining consistent and dependable data involves the implementation of an audit trail, which provides a detailed description of how information was collected, how decisions were made, and how I

arrived at my proposed findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). These methods are inherent in this methodology and ensured that data collection and analysis represent participants' views.

In contrast to interpretive phenomenology, a key epistemological strategy that is common to descriptive phenomenology is phenomenological reduction (Dowling, 2007). Reduction allows the researcher to release any presuppositions or biases, to establish open-mindedness and objectivity as an observer, and encounter things as they truly are (Moustakas, 1994). A common element of descriptive phenomenology is bracketing. Bracketing however, is antagonistic to the ontological, interpretive approach, which states that personal researcher knowledge and assumptions are useful and necessary in phenomenological research (LeVasseur, 2003; Smith & Osborn, 2003). After all, if the researcher chooses to study a topic or particular phenomenon, they must know something about it. Interpretive phenomenology therefore, does not require the researcher to bracket their biases or prior knowledge of the question under examination. As an approach to qualitative research it "is not at the level of description, but at the level of interpretation, that the natural attitude of the participants is understood" (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013, p. 6). The focus of interpretive research is on the experiences of research participants (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2011), to attempt to understand the "content and complexity of meaning" (Chan, et al., 2013, p. 6) in their experiences, and highlight the significance of the individual account. Because of my background in community colleges, working with African American students, this approach to research was appropriate because I sought to not only describe the participant experiences, but to gain understanding through interpretation. Bracketing would not have been appropriate or possible. In fact, my experiences and pre-understanding allowed me to make meaning of participants' accounts through the process of interpretation, to better understand the complexities of their experiences. In examining the experiences of African

American students at predominantly white two-year colleges through interviewing, interpretive phenomenology allowed me to obtain the participant's in-depth description of their experiences as a Black student at a predominantly white community college, and to examine the meaning and significance given to these experiences.

Researcher Reflexivity

In recent years, focus on the role of the researcher has become particularly important, with the realization that the researcher plays a requisite role in the research process and greatly influences the "construction of meaning" throughout the research process (Gilbert, 2008, p. 512). Reflexivity is a vital component in my phenomenological study, because I consistently had to recognize and assess my own personal beliefs and opinions about institutions where the dominant culture is white, as well as my beliefs and opinions about African American students in the predominantly white college environment. Glesne (2011) outlines a few questions to keep in mind during observations, data analysis and interviews. The questions I used to maintain reflexivity included: What, about my own experiences have led me to this topic? What do I think I know and how did I come to know it? As I analyze the data, what do I choose to omit and why? What has shaped mine and my participants' worldviews?

I have worked as an administrator at predominantly white community colleges in the Minnesota. I have studied data on the disproportionate achievement of African American compared to white students, and have witnessed flagrant and discernable discrimination and prejudice by faculty, staff, and other students toward students of color. When complaints of prejudice and discrimination have been made, investigations present inconclusive findings. Often, the complainant is retaliated against even though retaliation is in violation of policy. I'm aware that white students receive more scholarly attention than Black students and Black

students are tokenized when they achieve, and used to advertise the diversity of a campus or program. I continue this work to effect change at the institutional level, promote student agency, and work toward improving graduation rates for students of color. How would participants respond to this perspective and my interpretations of their responses? How do readers of my research perceive me, and how does it affect me? Throughout the research process feelings and interpretations were recorded. However, it was important to avoid prematurely pushing data into categories or themes that would potentially shape the direction of the study. Using these self-reflective questions allowed me to stay conscious of how my own assumptions and biases could impact the research process and findings. These assumptions were kept at the foreground so that differentiating my own beliefs and presuppositions from my participants' was done consistently and thoughtfully (Finlay, 2009).

Human Subjects

Prior to beginning any research, all Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms and materials were submitted for review and approval in order to ensure that the rights and welfare of human subjects in my study are protected. IRB included approval of all recruiting materials and screening activities (Institutional Review Board, n.d.). Great care was taken to ensure that all research participants were aware that their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality of all data was maintained at all times, given the sensitive nature of the discussions held while interviewing. This study posed minimal physical and psychological risk to my participants. A consent form was created outlining the purpose of my research and rights of participants. The consent form was sent for approval by the IRB at the University of North Dakota. Once approved, it was distributed to each participant for acknowledgement and signature.

Participants who failed to follow through after initial contact were not contacted more than twice in order to ensure that I was not coercing them into participation. Participant identifiers are not used on any transcripts, and study participants were given pseudonyms that they chose, to protect their anonymity in any published documents. Participants had the freedom to choose to answer or not answer any of the interview questions and could withdraw from the study at any time.

Consent forms and research data have been kept under lock and key in my home office. Research data has been retained on an external flash drive, and locked in my home office. Data and consent documents will be kept for at least three years after the study has been completed. All audio files will be destroyed, and written files shredded.

Limitations

Due to the nature of the topic, discussions about race and class inevitably unfolded during the interview process with research participants. Participants may not have been fully willing to share their experiences in ways that could create a more robust study. Every attempt was made to build trust and create open lines of communication, to make sure participants felt open to sharing their experiences. Participants may have been concerned that their peers may recognize their personal stories and experiences, and therefore refrain from full disclosure. In order to mitigate this, I assured anonymity, and let participants know that a pseudonym of their choice was linked to any narratives.

A second limitation of this study had to do with the fact that there are differences among African Americans of different countries and regions. I acknowledge that foreign born, as well as U.S. born African Americans may alternate between identifying their ethnicity and nationality by their family's country of origin or by describing themselves as American. During the recruitment

period, I invited participants who identified as African American, and did not differentiate by country or region in which they were born.

Chapter Summary

I used qualitative research methods to examine the persistence of African American students at a predominantly white, two-year college. Lakerock College is a pseudonym for the participating college, which is located right outside of the metropolitan area of Minnesota. Using Critical Race Theory as my theoretical framework, I explored the lived experiences of these students.

The sample consisted of seven students who completed at least one year at Lakerock College, and enrolled for year two. Participants were interviewed in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. My approach to data analysis was interpretive phenomenological analysis, as well as narratives, which allowed me to use in-depth data collection, clustering of significant statements, thematic analysis, and interpretation of data in a manner that allowed for themes to emerge. Continuous member checking occurred at each interview with each participant to make sure I captured the essence of their experiences. Other forms of validity are embedded in the methodology, such as use of rich and descriptive data, repeated readings of transcripts, and researcher reflexivity to assess my own biases and assumptions. Finally, limitations included participants' discomfort with full disclosure of their experiences as it related to the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of successful African American students in a predominantly white community college, and, to learn what strategies these students used that demonstrate effectiveness in negotiating the institutional structures at their predominantly white institution? Data was obtained through 45-60 minute interviews whereby participants described their experiences during their time at Lakerock College, as well as the strategies and personal strengths they used to succeed. Participant names were changed for confidentiality, and pseudonyms for the college, faculty, and staff where the study took place were also used. The findings are presented in this chapter.

Counter-stories are a central component in CRT. They "counter" deficit storytelling, which remains the dominant narrative in the stories of marginalized individuals, particularly in the educational context. To address the first research question, I present the narratives, or counter-stories of the seven participants who volunteered for the study. These narratives provide background information, and focus on the individual lives and experiences of the participants in the predominantly white community college environment. Openness varied from participant to participant based on what they were prepared to share about their experiences. Therefore, some narratives are longer and more detailed than others. Following the participant narratives, I will provide a detailed thematic analysis to address the second research question. These themes illustrate and describe the strategies and resources utilized by participants in negotiating the institutional structures at the predominantly white institution. Chapter five will provide a Critical Race analysis of the data using three tenets of CRT outlined by Ladson-Billings (1998), along with discussion, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Participant Narratives/Counter-stories

Luna

Luna had a quiet confidence and calm demeanor. She exhibited an inquisitive nature, warm smile, and openness to a new experience. Her advisor from TRiO told her she should participate in a research study she saw on a flyer in the hallway, so she did.

Luna describes her schooling experiences as "very challenging." From a young age, she loved math, science, and running. In elementary school, however, she "stopped trying" in math and science when she approached a teacher for help with a math problem and the teacher remarked, "you won't amount to anything so stop trying." Running made her feel free, and she was encouraged by her peers who called her *The Flash* through middle school and early in high school.

Right after her senior year, Luna and her family faced eviction, and struggled to make ends meet. With so much focus on her family's well being, she took some time after high school to work overtime hours, and earn and save money to help her family. Feeling somewhat defeated, she recalled of the time, "I felt like, if things are going to still happen like this in my family, then what's the point of going to school? Let me make money and support my family instead of struggling with my grades." She soon realized that earning a degree would ultimately help her family in greater ways. After discussing with her father her desire to pursue business, Luna enrolled in a for-profit, business school. After one semester there, and many attempts to connect with an advisor, she left feeling like instructors and staff did not take the time to support her in determining her career path and goals more specifically. After accumulating 15 non-transferrable credits at the business school, she enrolled at Lakerock College and worked with an advisor only to learn that none of her credits transferred. Although she had to start over, and

retake courses she had taken at the business school, Luna felt optimistic because she was able to differentiate "between college and university, a certificate and diploma, and how many credits to take and how it would impact [her] financial aid." Equipped with this knowledge, Luna felt more confident moving forward, but was not assertive in approaching college faculty or staff to explain her drive and passion for her goals in the business field. She felt she was born to be a businesswoman, but could not quite convey that message to anyone she had met. Soon, however, she connected with staff and faculty who would support, encourage, and uplift her, like staff in TRiO, or instructors with whom she developed a relationship. Her advisor in TRiO connected her with and advisor who could assist her in gaining more focused information about her Business major.

Later that semester, Luna accomplished milestones, achieving a 3.0 GPA, getting recruited and hired as a tutor, and earning a scholarship. She moved forward at Lakerock College more confidently in her education than ever before. Along the way, however, she experienced difficulties that would challenge her self-confidence, and cause her to question her intelligence. She saw few Black students in her courses and felt that if there were more she would speak up more, even if she felt she was not 100% right. Luna struggles with believing she is smart enough. She fears others will believe she is not smart and has trouble speaking up in class unless she is absolutely sure she will be correct in her words and expressions. At times, she feels ignored, overlooked, or dismissed by white professors during class for not asking "the right question." These difficulties, however, have allowed her to develop the wherewithal to determine that these voices are there to push her down and keep her from succeeding. She stated, "There's a lot of talk around, that black people are not smart enough. I know we are smart enough but we already,

from the jump, got a disadvantage from everybody else in the world." Living with this reality has not stopped Luna from accomplishing her educational and professional goals.

Without taking any breaks, "even if things are rough for [her] family," Luna plans to finish at Lakerock College, then apply to Garland College of Business to major in International Business. If she does not get into Garland, plan B is to get into a liberal arts college, transfer to Garland, then pursue a Master's degree in Business Management. From there, Luna will pursue her PhD. She is aware, "Just knowing that, at my end goal, if I continue with my education, it will benefit my family more." She wants her family to gain accomplishments like hers. She stated, "I'm the second born, but the first one to go to college. So, it's like, I want the rest of my family to have this kind of experience too." Although her time at Lakerock has been challenging, Luna feels uplifted by her accomplishments, the knowledge she has built, and the relationships she has developed.

Kendrick

Growing up, Kendrick saw friends and family in the Black community fall into drugs and violence and believed he could have easily fallen to that way of life as well. His close family members- his parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles- helped him believe that he could be whatever he wanted to be if he put his mind to it. His mother earned an associate's degree. His father attended some college, but did not earn a degree. They struggled financially while raising Kendrick and his siblings, and encouraged him to earn a bachelor's degree so he could earn a better living than they did. He stated, "I really don't want to work for … the rest of my life, minimum wage. I want my degree so I can go into a career." This keeps Kendrick motivated to finish at Lakerock College and transfer to a university to earn his bachelor's degree.

Kendrick chose to attend a community college because his high school grades were not "good enough" to go to a university right away. He was "distracted" by sports and thought he would play in the NFL. By the time he entered his junior year, he realized the benefit of focusing more on academics than on football. He reflected, "I actually think going into community college is a big blessing because I actually feel like I'm doing a lot better here than if I started off at a university." Kendrick participates in the TRiO program at Lakerock. Through TRiO, he is encouraged, and required, to utilize tutoring, the math and writing centers, faculty office hours, faculty email, and participate in other requisite activities beneficial for achieving success in each of his courses. Connecting regularly with his instructors motivates him to "do [his] best," helps him realize how approachable many of them are, and allows them to witness his potential and how hard he is working in their class.

As for out of class activities, Kendrick attends co-curricular events like *Student Success Days,* in which every class is canceled for that day, and students come to school to be exposed to academic programs and tips and tools for being a successful student. He feels comfortable in most places on campus currently. Although, when he first started at Lakerock College, the unfamiliarity of a new campus compelled him to seek familiarity. He recalls of that time,

> Things were moving so fast. So I used to sit around people the same ethnicity as me. But once I got to know people, I started to move around campus a little bit more. I feel like you can really sit next to anybody and they're not going to judge you, at least in the places where I've been.

When Kendrick is not in class, he hangs out in the TRiO office, he visits with teachers during their office hours, and visits the Upward Bound (UB) staff whom he met when he participated in the UB program in high school.

Kendrick works between 20-30 hours per week at a furniture store. During the busy season, he works close to 40 hours per week. Although he has a credit load of fifteen, he does not feel stressed by full-time work and full-time school. He is able to manage his coursework, and get the help he needs from his instructors and tutors. His schedule, however, does not allow him to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities like *The Lab,* a place on campus where students can design 3D prints and prototypes. He states, "It's free to all students and you can pretty much design anything you want. And that's really cool and interesting to me, but it's really hard to do stuff like that when you have work and school." Because of a full-time job, Kendrick finds that courses he is not as strong in, are difficult to manage.

Last semester, a math course pushed him to his limits and caused him to seriously contemplate quitting school. The class was two and a half hours long, twice per week, and became cumbersome in addition to his work schedule and coursework from his other classes. Taking advice from his mother and father to "focus and get it done," Kendrick passed the class. He reflected, "I remember thinking I gotta do this 'cause I know I'll have an easier life later. I hear my mom and dad saying, 'Just a couple of hardships now. But in the future you're going to be set up nice.'" Passing the class built Kendrick's self-assurance, and allowed him to move into the subsequent semester with greater confidence.

Using self-motivation and unwavering focus, Kendrick finds it of high importance to care for his mental state and physical well-being. He works out twice per week to clear his head, and works hard to stay organized. Eating healthy meals is important for Kendrick, but it is not always possible with a busy schedule. Recently, Kendrick started drinking Kombucha, which he attributes to feeling more mentally alert and physically energetic. He stated, "I feel like the healthier I've been the better everything else is falling in my life. And sleep too. You gotta get

good sleep." During challenging times, Kendrick's self-care habits allow him to cope with difficulties, stay focused, and persevere. Kendrick wants to major in Business and Entrepreneurship. After Lakerock, he will transfer to a four-year university and hopes to contribute his knowledge and skills as a consultant for struggling businesses that need assistance to stay viable.

Arlene

Arlene decided to apply to Lakerock College because it is affordable, and she would be able to work part-time to help her family with finances and attend school part-time. Arlene is the youngest of four, and she and two of her sisters are the first to attend college in her family. Her two older sisters attended college before her, which has influenced Arlene to earn her degree. Of her childhood, Arlene states, "My parents struggled a lot when I was growing up. So that was a big factor in me wanting to go to college, you know. I don't want to struggle." Arlene describes her parents as supportive in her desire to pursue a college degree; however, they do not "understand the value of college or how to get through college successfully." Arlene is studying to be a dental assistant and has recently passed her exam to enter the field. Her goal is to go to dental school and become a dentist. Although her sisters provided some assistance in helping Arlene through the process of applying to and attending college, she attributes this accomplishment to her own navigational skills and the ability to jump in and figure things out for herself. Another motivating factor to attend college was the potential to earn more money than her parents over her lifetime because of her degree.

Arlene understands ways in which race can play a role in her experiences in school and in life, but does not feel like she has experienced racial discrimination. She chooses to believe that

her accomplishments and obstacles she faces are of her own making, and not because of the color of her skin. She stated,

> I try not to look at things as my color. I guess I try not to think about it really. Like, I want my experiences to be…experiences because I did well or I didn't do well, but not because I'm a certain color.

In the dental assisting program, Arlene is one of only two Black students enrolled. She feels her instructors in the program respond to her based on her performance, as opposed to her skin color. She recognizes the need for more Black female dentists in Minnesota, however, which drives her toward her goal of being a dentist.

Her desire to earn As, as well as her long-term goal to become a dentist, motivates her to participate in her courses, and do everything possible to comprehend the material. Arlene believes that people who know her believe she is the smartest person in her classes. Her classmates believe she is "top of her class or somewhere up there." She reflected, "A lot of people don't know that I work really hard in school. They think that it comes easy for me. But I do work hard." During her first year, Arlene took her Composition course twice, because she got a 'C' the first time. Knowing this would work against her in applying for dental school, she retook the class with an instructor, Angie, who saw great potential not just in Arlene's writing, but in her ability to comprehend the material in a way that could help other students. Angie soon asked Arlene to be a tutor for students taking Composition.

As for her instructors, Arlene has had positive experiences in the Dental Assisting program. Her instructors motivate students in the program to work hard, and encourage them through a very rigorous program. Arlene appreciates instructors who are open minded to students and their questions. If an instructor looks busy all the time, or has closed-door office hours, she

feels they are less approachable and do not want to be bothered. This does not deter or discourage Arlene from pursuing an 'A' in every class. Her motivation comes from within herself, so much so that she is very driven to learn and figure things out on her own, much like her process of applying to and getting into college. When she needs help with course material, she uses YouTube videos instead of seeking tutoring on campus. As for other campus resources, Arlene has utilized Advising to discuss transferring courses to the university. She has also sought assistance from Financial Aid and found the staff to be very helpful and friendly. The library is a quiet space where Arlene frequents, to study on her own. She despises group projects and study groups because, "People either like to socialize too much and we don't get anything done, or they don't want to work as hard as I do and then I get frustrated 'cause we could have had a better grade." Between her work-study job and her off-campus job, Arlene works the equivalent of 30-35 hours per week. Because of this, she has little time to participate in clubs, or participate in campus social events or extracurricular activities.

When reflecting on challenges for African American college students, she feels strongly that society places stereotypes on Black people, that "we're supposed to be on the bottom," which creates more pressure for Black students to achieve. Arlene believes that many African-American students face instability in their homes, which negatively impacts their achievement. Additionally, many groups and individuals in society believe that Black people should not earn a college degree and/or "be on top." This belief gets perpetuated by children who imitate their parents treating Black people poorly. She stated, "Children believe this behavior is normal, and then they do the same thing." Arlene also notices there is "more fear associated with Black people in general." On social media, and in the news, she described, "all we see is Black people killing people." This seems to be the newsworthy activity contributed by the Black community.

Despite the implications of society's perceptions, and as a result of the pressures placed on African Americans to dispel stereotypes, Arlene believes that, "Black people are tougher people. We can handle more." Upon reflecting on all of the trauma and oppression that Black people have had to endure, she feels that the Black community has built resilience and toughness. Arlene grew up in a very tough environment that she struggled to talk about during the interview. She feels that the struggles she and her siblings endured growing up has provided her with the fortitude and endurance to be successful in college and in pursuing her dream of becoming a dentist.

Athena

Athena walks on campus very conscious of race, her Black skin, and how it intersects across her experiences. She speaks confidently and assertively, and keeps eye-contact throughout the interviews. She is present, and expresses gratitude for the opportunity to discuss race, and her educational experiences. Growing up in a predominantly white family, Athena recognized she was different at a very young age. She was raised by her single, white mother and was very close to her maternal grandparents. At thirteen, Athena learned that her father was half Brazilian. Having a Norwegian mother and a Black and Brazilian father catapulted Athena deep into self-identity research and discovery. She recalls, "I find out this other thing about me, that I'm Brazilian. That's so cool but also terrifying. And so right then and there I was just like this weird kid that became obsessed with finding out about who I was." During this process of deep introspection Athena began reading poetry, where she found comfort, and could identity with the experiences of writers of color. In high school, she began writing her own poetry as a means of artistic expression and continued self-discovery.

Athena attended a "super white" elementary, middle, and high school. Being a Black student in predominantly white schools, Athena at times felt isolated. At age five she was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Dyslexia, which created heightened feelings of marginalization and alienation throughout her schooling. She described her experience in high school: "I graduated high school with a very low GPA which means obviously, low self-esteem. And I just, I was in these classrooms and I was the kid that did not understand shit. So I just checked out." Athena knew she had to go to college. Growing up, she witnessed her mother struggling to earn a degree while raising Athena and her brother, and decided she wanted to finish a degree before having children. In addition to a low high school GPA, Athena's family was not "financially equipped" to afford a university. She decided to attend a community college, and experienced "intense shame" for being the only person in her high school graduating class who was not going to go to a four-year institution.

Athena soon found her place at Lakerock College upon enrolling in a community organizing class, and creative writing courses. Soon she started writing screen plays and got involved in theatre. Athena expressed dismay at being the only Black student in Creative Writing, and only one of two Black students in Theatre. "The other student in theatre" she stated, "has been called 'the blacktor.' The Black actor. That's just so problematic to me, which is why I want to take a leadership role in theatre." Athena hopes to write and direct plays, and create programs where more students of color can write plays, direct, and act in them. She is motivated to help pave the way for other aspiring Black artists so there will be more role models for kids who want to pursue theatre arts.

She participates fully in co-curricular creative writing and theatre activities, and takes advantage of almost all opportunities presented to her by her instructors. However, as the only

Black student who consistently participates in these activities, Athena feels she is told by her professors, of opportunities for scholarships, grants, fellowships, and internships before any other students are informed. Often times Athena gets "over-awarded," or over-complimented by her instructors, and faculty ask her to represent the college or the department at a conference. "At first," she stated,

> I felt pretty special. But then I realized that it makes white professors look really good when a Black girl gets an award or something, or goes to present at a conference, or even gets an 'A' in their class. Or it makes the Creative Writing department look good because they have a Black girl who can write really well.

Even though she acknowledges she is tokenized in Creative Writing, and in Theatre as the only Black woman, Athena realizes these opportunities help her gain experience and exposure as a young artist. She acknowledges them as a "blessing," but is often conflicted with the idea that her race is objectified to support the appearance of a racially inclusive academic department.

Athena described two classes that "changed [her] life." Those two courses were African American Literature, in which she was able to continue her now years-long process of identity development, and a screenwriting course. In addition to these life-changing courses, Athena has a sincere love of learning that she discovered only after going to college. In working with her ADHD and Dyslexia diagnoses, Athena avoids taking classes where she has to take tests. She stated, "Test anxiety is a very real thing for me. I'd rather write a paper or do a presentation. But, over my dead body will I take a test." Currently, she has a 4.0 GPA, and is working on a second fellowship with an organization out of New York City. Additionally, Athena works in the Writing Center as a tutor.

In the classroom, Athena discussed the complexity of navigating a predominantly white classroom as a Black woman. She gets discouraged when her passion and excitement during a class discussion is viewed as aggressive by her instructor or white peers who let her know she needs to "chill." Yet, she is not afforded the liberty to sit quietly in the back of class due to feeling tired, because she will be viewed as "the angry Black in the back of class." These marginalizing experiences are described as both "exhausting" and "frustrating" by Athena. She also described situations inside and outside of the classroom, in which she exhibits pride in her Blackness, and is "challenged by insecure white folk in the room." She recalls, "It happens all the time, and it's happened growing up with a white mom and her white family. It happens in the classroom and it happens in the theatre department. It's just everywhere."

Both outside and inside the classroom, race-based disparaging instances occur almost daily for Athena. As she continues to develop and strengthen her identity as a Black woman, in these instances, she struggles to respond in a way she feels is adequate. At times, she immediately retracts after an incident, feeling shot down for "being an empowered Black woman." Other times, people are in disbelief about her accomplishments. In instances like these, when Athena has the wherewithal to confront microaggression, she "chooses her language very carefully," especially when approaching a "super white and dominant professor." She stated, "It's like, you have to show that you're level-headed, even if you're on fire internally." Athena looks for support in dealing with her feelings, and formulating a requisite response. She laments that there is no one on campus in whom she can confide when it comes to dealing with microaggressions and stereotyping, and how to best deal with them as a 20 year-old Black woman.

With her Associate of Fine Arts, Athena plans to tell stories through poetry, prose, theatre and film, that open audiences to different perspectives through which to view communities of color and those who have been disempowered by oppressive systems. She also discussed enrolling in film school when she finishes at Lakerock. Expanding her portfolio while continuing to hone her writing craft is a goal on which Athena keeps her sights set.

Sandy

Sandy characterizes herself as "a loner, who isolates [herself] a lot." She admits that comes with pros and cons. One benefit is, she never gets caught up in the "fun part of college life," consisting of partying and neglecting class and coursework. Additionally, she can be self-motivated and is able to complete assignments all on her own. Along those lines, however, lies a drawback, which is having to figure things out for herself when she has difficulty understanding a concept or assignment from one or more of her courses. She does not like to ask for help from instructors, peers, or campus support services when encountering difficulties. She prefers to work through assignments and projects on her own. As the youngest of five siblings, Sandy recalls her family doing things for her and helping her so much that she reached a point in her life where she insisted on doing everything herself.

Sandy is the first of five older biological brothers to attend college. Her parents were divorced and remarried by the time she was nine years old, at which time she acquired step-siblings. In addition to her mother having a Nursing degree, one of her stepsisters also attended college. This stepsister, one who Sandy looked up to and emulated, made college look appealing to Sandy, which influenced her decision to attend. She described her mother and stepfather as supportive in her pursuits, less concerned with the area or field of occupation. She stated, "Our parents, they just wanted us to do something that made us happy. And also have some modicum

of success." Sandy does not describe her parents as "strict" about schooling. This removes pressure from her, because it makes her want to earn a degree to make them proud as opposed to doing it so they will not be disappointed in her. Sandy's parents are hard workers, and since childhood have told her and her siblings to always do their best.

After facing the death of her closest aunt during her senior year of high school, Sandy thought a gap year would be appropriate before entering college. During her gap year, Sandy worked and took some time to take a "mental break from school, and find her new normal," after her aunt's death. Her cousin from her extended step-family mentioned to her that a community college would be easier to get into. After the gap year, Sandy enrolled at Lakerock College, while working part-time. After Lakerock College, Sandy will transfer to a University to obtain a four-year degree in Child Psychology.

Although Lakerock College is a predominantly white community college, it is more diverse than Sandy's primary and secondary schools. She felt more comfortable when she got to Lakerock, and immediately noticed there were more people that "looked like [her]," and who were doing what she was doing. More than ever though, Sandy felt pressure to "do good," in school. As a Black woman, Sandy has to constantly dispel stereotypes, leaving her no chance to fail. If she does not do well, it comes as no surprise to anyone. Sandy has never heard anyone outright speak their stereotypical beliefs to her. She stated, "It's more of like a subconscious thing, rather than something someone told me. I've always had that feeling that people don't think I'm going to do well." Sandy gains determination and drive to "prove anyone wrong who would doubt [her], just because [she's] Black."

Academically, Sandy finds ways to push herself out of her comfort zone. She enjoys taking electives, and enrolled in a social dance course during her second semester, admitting she

is not a social person. She enjoys learning new things "for the sake of learning," and makes sure that each semester, she takes elective courses which she described as "the fun courses" along with the "make or break" courses of her major. This strategy helps her avoid burn out, keeps her engaged, and enrolling semester-after-semester. Sandy also loves to write. She enjoys English classes because of the writing assignments, and feels empowered to compose a paper from scratch that includes her own original ideas, thoughts, feelings, and creativity.

Interpersonal Communications, which was required for her major, is a class that captivated Sandy. With the exception of this course, typically, and for various reasons, Sandy avoids participating in class. She considers herself to be introverted and does not like to call attention to herself, unless she is interested in the course material and wants to engage in topics presented. Other times, she has felt overlooked or ignored when trying to participate. In Interpersonal Communications, Sandy felt drawn to the material because she realized she would be interacting with diverse clients in her future counseling career. The class was filled with people with varying views and backgrounds and, "[they] all just talked about how to relate to one another." Sandy felt she really connected with the course material, and found herself instinctually wanting to participate when others in her class made assumptions and drew stereotypes about cultures different from their own. Additionally, Sandy was able to connect with her professor for this course in a way that enriched her experience in spite of a setback.

During that semester, one of her best friends died suddenly. Sandy found herself falling behind in her schoolwork. She was reluctant to meet with Dr. Coffman, because she feared he would think she was making excuses for not completing her assignments. She recalled, "A lot was hitting me and my work was late. I just couldn't get it together in time." Up to that point in the semester, Sandy had earned high marks on her assignments, and regularly contributed to

class discussions, so Dr. Coffman was amenable to offering Sandy leniency on a few deadlines. "That really helped me get through the end of that semester, which was really tough," she recalled.

Sandy and Dr. Coffman developed a beneficial and productive relationship. At the end of the semester he connected her to a professor in the Child Psychology department at a local University where Sandy considered attending. Sandy was encouraged by Dr. Coffman's interactions. She recalled, "Everything in that class just made me feel like I was on the right career path." Her experiences in the course validated her decision to pursue a counseling career.

In her courses, Sandy appreciates professors who come across as "real people," as opposed to authoritative figures who seem unapproachable. A communications teacher she had would talk about her hobby being a Cosplayer, attending conventions around the United States. Cosplay is a form of costume role-play, where a person imitates the attire and personality of a fictional character from comic books or pop culture (Gomez, 2017). As a way to connect with students, the instructor would ask for their opinions on certain costumes or characters she was considering. To Sandy, this made her instructor seem like a regular person, less authoritative, and more approachable. The instructor also went out of her way to make sure she could be available to her students in the class. Sandy also enjoyed hearing about the instructor's cosplay adventures, and felt at ease talking with this instructor about course material, and other topics.

When asked about ways in which her racial identity influences her experiences in college, Sandy could not pin-point any one experience in particular. She is certain, however, that being African American impacts every interaction she has in her life. She stated,

> I couldn't describe a particular interaction, you know, other than like the times where I felt like I was overlooked in class. You know but I felt that way in all of my schools. And

> at least here [at Lakerock], my interactions with instructors aren't awful. I mean they're not overwhelmingly more positive, but they're not as bad as elementary school.

Since elementary school, Sandy has built up a "barrier" to protect herself from others in school. Surrounded primarily by white classmates who picked on her, she became aware of her race at an early age, and accustomed to "insensitive and ignorant comments" from classmates. She explains, "Now, if I experience something, it's just like, 'Whatever. Been there. Done that. Heard that. Seen that.'" This has become Sandy's method for coping with racial bias on campus.

Like many Black students, Sandy feels pressured to prove herself as a Black student, thus working twice as hard to prove people wrong. She stated, "I have to succeed, because people don't expect me too. And there's racial undertones to everything as a Black person in America." As an example, Sandy's struggle with transportation to and from school creates extra anxiety for her. If she is late to class because her bus, or her ride is late, instructors and classmates attribute her tardiness to being unmotivated or lazy. They impose stereotypes on her that diminish her credibility as a successful student. Overcoming the harm of stereotypes is a significant challenge that many African American students face in attaining a college degree. Sandy stated, "If one Black student fails, then it proves that people's stereotypes are right. Like we're the face of the whole community, and it's hard to carry that burden because if I fail, then all Black people fail." One idea to counter these stereotypes, and help more Black students succeed, is to hire more faculty of color at the college. Having more faculty of color, "in authority positions," could encourage more students of color to consider attending an institution where there are "teachers that look like them," and might understand their experiences.

Sandy credits her family with her drive to succeed in school and in her chosen career field. Her family remains supportive of her endeavors, and motivates her to succeed, without

placing a lot of pressure on her. This makes a world of difference for Sandy, and it makes her eager to make them proud.

James

James is the oldest of his siblings, and the first in his family to attend college. He has been raised by a single mother, and although his parents are separated his father is very much a part of his life. Growing up, James' father has always been "really tough" on him. He stated, "He didn't want me to make the same mistakes he did, so he always pushed me to do better, and it was really tough." Throughout his life, he has helped his mother take care of his younger siblings, and has grown to embrace his gift of caretaking. In the last few years, however, he has been encouraged by both of his parents to take care of himself first, which has allowed him to focus more intently on school.

On campus, James makes sure to attend every class. Outside of class, he spends much of his time in the TRiO area, where he can connect with his peers, and build relationships with staff who encourage his academic progress, and who are genuinely interested is his overall well being. "I feel like I can talk to the TRiO staff about anything," he stated. "Like Liza, she's Black too. She's the Director but she's real cool. She gets me. She gave me a journal and a planner. She knows I like to write, like music and stuff." Outside of campus, he plays pick up basketball games and finds that it keeps him in shape which also helps him mentally. He enrolled in a yoga class last semester, and occasionally attends the free yoga class offered on campus weekly. Yoga has proven to be a nice complement to basketball, and has improved his focus on his school work, as well as other areas of his life.

One of the biggest challenges that James faces in finishing college has to do with finances. James' mother has always lived "paycheck to paycheck," and growing up James and

his family struggled to make ends meet. In spite of the challenges that poverty brings, James feels each generation in his family is better off than the last. He shared, "Before my mom, my grandma was worse. She was real poor. And my mom, she's a single mom, but she's doing alright. And now, I'm better off than my mom 'cause I got the opportunity to go to college." James' mother models hard work for him, and in turn motivates him to work hard. He learned money saving techniques from his father. Over the summer, James works long hours to save some money for the school year, when he cuts down his work hours to focus on his courses. To make ends meet in his household, he and his brothers pool their money to help their mother pay bills and buy food. At times, James struggles to justify being in school when he could be earning money. Anticipating higher earning potential with a degree in hand, however, keeps him enrolling each semester. Additionally, he justifies his continuous enrollment with all of the progress he has made in school thus far.

In discussing James' racial identity as a Black man, he is "constantly reminded" that he is Black, which prompts him to work harder every chance he gets. Years and years after slavery, Black people are "still oppressed" and made to work harder than those who have not endured what they have endured, wearing themselves out mentally and physically. In describing his thoughts, James' demeanor and energy changed. As Black people, "we're already set up to fail," and to "think little of ourselves." He stated, trying to convince himself, "Working harder doesn't always have to be a negative thing I guess, right?" James refuses to allow himself to feel defeated by this for long. He stated, "I try to not let this get to me. We're smarter than we think we are. We're bigger than we think we are. I try to think like a millionaire, 'cause if you think things, they'll happen." He surrounds himself with people who keep a positive mindset, who also

work hard at succeeding. The idea that Black people have to work harder to succeed is more of a matter of fact for James. He does not dwell on the inequity. He just moves forward.

When James graduates from Lakerock, he plans to transfer to a four year college. Although he has not settled definitively on a major, his interests are Psychology, Communications, and Business, and he intends to take all the classes he can in each of those disciplines. When he gets to a four-year college he will minor in African American Studies. James loves to write, and feels he communicates and influences most effectively through writing. Additionally, he has an entrepreneurial spirit. Recently, he has taken an interest in stocks and crypto currencies, and intends to build his business acumen to lead his own company. If he can help it, he intends to never again work for someone else, and sees little value in working hard for "someone else's cause." He has his heart set on helping kids in his community, and intends to buy a building, open a recreation center for kids, and provide mentoring and life skills programming.

Nura

Nura is motivated and influenced by her mother to attain a college degree. Her mother was educated as a nurse and has been working as a nurse for the majority of Nura's life. Although her mother has tried to influence Nura to study medicine, and become a doctor, she has her heart set on Civil Rights and Immigration Law. Nura's sister encouraged her to apply for as many colleges as she could. Ultimately, she enrolled in Flasgtone College after having completed credits there through dual enrollment during her junior and senior years of high school.

At Lakerock, Nura is involved in the Black Student Association (BSA). Although the group is small in number, she appreciates connecting with others and listening to their

experiences and how these experiences move them forward. This group has worked with college staff to improve its programming during Black History Month. She stated, "[The college] tries to do Black History Month programming, but they don't do enough, and, it's just not … great. So, …, they need to be pushed a little bit." Additionally, she and her friends participate in hip hop, African, and other forms of dance with a growing group on campus. In this space, Nura stated, "We're doing something we love. We're not being judged, and people are appreciating us for it." Nura gains energy and motivation outside of class through connecting with friends and the small African American community on campus. She enjoys meeting people in the Multicultural Center, where she spends much of her time outside of class.

Nura utilizes other resources on campus like the Resource Room, where she can obtain access to free meals and snacks, and get information on different jobs, and resources outside of campus. She likes to look at job postings, to see how her skills might match up with different positions. She frequents the library because it is one place on campus where she is able to focus and get a considerable amount of work done without interruption. For assistance in Biology, she visits the tutoring area, but finds that tutors talk down to and condescend her.

Nura is highly organized and prides herself on turning her assignments in on time. When she receives an assignment that requires more time to complete, she carefully plans out how and when the work will get done. Taking time to do this, and sticking to her plan, allows her to focus on each assignment without worrying about running out of time or missing the due date. Additionally, Nura closely examines her assignment sheets and syllabus to obtain an understanding of how the instructor grades.

In class, Nura struggles with wavering confidence in part due to her experiences in the classroom. She stated, "… I feel like my mind works differently. And when I say something in

class, people kinda look at me like, 'does that even make sense?' And I think …, 'I don't know. I know I'm not dumb.'" In online discussion boards, Nura's posts rarely get replies. She wonders if her classmates think her posts are really smart, or completely off the mark. Her instructors sometimes dismiss her or overlook her when she raises her hand. On assignments, Nura notices that other students who "are not the same color as [Nura]," benefit from more in depth explanations from the instructor on "what they did right or wrong on an assignment." Nura does not get this level of "care" from her instructors. This wears on her psyche and her motivation.

At times, Nura wonders why she struggles through school when she could just be working and earning money. She teared up when she started to describe how tired she felt. Nura works thirty-five to forty hours per week at a group home. She works the night shift as direct support staff for vulnerable adults with mental disabilities. This semester she is enrolled in fifteen credits. When she thinks about quitting school, or taking a year off, she reminds herself how badly she wants to be a lawyer, and realizes that earning more money now, and having freedom from the tedium, challenges, and obstacles of school are only a short-term solution to feeling better. She relies on the support of her closest friends, who consistently remind her that the law profession was made for her. When there are BSA meetings, sometimes she talks through her difficult experiences with her peers in the group. "Ultimately," she said, "no one's forcing you. You can stop school, but you'll regret it." Nura intends to continue working with the BSA to help motivate other African American students like herself, who "feel like sometimes they don't belong here, or feel so tired all the time 'cause they have work and school, and personal stuff going on," or feel like they are not cut out for college.

"Black people," Nura stated, "we do have our strong suit. All of us, we have experiences and we're good at certain things." Because there are so few Black faculty and staff on campus,

connecting with an authority figure who understands, can validate the experiences of, and motivate African American students on campus seldom happens. Liza, an African American woman who works as a director in the TRiO office, is one staff member whom Nura, along with many other students of color, really appreciates and is encouraged by. Along with her director responsibilities, Liza emails students, or stops them in the hallway to ask after their well being, which includes their academic progress. Although Liza never let's on that she is tired or bothered by students, Nura understands that this can be taxing for Liza, and feels other faculty and staff should carry the load. She explained that white faculty and staff are less likely to reach out to Black students, and "a little push or some motivation would be helpful," but Nura rarely sees that happening.

Currently, Nura is working on her general education courses at Lakerock. She enjoys taking courses that will inform her chosen profession like Ethics and Sociology. In her Race and Ethnicity course, she wrote a paper on white privilege, and studied and defined colorism. Understanding these concepts, and building knowledge around matters of race helps Nura understand her own experiences as well as the experiences of her same-race peers. Additionally, they prepare her for understanding the compounding struggles of her future clients. After Lakerock, Nura plans to transfer to a local university to pursue legal studies and criminology. She is considering completing a paralegal certificate, so she can work and earn money while gaining a more focused introduction to legal work as she finishes her law degree.

Strategies and Resources Used at the PWI

This section provides a detailed description of themes and subthemes that were derived from the interview data using an interpretive phenomenological approach. These themes address the second research questions, *What strategies or resources did these students use that*

demonstrate effectiveness in negotiating the institutional structures at the predominantly white institution? As discussed in chapter three, the goal of interpretive phenomenology is to identify and investigate meaning and significance that participants subjectively applied to their lived experiences. This allowed me to develop themes based on what participants experienced, how they experienced it, and how they made sense of their experiences (Moustakas, 2004).

Five themes were derived from participant experiences: *influential others, high school programs, early choice major and path to the profession, dispelling and overcoming imposed stereotypes, negotiating the PWI using self-identified strengths and strategies.* Each theme contains subthemes, drawing more specifically on each of the resources participants utilized to advance their goals within institutional structures. The following sections present a discussion of each theme and subthemes.

Influential Others

Participants described one or more individuals in their lives who influenced and motivated them in various ways, including *choosing to attend college, recognizing their talents*, and *choosing a profession*. These influential others supported them in identifying opportunities to advance their skills, and encouraged them to step into experiences that would promote their academic development and personal growth.

Choosing to attend college. Going to college was not the obvious next step after high school. For some participants, it made more sense to earn money to help their families, instead of struggling through financial hardship. Both James and Kendrick felt fortunate to receive multiple messages that, in spite of a few more years of hardship a college degree would open up greater opportunities for themselves and their families. James was aware that going to college was going to be difficult for his family financially. He knew, however, that he needed to "set the standard"

of going to college for his younger siblings. His mother encouraged him to enroll in college, and mentors from his Black men's mentorship high school program had already inspired his choice of profession which he believed, required a college degree. Kendrick discussed meeting his mentor when he visited inner-city high schools to empower young Black men. He looked up to his mentor, appreciating the ideas he introduced to the young men, about ways to be successful businessmen. Until then, Kenrick had not ever imagined himself as a professional. Kendrick also spoke fondly of the relationship he built with his barbers, who encouraged him to go to college. Kendrick feels that young African American men and boys need role models who can influence them, steer them away from what he refers to as "unacceptable behavior" like drug dealing and gang activity, and influence them to go to college.

Recognizing talents. Participant described experiences when a teacher or advisor recognized their talents, and guided them toward opportunities to actualize their skills. Soon after joining TRiO, and earning an 'A' in Public Speaking, Luna's instructor asked her to be a tutor. She took great pride in this work and learned that being a tutor was a respected role on campus. At the end of that semester, Luna's advisor encouraged her to apply for a scholarship and guided her to reflect upon and identify her strengths and accomplishments for the application. Luna was awarded a scholarship for the subsequent academic year. She continues to connect with her advisor and Public Speaking instructor, realizing their sincere interest in connecting Luna with opportunities that can build her skills and lead her to greater achievement.

Similarly, Arlene connected with her Composition instructor, Angie, who noticed her exceptional writing capabilities and asked her to be a writing tutor. Arlene worked as a tutor in the Writing Center, which proved to be an "eye-opening experience." She was able to organize and participate in English department events led by Angie, as well as work on projects with other

English faculty who recognized her work ethic and responsibility. She stated, "I would say, working with Angie, and being able to…work with the English faculty was pretty intriguing." At the end of her first year, Arlene was awarded *Student of the Year* in English.

Athena met Dena, her "phenomenal" screenwriting instructor, who altered Athena's path forward within her creative writing major and made her believe that screenwriting was her calling. Athena recalled, "from the moment I walked into her class, she made me feel like I was it." The in-class activities and out-of-class assignments pushed Athena beyond what she believed she was capable of as a writer. Athena described writing her first screenplay in Dena's class as "an emotional rollercoaster." Dena offered support, encouragement, and constructive critique from which Athena both learned and grew. Further, she was inspired to explore other areas of theatre where she blossomed in effectively expressing herself artistically.

Choosing a profession. Influential others provided inspiration to participants by extending kindness and compassion, and demonstrating agency in building up and supporting the Black community. This inspired both Sandy and James to pursue the professions and occupations of their mentors. Sandy looked up to a school counselor in elementary school, who influenced her decision to pursue a career in child psychology. Sandy frequently got in fights to defend herself from kids who picked on her. Ms. Atkinson was the only adult at school who saw that Sandy never instigated the fights. She listened, and saw something in Sandy that other teachers, who punished Sandy for fighting, did not. Ms. Atkinson looked after Sandy's well being, and made herself available to her and other kids. Sandy felt that Ms. Atkinson genuinely valued their time together, and loved her job. She felt safe with Ms. Atkinson, who has, over the years become one of Sandy's "main inspirations" in her life. James also connected with a mentor who saw great potential in him.

During his Black men's mentorship high school program, James connected with Coach T and Dr. Mays. Coach T directed the program, and taught James and other young Black men about maintaining their physical and mental well being. He taught program participants about entrepreneurship, Black history and heritage, and the importance of learning about "who we are and where we came from." Lessons in Black history from an empowerment approach gave James a sense of pride in his ancestry, and encouraged him to develop spiritual practices connecting with his birthright.

Dr. Mays, a psychology professor and psychologist, also mentored James. Sharing his experiences influenced James to study psychology in hopes of purchasing a recreational center, to create a program for kids in his community. James stated, "I want to make sure kids of color feel like they're seen and they matter." Coach T and Dr. Mays

Need for more influential others at Lakerock. Data suggest the need for influential others to reach out to, connect with, and motivate African American students on the Lakerock campus. Nura discussed the need for more of this activity to reach more Black students across campus. She mentioned Liza, an influential African American woman, and advisor to many Black students. Liza works closely with Nura on organizing and developing topics for discussion at the BSA meetings. Liza connects with students and expresses a genuine concern for and interest in their well being and academic progress. Other study participants also spoke fondly of Liza, as a caring and supportive person on campus. Nura feels Liza's effort should be shared by other faculty and staff across the campus however, when she sees how busy Liza stays, and how tired she sometimes appears at the end of a workday. James shared this sentiment, noting the absence of Black teachers who work at Lakerock. James is aware, however, that Black

instructors at an institution where there are so few, can feel alienated. He wishes many Black faculty and staff were hired at the college.

When students are able to connect with Lakerock staff and faculty who express an interest in students, see their potential, or set high expectations, success ensues. This was demonstrated by Arlene, Athena, and Luna, whose instructors took notice of their talents, and set high standards for their achievement. Arlene was recognized as *Student of the Year* in the English department, Luna achieved a 3.0 GPA that semester and earned a scholarship for the subsequent year, and Athena reached another level of confidence in her writing in a new genre, and was exposed to the world of theater.

Individuals who developed influential relationships with participants guided their choices, encouraged them to learn about themselves and the opportunities before them, and helped them take necessary steps forward. These trusting relationships were pivotal for participants, offered emotional and moral support, and inspiration to do good for themselves and by their communities. Participants spoke fondly about their experiences with influential others, and recognized more and more over time, the value in their lessons.

High School Programs

Out-of-school time programs such as cultural groups, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and Upward Bound (UB) have demonstrated effectiveness in increasing youth awareness of, access to, and graduation from college. Upward Bound is a TRiO program for high schoolers, designed to equip low-income and soon-to-be first-generation college students with the academic skills and motivation to successfully complete high school and enroll and succeed in college. Similarly, AVID supports K-12 schools shift toward equitable, student-centered practices to prepare students for college, a career, and life (avid.org). These programs

improve precollege performance, increase motivation to attend college, and build capacity for entering college confidently. James, Kendrick, Nura, and Sandy participated in these programs, and benefitted from their experiences during and after completing them.

Improving precollege performance. Participating in out-of-school time programs in high school increased motivation and engagement among participants prior to enrolling at Lakerock, which improved their academic progress. Kendrick stated he did not take academics seriously during his first two years of high school. He joined UB at the beginning of his junior year. By engaging in tutoring, academic skills building, and placement exam preparation thorough UB programming, he gained focus on his schoolwork, improved his grade point average, and started intentionally thinking about options for college.

Nura's precollege performance was motivated by support from her AVID instructors, who took her interest in becoming a lawyer seriously. They helped her find a college that would be a good fit for her. They reached out to her regularly to check on her progress in school, and to ask after her well being. The trust and accountability established between Nura and her AVID faculty motivated her to excel in her schoolwork, graduate from high school, and move closer to her goal of becoming a lawyer. Before participating in AVID, Nura had not felt that level of engagement and encouragement about her academic abilities from any counselor or teacher.

Participating in AVID was a catalyst for James' persistence as well, who, due to a few setbacks in his personal life during his junior and senior years, fell behind in his schoolwork and college applications. AVID instructors were able to connect James with academic and personal resources to help him get on track and graduate from high school on time. James learned the importance of leveraging his resources to move forward.

Increasing motivation to attend college. Intentionally designed to help high school students identify a path to college entrance and success, the activities in which participants engaged through AVID, Upward Bound, and other programs like it, motivated and supported them to go to college, even when they thought college was out of reach.

Through participation on a high school Step team, Sandy described Stepping as a form of dance where the body is used to create sounds through stomping, clapping, and spoken word. Step builds connection and empowerment in African American communities. She described, "[Step] started as a means of communication in the mines for the African slaves. That's how they could communicate because they weren't allowed to talk. So it came from that and has made itself into different forms over the years." Sandy's coaches took her and her peers on college tours, leadership conventions, and cultural enrichment activities. She recalled her coach relaying the importance of having options and understanding the possibilities a person can create for themselves with a degree. The stories Sandy's coaches shared about their own experiences in college motivated her to pursue college even though she was not sure she was going to attend. Bonding with her peers on the Step team over their processes of college choice and enrollment incited Sandy's drive to complete the activities required to enroll in college. Connecting with other African American youth and her African American Step coaches around enriching activities like leadership, culture, and college was uplifting for Sandy and became something she looked forward to.

Being on a college campus, and participating in collegiate activities helped Kendrick, as well as Sandy (during college tours with the Step team) imagine possibilities for college. Campus visits to New York, Wisconsin, and Michigan during high school summer months helped Kendrick realize that being on a university campus enrolled in university courses could be a reality for him.

Spending time on these campuses was the motivating force behind Kendrick's desire to complete his college applications, as well as secure financial assistance to pay for it.

James' difficulties in high school caused him to believe college was not going to be a reality for him. His desire to attend right after high school waned as he and his family worked through hardships. The more time he spent out of school meant he may never attend college, and he was ready to accept that. The AVID program staff offered James some options to get into Lakerock just in time for the fall semester after high school graduation. Understanding the work it would take to enroll, James met this challenge with greater interest and motivation to enroll and persist in college.

Entering college confidently. With the support of high school program staff and instructors, participants felt more confident entering the collegiate environment, and achieving academically. One component of UB programming was guiding high school students in seeking out support resources when in need. In addition to engaging in tutoring and academic skills building, which gave Kendrick the confidence to take on the academic rigor of college-level coursework, UB taught Kendrick about resources available on the college campuses, and when and how to reach out for assistance with academic quandaries. The practice of learning about, and obtaining assistance from support personnel in high school, carried over onto the college campus. Kendrick did not hesitate to identify and reach out to individuals who could help him with both academic and life challenges.

Overcoming personal challenges with the help of AVID instructors during his junior and senior years in high school allowed James to recognize he was not on his own in dealing with life's difficulties. AVID instructors informed him of resources and helped him problem-solve. Like Kendrick, James learned that college campuses offer a host of support services and resources to

help enrolled students with academic as well as non-academic-related challenges. AVID assisted James through the financial aid process as well. This activity, along with the knowledge of support available on the college campus helped him remove barriers to his continued attendance.

Sandy's increased confidence came in the form of cultural-identity and leadership development along side her same-race peers. When discussing degree attainment, her same-race coaches and mentors assured Sandy and her peers that "they could do it if they wanted it." Sandy felt encouraged by the connections she built with her coaches on the Step team, and was motivated by the stories they shared with her about their own experiences in college.

The programs participants engaged in during their high school years built a tight-knit community of support around them, and allowed them to connect with like-minded peers and influential teachers who supported their personal and academic achievement. Through small-group and individualized interaction, participants were exposed to colleges and universities, coached, guided, tutored, and encouraged. These programs had a direct impact on participant's success getting into, and persisting at Lakerock.

Early Choice Major and Path to the Profession

Participants in the study chose a major early during their time in college, or had an idea of the degree they intended to pursue during high school. Various factors influenced how participants came upon their decisions. James and Sandy discussed the mentors who inspired their choices. Others discussed how they came about choosing their majors, and the validation and encouragement they received when inquiring after and pursuing their chosen fields of study. Programs and activities in which participants participated afforded them an early start in exploring the options and possibilities for professions tied to their choice of major, and allowed them to take courses that both peaked their interests and applied to their field of study.

Mentor-inspired. A mentor in high school, Dr. Mays, shared much about his life experiences with James. James saw himself in Dr. Mays and was inspired by him to pursue Psychology as a major. Throughout his time at Lakerock, James has also gained interest in and recognized his talents in Communications and Business. He plans to take classes in these areas to develop the acumen to open a center for kids in his community. He remains drawn to Psychology however, as a way to work closely with people to help and empower them to be successful. Upon transferring to a four-year university, James has already decided to minor in African American studies, to learn more about himself and the population with which he will work.

Like James, Sandy was inspired by an elementary school teacher and has known that she wants to do for other children what her school counselor did for her. As a child, she "felt like [her] teachers and the adults around [her] who [were] supposed to be [her] main encouragers, were kind of oblivious." The support that her school counselor, Ms. Atkinson gave Sandy created a lasting impact on her, and has motivated her to pursue a career where she can help children who feel seen, listened to, and understood. She envisions herself as a school psychologist after she completes her degrees at Lakerock, and transfers to the local University.

Pivotal activities during high school. Intrigued by a bulletin board posting in her high school hallway, Luna decided she wanted to explore the option of pursuing a business degree. Around the same time, she felt validated with her decision when she was promoted to management at a clothing store after working there for only a short time. Not going to college was never an option. She stated, "Education is really important in my family." Her father, whom she described as strict and domineering, told her that she needed to attend college, and pressed her to major in medicine or law. After witnessing her success and enjoyment as a manager at the clothing store however, he gave his approval for Luna to pursue a Business degree. Once in college, her TRiO

advisor recognized Luna's relationship-building skills, and validated her choice. She connected Luna with a Business advisor who could help her distinguish among the different paths within the major and choose a four-year college based on her decisions.

Athena's love for reading and writing poetry that started early in high school influenced her decision to major in Creative Writing. Within her first three weeks at Lakerock, Athena was thrilled to learn that Creative Writing was an option for a major in college. Of her choice, she stated, "I realize, especially in the Black community right here in Minnesota, I'm very lucky to be able to make the decision to major in Creative Writing. Not everybody is so fortunate to go to school for something they love." Her strong writing abilities and validation from instructors in the English and Theatre departments, along with opportunities for professional development such as attending conferences and earning fellowships, have enabled and encouraged Athena to prosper in this area of study.

Arlene figured out her path to her profession in 11th grade, when she conducted career pathway research as an assignment for a class. She was interested in the medical field, but not in being a medical doctor. She was intrigued by dentistry, which came up as a result on a career assessment. After some research, Arlene strategically decided she could start earning money as a dental assistant, after completing a two-year degree program. This would allow her to work alongside a dentist to see what they do, and determine whether or not she'd like to be a dentist. In her time at Lakerock, Arlene has succeeded in the dental assisting program and has since decided she will transfer to the local university to study dentistry and become a dentist. She decided she wants "to call the shots," and not have to work under anyone's direct supervision. She described her personality to be more aligned with "being in control." Having a well thought out plan provided direction for Arlene as she navigated the college admissions process. Choosing this major early

has helped her set out a clear path for pursuing a career as a dentist, and earn a living as a dental assistant in the meantime.

Choosing a major early gave participants an idea of the professional field they wanted to pursue. Upon entering college, they had developed the language around their career interests to be able to have effective conversations about their chosen professions, enroll in classes that complemented their choice of major, and seek out resources to help them find a more specific career path. Additionally, by knowing their major, they were able to talk to faculty, staff, and peers, about their interests, which led to early opportunities to further their knowledge and gain professional experience like attending conferences and taking on relevant on-campus job opportunities.

Dispelling and Overcoming Imposed Stereotypes

In exploring career options, and engaging in classes and with support resource staff, participants' expressed sentiments derived from microaggressions and stereotypes with which they felt the responsibility to dispel. In the moments during and immediately following these interactions, participants were aware of their racialized nature, but more often than not, remained passive. Kendrick's encounter in the Writing Center, in which a staff member refused to help him with his paper about an empowered Black neighborhood, and Luna's interaction with the Business advisor who discouraged her from applying to a prestigious business school, were microaggressions that neither participant were prepared to address in the moment. As Athena described, it is possible that African American students in these situations cannot find the words to adequately address the perpetrator of the microaggression in a way that feels suitable, or is socially acceptable to the norms at a PWI. Another possibility for their perceived passivity is their instinctual and instantaneous attempt to process the psychological and physiological effects of

racism in the midst of obtaining academic support to move forward with their schooling. They are caught off guard and perhaps stymied by the biased behavior of others in these instances.

In and beyond these incidents, in their everyday lives on campus, participants discussed, for example, the need to dispel stereotypes by silencing themselves when becoming passionate about a class discussion topic so as to not come across as "the angry Black girl," as described by Athena. Based on society's imposed stereotype that Black people are "supposed to fail," Sandy believed failure for her was not an option. After entering college, more than ever she feels pressure to do well in school, so as to avoid "proving people right," and perpetuating stereotypes that Black people are supposed to fail.

Working ten times as hard as white students. The message, "I have to work twice as hard, or ten times as hard as everybody else," reoccurred throughout participant interviews as the most evident strategy by which to dispel stereotypes. Participants experienced pressure to prove to instructors and peers that they, as an African American student deserved to be in college classrooms and academic spaces.

The pressure to work ten times as hard in order to dispel stereotypes is a common instinct imposed upon multiple participants in the study. Athena, increasingly aware of how her race plays a factor in her interactions and classroom experiences, sits front and center on the first day of class, and raises her hand as much as possible so she can participate and ask questions. Otherwise, she stated, "It's almost guaranteed that the professor will knock me off as the lazy student because I'm Black. I know that's just how it goes because I've seen it and I've experienced it." Athena described the need to "work ten times as hard" as "really exhausting," and feels that she must prove to her instructors that she will, at a minimum, work just as hard as other students in the class, or her grades will suffer. Similarly, Luna feels she constantly has to

prove she is supposed to and deserves to be at Lakerock. Not being "up in your game or thinking smart" makes Black students susceptible to hasty judgment by peers, faculty, and staff. In proving her worth on campus, Luna has to "work ten times as hard," to ensure that stereotypes held by others about Black people are "not real," and are a result of people's racial biases and discriminatory beliefs.

James feels the need to always work "much harder than other people." Due to their prejudices, people constantly "look down" on Black people and try to "push us down." In spite of consistently feeling pressured to overcome this prejudice, James tries hard to stay focused and "in the moment." He stated, "It just makes me work twice as hard. And I'm not afraid of a little hard work." James described this phenomenon as daunting, but uses his positive mindset to work through this challenge when confronted with it.

Sandy realized that the impetus to work harder has been the result of a lifetime of subjugation imposed upon people of color throughout their lives. She conveyed that at every level of schooling, Black students are constantly "pushed down" and made to feel as though they are "not good enough." Even in seemingly small or meaningless interactions with others, microaggressions occur. Growing up, Sandy felt she, and other same-race peers felt they could not do things other people do, like go to college. When Black people do go to college, they have to "be twice as good and get past all the nonsense of people still pushing you down." This burden often weighs on one's mental health and detracts from minoritized students' ability to focus solely on learning.

Interplay of identities. All participants in the study were aware of their racialized identities, and contemplated the interplay of their race in relation to gender and socioeconomic status. The young women in the study recognized that being Black and female influenced others'

opinions of them and often discredited their academic determination and prowess. Athena experienced this as a writing tutor, when she offered her assistance to a white male student who came into the Writing Center for help. She asked him "why" twice, offering him two opportunities to tell her why he did not feel she was qualified to help him. He did not articulate why, and left her certain his reasons related to her race and gender. The male participants recognized they could easily fall to others' perceptions of Black men as threatening, violent or thuggish. Kendrick and James both discussed their concern with this and clung to the teachings of their Black male mentors, who invoked in them a sense of pride through culture and self-preservation, and taught them about business and entrepreneurship. Kendrick believed that earning a bachelor's degree offered him the highest likelihood of "not becoming a statistic," further qualifying stereotypes of Black men. Participants from working class backgrounds described their fear of being dismissed as lazy or disinterested in academics because they worked the night shift and struggled to be alert in class, or because the bus dropped them off late for class due to inclement weather or poor road conditions.

These complexities emerged from the data, as well as participants' means and strategies for negotiating them. These strategies are highlighted in the next section. During interviews, participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to describe life events in ways that placed their identities as Black students at the center of their experiences. This provides evidence for participants' desire and need to talk through their racialized experiences on a predominantly white campus.

The experiences described by participants in which they feel they are under pressure to dispel and overcome stereotypes imposed on them demonstrates an undue hardship. They feel they must continuously push through these hardships in order to stay focused on their coursework.

Stereotypes and microaggressions impacted participants in various ways, and each participant understood that they had a responsibility to assuage themselves and/or their entire race from the burden of continued stereotyping. Participants not only have to navigate through disparaging racial stereotypes, they must work hard to maintain good academic standing. Exhaustion, frustration, and isolation ensued from constant effort to combat these biases. Over time, this responsibility can have a detrimental impact on one's well being. In spite of these feelings, participants maintained the strength to employ strategies, to help themselves stay the course, and avoid getting diverted from completing their degrees.

Negotiating the PWI Using Self-Identified Strengths and Strategies

Participants undoubtedly required mechanisms to help themselves through fatigue that school, work, family, and dealing with racial bias brought about. These mechanisms assist them in activating self-advocacy and personal agency, which support their academic achievement in spite of feeling isolated and weary. For some participants, strategies had been identified, and practiced in the years leading up to their time in college. Sandy, for example, built a "wall of defense" from her days in elementary school, when she was pestered and picked on by classmates. Luna, almost intuitively, learned how to sniff out individuals who did not have her best interest in mind, and built stronger relationships with those who did. Athena retreated to writing, which she had been practicing since her early high school days. Sandy also retreated to dystopic fiction to completely remove herself form the realistic challenges of life and school. Others discovered opportunities to empower themselves and their peers within the campus environment. Through engagement in the Black Student Association, Nura garnered strength from the support she gave and received from her same-race peers. Similarly, using his positivity and charisma, James regularly offered support to first year students he saw in common areas

on campus, like the café.

Each participant identified hardships in their experiences at Lakerock College and in their lives. Some campus-based challenges were identified as race-related, in the form of microaggressions, stereotyping, or disempowerment by white peers or instructors. Overcoming these obstacles requires both natural and honed talents and strengths that each participant has learned to rely on to carry them through difficulties and toward their goals. The strengths and strategies presented in this section are outlined in subthemes characterizing self-reliance and inner-drive, self-centering practices, and community-focused activities. A description of each subtheme is provided, along with shared ways of experiencing the phenomenon detailed by each participant. It was important to highlight each individual under each subtheme, to demonstrate the unique characteristics that supported their persistence.

Self-reliance and inner-drive. This subtheme is defined by participants' reliance on their own strength and motivation to look past doubt and discouragement from others, and identify ways that will buttress their persistence.

Nura. Nura's unwavering persistence and determination has been a key factor in her goals attainment. She does not take 'no' for an answer. When someone tells her she is not capable of doing something, she gets energized and motivated to prove to herself and others that she is fully capable. In her schooling, individuals have doubted her ability to be a lawyer. This has motivated her to push harder, and to demonstrate her passion and prowess related to issues of injustice and civil rights. Each semester, Nura selectively chooses courses that will increase her knowledge related to the law, as well as apply toward her field of study. Outside of class, she spends time organizing as a leader in the Black Student Association. At Lakerock, she has earned

the encouragement from her same-race peers, who have stated, “the law was made for you Nura!” This respect and encouragement have helped her maintain motivation.

Kendrick. Similar to Nura, Kendrick has experienced peers trying to discourage him or “tell [him] he can’t do something.” He is convinced, however, that those voices are from people who “couldn’t do it themselves so they try to doubt [him].” Kendrick remains “[his] own person,” and refuses to listen to those voices. He has his sights set on achieving a bachelor’s degree, and will earn one, so he can provide himself and a future family a “real nice life.” Throughout his life, if he sets a goal, nothing can stop him from reaching it because he makes sure he works as hard as he can to achieve what he wants and believes he can achieve. Kendrick attributes much of his success in college to his self-motivation, positivity, and intense focus. He describes himself as confident and competent in doing what is necessary to achieve what he wants for himself in school and in life, and believes in his ability to achieve high marks in his classes.

Luna. Like Nura, Luna has also experienced others questioning her academic abilities and skills. As a result, she feels she sometimes does not ask the right questions or feel “smart” in certain academic areas. She admits she does not speak up in class or group discussions as much as she would like. Luna’s navigates this complexity by cultivating one-on-one relationships with her peers, support staff, and faculty members from whom she find support. She claims relationship-building as her greatest asset. One benefit of this has been finding a tutor with whom she feels comfortable. She has also been able to identify other influential individuals on campus whom she trusts and who have challenged her to do things that will move her toward her goals. Other self-identified characteristics are her abilities to read and understand others, which is a valued skill upon which she will be able to capitalize as a businesswoman. Additionally, she

describes herself as a very independent person who likes to do things her way. She has the self-awareness to know her areas of academic strength and weakness, and know where and when to ask for help. She is an observer and a listener, which affords her the knowledge to discern what is happening in each environment she encounters, and whether or not to "jump into a situation." At 23 years old Luna has acquired the skill of finding individuals who will support her, and eschewing those who seek to discourage and push her down.

Athena. Athena is aware that "the odds are against [her] because [she's] Black." Instances like those described by Nura and Luna, along with her ADHD and Dyslexia diagnoses have attempted to place her disadvantaged in her schooling. However, she continues to work hard to demonstrate to her instructors that she cares about her academic achievement, wants to be in their classes.

Athena has worked through many challenges by writing. She is confident in her writing abilities, and uses effective writing as a tool to "shock" her professors with her assignments. This provides her animus as she researches and composes papers. She relishes in the idea of "writing a really dope paper," to make her instructor disbelieve that "a Black girl wrote it," when grading her written assignments. She admitted her "ego" being at play in these instances, and derives power from the ability to undermine racist beliefs of her white professors with her writing. She gains energy from pushing her instructors to see her beyond their perceptions and biases of her Blackness. Anticipating at times, that instructors may deem her invisible, she approaches them on the first day of class to introduce herself, her major, and to ask them "What do you think this class is going to do for me?" This direct action is about making her instructors see her, proving to them that she is "worthy of that class and deserves to be there." It is also about making sure they are aware of their responsibility to see, hear, and engage her.

In addition to writing, Athena employs "code-switching," and claims this as a strength in negotiating white spaces. Growing up in a white household provided her the ability to "talk and act like a white person when [she] needs to." She utilizes this skill in instances where she needs to approach or confront her instructors. She is skilled in choosing and using her language carefully, when confronting "people in power positions," like her instructors.

James. James is a self-proclaimed positive thinker. Even during difficult and stressful times, he is able to realize there is a learning opportunity afoot. In the midst of difficulty, realizing he is learning something new creates positivity that gets him, and those around him, through challenges. In his mind, there are no "bad" situations, "just ones we learn from." His focus and persistence drives him to continuously discover where he belongs in his life. He is a deep thinker and consistently contemplates his path forward in life. James is very outgoing, charismatic, and loves talking to people. He has a propensity to easily influence others while making a point to include their opinions and perspectives. His positivity, good nature, and encouragement have made him a natural leader among his group of friends and classmates.

Arlene. Arlene describes herself as "all about school." Unlike many students, she has never contemplated quitting or dropping out. One of her biggest assets is the ability to motivate herself from within. She feels, "Typically people get their motivation from outside forces. But, I am very motivated by myself, and what I want to achieve." Another strength is Arlene's ability to compartmentalize home life and her studies. She stated, "Stuff that happens at home that I have to deal with, I leave behind as soon as I leave the house. The ability to be able to separate my school life from my home life is really intact for me." This skill, which she has honed over the years, allows her to remain focused on her goal of becoming a dentist.

Sandy. At Lakerock, Sandy's determination and motivation support her in following through on her decisions. And although she admits to procrastinating, she takes pride in turning assignments in on time. She takes school in stride and approaches it with balance and ease. Relaxed and easy-going by nature, Sandy does not get over-stressed or anxious about assignments or exams. She has witnessed many classmates have "breakdowns," struggling to get through course assignments, midterms, and finals. The stress of these activities has never gotten under Sandy's, which has allowed her to maintain her mental health while also succeeding in her courses.

Community focused activities. Participants described activities centered on supporting and uplifting their same-race peers and other marginalized communities. These activities support their persistence and help them realize that supporting others, in-turn makes them feel supported and bolstered by their community at the PWI.

Nura. For Nura, the Black Student Association is a mechanism for motivation and strength. Her leadership within in the BSA provides her with a community that she works to both empower and be empowered by. She stated, "…we have to uplift each other, because it can all be really hard. And having people that look like me at [BSA] meetings, and who share my experiences; it helps a lot." Students in the BSA support one another through academic challenges as well as challenges outside of school. They recognize a collective struggle. This recognition and support has helped Nura stay enrolled. Additionally, participating in this group has strengthened Nura's racial identity. She meets new people each semester who connect "on the same level" as her, who understand her, and who "want the same kind of change for Black people on campus."

Athena. Athena finds strength in activism and social justice. Last year, after receiving a fellowship, she worked with staff and faculty to organize an awareness-building event focusing on Indigenous women and sex-trafficking. Planning for the event took roughly four months of organizing, consultation with the Native American community, scheduling of speakers, promotion, and finally execution. Roughly forty participants attended the event. Athena had hoped for greater impact, recognizing the the need to build broader consciousness around the atrocities taking place in this community. She is passionate about raising awareness of injustices committed in underserved communities, and hopes to start a movement on campus to share the stories of Indigenous people.

James. James has a firm belief in community. Inspired by his mentors from his experiences in the mentoring program in high school, he is motivated to help first-year Black students succeed. Particularly, he wants to help new students find their way at Lakerock. One simple way he does this is by inviting other African American students to sit with him and his friends at the lunch table in the campus café, his favorite place on campus. Using his influence and good-nature, James has struck up many conversations with first-year students, befriending and supporting them during their time at Lakerock. He stated, "I see these students, and I know how hard it can be when you don't know no one. I just want to pass on what my mentors have taught me. They really helped me get where I am right now." A benefit to being Black at a PWI, is that Black people can work together to support one another which builds strength both individually and collectively. James' activities have organically created a group of young Black men who help each other in moving closer to earning their degrees.

Luna. Luna is inquisitive by nature and has a genuine interest in and curiosity about people. She gets to know her classmates, where they are from, and what motivates them. She

stated, “You never know how you might be able to help someone, or how they might be able to help you down the line. So, it’s good to get to know people.” Luna understands that being a businesswoman requires getting to know who people really are and building solid relationships with them. Luna practices this where she works in the tutoring area, which builds an environment of trust, and stable base of students who return time and again for tutoring services.

Self-centering practices. These practices have been developed over years of schooling and life experiences, when participants have felt the need to mentally and/or physically remove themselves from challenges and hardships to gain perspective. When describing these activities, participants non-verbally communicated authority, a sense of relaxation, and confidence. The activities are detailed in this sub-section.

Nura. One of Nura’s greatest talents is her ability to visualize the activities she will conduct when she starts her work as a lawyer. In her “nice office or the courtroom,” she envisions “writing a lot, meeting directly with clients, studying, reading and writing case law, and writing and delivering opening statements.” When she gets discouraged and downtrodden by the messages from teachers and classmates, these visualizations remind her that “[She] can think. [She] is smart, and [she] can do this.” This process allows her to “reset,” “reinvigorate,” and it motivates her to persist.

Kendrick. When Kendrick finds himself overwhelmed because he “got a bunch of assignments thrown at him,” he mentally takes a step back to evaluate what is before him, and allows himself time to slow down, organize, and break down assignments into manageable parts. This process of “take[ing] things step-by-step” builds his confidence because it authorizes him to be in control of his assignments, and how he goes about working through and completing them. In turn, he feels in control of his own academic progress toward graduation.

Athena. When working through challenges, Athena finds herself drawn to writing and activism. Her writing is, at times, a mediation practice as much as it is a honing of her craft. When possible, she uses her class writing assignments to gain self-knowledge. In spite of setbacks, she stays enrolled semester-after-semester because she is curious about different forms and genres of writing and wishes to further develop her craft so that upon graduation, she can start doing the thing she loves, better. Practicing her writing empowers her to imagine great possibilities for her work beyond college.

Arlene. Arlene has tactically developed a "goals strategy" for becoming a dentist. This strategy will be achieved by reaching smaller goals along the way to her big goal. Seeing "the big picture," she believes in rewarding herself after each small goal is accomplished, so as to not become overwhelmed or overburdened with everything required for becoming a dentist, which is years away yet. This process has helped Arlene accomplish her objectives thus far. She plans to practice this 'achieve and reward' process throughout dental school.

Sandy. During difficulty, Sandy reads to center her mind. She immerses herself in fictional dystopian stories where "people are going through something and their whole world is falling apart." Even though the characters are fictional, they allow Sandy to distance herself from life's difficulties, and realize she will get through them and "eventually feel better." Recently, she has begun to write her own dystopic fiction. She enjoys writing stories as a way to completely remove her mind from hardships and the monotony of daily tasks, and has considered taking creative writing classes to hone her skills in story-telling and writing.

James. Mental strength and overall wellbeing is extremely important to James. It helps him keep a positive mindset and the ability to move forward in spite of setbacks. Self-awareness is an important characteristic, which James practices frequently. When experiencing hardships,

he sometimes feels self-doubt arising inside of himself. When working through self-doubt, James retreats to a private space, which allows him to clear his mind. During this time, which he calls his "self-focus mode," he writes music, sings, and meditates on the positive forces in his life like his mother, and his close group of friends. This practice allows James to center himself and move forward, maintaining his positivity and perseverance, which influences his younger siblings and friend group in meaningful ways.

Understanding the experiences as described by participants in this study provides insight on the strength, resilience, and wisdom required of students of color to navigate educational institutions where race-based bias remains a stable and enmeshed element of college attendance. Knowing when and where to employ their developed strategies requires self-knowledge and self-awareness. Each participant identified and discussed their own personal strategies in overcoming obstacles and setbacks. Many of the strategies employed have been refined over years of personal development and past schooling experiences. These strengths have facilitated their persistence beyond the first year of their college, which is often the most difficult year to complete successfully.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the narratives of seven research participants, addressing the first research questions, and providing an understanding of their backgrounds related to schooling, and their experiences at Lakerock, a predominantly white community college. A description of the five themes that emerged from the data provided further insight into participant experiences and addressed the second research question. The themes and subthemes highlighted the support, strengths, and strategies from which they drew, to navigate the predominantly white campus environment. The themes are, *influential others, high school programs, early choice major and*

path to their profession, dispelling and overcoming imposed stereotypes, negotiating the PWI using self-identified strengths and strategies. The individualized narratives, as well as the collective themes and subthemes exemplify the challenges African American students face in reaching their goals at a PWI, and resources they pulled from in order to persist into their second year of college in spite of hardships.

CHAPTER 5

CRITICAL RACE ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This aim of this research study was to 1) examine the lived experiences of successful African American students at a predominantly white community college campus, and 2) understand the strategies and resources participants used to demonstrate effectiveness in negotiating institutional structures. Community colleges have enrolled a majority of African American undergraduates from year to year. Yet, these students remain the most underserved population, and therefore are among the lowest in degree attainment. Contributing factors include, lack of requisite resource allocation by institutions to effect change, poor racial campus climate, and lack of adequate support for this population of students (Bivens & Wood, 2016; Harper, Smith & Davis III, 2018; Lark, 2012). This trend has persisted for decades. Additionally, prominent among educational research and practice is the belief that African American students and their families remain deficient, lacking the skills required to succeed in postsecondary education (Harper, 2012; Harper, Smith & Davis III, 2018; Valencia, 1997). Therefore, in addition to answering the research questions, this study uses a critical race approach to studying African American student success using narratives that challenge the validity of dominant discourse found throughout deficit-based theorizing, research and practice. With this approach, I hoped to:

- explore the challenges African American students face in predominantly white community colleges,
- examine the impact of the predominantly white community college environment on African American student participants,

- contribute to the asset-based research on African American student experiences in higher education, and
- prompt researchers and educators to think and act in ways that empower communities of color.

This study is also important because it encourages African American students who are entering college, to learn strategies from successful students like the participants in this study.

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted one-on-one interviews with seven students attending a predominantly white community college in Minnesota, who identified as African American, and who, at the time of the interview had successfully completed at least their first year at Lakerock College. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word. During data collection and analysis, I used interpretive phenomenology, which moves past ordinary descriptions of concepts and seeks meaning that is incorporated and embedded in everyday life experiences. Additionally, critical hermeneutics was used to gain exposure to hidden meanings embedded in the descriptions of participant experiences, while gaining greater insight of the historical impact on the campus environment. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the social realities of the predominantly white community college campus on the participants in this study.

This chapter provides a Critical Race Analysis using Ladson-Billings (1998) contributions to the theory. These distinct yet interwoven tenets with accompanying excerpts from the data offer tools to challenge cultural deficit theorizing, and promote the need to center voices of marginalized students, so as to recreate educational structures, policies, and practices that include their experiences. Following this analysis, conclusions and recommendations are provided.

Critical Race Analysis of Data

The principle tenet of Critical Race Theory holds that racism in American society is ordinary, normal, and embedded in our structures and institutions, and therefore disadvantages minority groups and perpetuates racialized patterns of behaving, relating, and interacting (Hechter & Horne, 2003; Gilborn, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT offers a lens to examine ways in which race continues to be a prominent component of inequality throughout education, and allows researchers to critique deficit theorizing that may be limited by the exclusion of voices of people of color (Yosso, 2005). Further, CRT is "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). The following sections provide an analysis of data obtained in this study using a CRT lens. Examples from the data are used to illustrate each tenet offered by Ladson-Billings (1998). I chose to explicate the data through a CRT lens because CRT offers a transformative means for analyzing race-based discrimination, and seeks to remove race as a means to dictate educational outcomes for people of color. Further, it challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism in education, while centering the racialized experiences of people of color (Solorzano, et al. 2000; Love, 2004).

As outlined in chapter two, Ladson-Billings (1998) offered four basic and interconnected tenets of CRT, summarized here: 1) due to the embedded nature of racism in our society, racism must be exposed in its myriad forms, 2) counter-stories demonstrate the ongoing efforts to dismantle ideals supporting racial hegemony, 3) critique of liberalism – liberalism promotes race-neutrality and colorblindness, and is ineffectual in overcoming racist norms through necessary, abrupt and sweeping change. Instead, slow and steady progress toward elimination has historically been the practice. 4) Critical Race theorists argue that white people have been the

primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation such as affirmative action. Data gathered in this study is examined here, using the first three tenets identified. The fourth tenet, concerning affirmative action as described by Ladson-Billings (1998) was not used in this analysis. Since, Lakerock College is an open door institution, issues dealing with affirmative action were not the focus of the study, nor did they emerge from the data.

Exposing Racism

Racism is so endemic to American educational structures, it appears normal and natural in our society. Critical Race theorists argue it is a fundamental part of defining how US society functions (Bell, 1992). The role of CRT in educational research is to expose and challenge deficit-informed research that ignores, down-plays, and distorts the experiences of people of color. Further, since racism is a permanent fixture of life in America, Ladson-Billings (1998) argues, "The strategy becomes one of unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations" (p. 12). The first research question, *What are the lived experiences of academically successful African American students at a predominantly white community college*, seeks to unmask participants' racialized experiences at Lakerock. Participants help to expose racism by describing that they have often been the targets of microaggressions and stereotypes by peers, faculty, and support staff at Lakerock. Additionally, they described instances of feeling overlooked and invisible.

Invisibility. Sandy felt "unseen" in class. During class discussions, she would raise her hand to participate, the instructor would make eye contact with her, and still not call upon her to contribute to the exchange of ideas, or ask a question. Although she would try to "not take it personally," she could not help but feel the instructor did not want to hear what she had to say.

These experiences dissuade Sandy from participating in future class discussions. Athena shared a similar experience in a class taken with an older, white woman instructor. She would raise her hand to participate, and although she was positive her instructor saw her, the instructor would not call on her. Athena is "challenged" by getting her professors to "see [her] outside of being Black," and is aware that being a Black woman leaves her open to being unheard, not taken seriously, or ignored. Through her coursework and through careful communication with instructors, Athena works hard at convincing her professors that she is worthy of being there, participating in discussions, and fully capable of earning the highest marks on her assignments.

Nura hesitates to participate in class. Concerned with the responses and reactions of her peers, she considers her words carefully, and only speaks up when she feels passionate about a topic and can "back it up," responding to any rebuttals. Often her contributions to class discussions are "totally dismissed," and she asks herself, "Why do I want to keep raising my hand if no one's going to pay attention to what I'm saying?" Like Sandy, Nura gets discouraged and stays quiet in class due to instances of feeling dismissed.

In recent history, Black women have gone unrecognized for their participation in the Civil Rights movement. Black female victims of police brutality remain in the shadows of Black male victims of police brutality. And many Black women remain unnamed in the media when missing or murdered. Overwhelmingly, media favoritism is given to white victims in crime reporting (Moss, 2019). Black women live at the intersection of two marginalized groups, rendering them invisible and opening them to intersectional discrimination.

Matters of sexism or sex discrimination typically center on the experiences of white women, and matters of racism are centered around the experiences of Black men, thus muting the experiences and voices of Black women. In legal matters, only gender or race, but not both,

are addressed when examining discriminatory practices in law and public policy (Crenshaw, 1991). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), a Critical Race Theorist, and legal scholar developed the concept of *intersectionality* on behalf of Black women, to expose deficiencies in antidiscrimination laws, and to draw attention to the deletion of Black women who are "invisible in plain sight" (Adewunmi, 2014, para 7), in workplaces, educational institutions, policy, and in social circles.

In *Three's a Crowd: The Dilemma of Black Women in Higher Education,* Constance M. Carrol (1982) stated, "Black women in higher education are isolated, underutilized, and often demoralized" (p. 12). Nearly forty years later, this sentiment still rings true, and is acutely exemplified in the instances described by Sandy, Athena, and Nura in their classrooms.

Microaggressions and Stereotypes. Microaggressions and stereotypes, stemming from racial bias take form in various examples throughout the data. Luna described a time when she met with a Business advisor recommended by her TRiO advisor. She discussed different options for university transfer to pursue a four-year business degree. About two months later, the advisor approached Luna while she was working alongside a colleague at the front desk in the tutoring center. He asked her how the applications process was going, and mentioned he had not seen her since their appointment. She was unaware she needed to have a follow up appointment with him, but had been actively applying for a couple of different business schools. Perhaps Luna would have scheduled a follow up appointment with the business advisor, but from their first encounter she felt he discouraged her when she stated her choices for transfer institutions. She reminded him she had her heart set on Garland. He reminded her about their discussion in the meeting when he told her that she should not pursue Garland because she could not get accepted. Luna stated, "He hadn't even looked at my grades or anything. He just told me, 'You know it's really

hard to get in there.'" Luna felt the advisor was talking down to her and completely dismissed her desire and drive to get into Garland. She thought it was inappropriate to discuss the matter in front of her peers, and felt "embarrassed" by his tone. "He just sounded like he didn't have any hope for me," she stated. In effort to minimize the damage done to her, she dismissed him quickly by stating to him with slight curtness, "Okay. I'm still gonna try. Thank you. Bye." Trying to "push it off," Luna felt "disappointed and devastated," having memory of different times in her schooling, when she was told she could not do something because "she was not smart enough, or Black, or female." Luna felt proud of herself for not demonstrating to the advisor how she felt about the interaction.

Kendrick described a visit to the Writing Center, when a staff person refused to help him with his paper. The paper was about *Rondo Days.* During the 1950s and 60s, Rondo, an African American neighborhood was destroyed by the construction of Interstate I-94. Since the 1980s, an annual celebration has been held in St. Paul, Minnesota. It is the largest African American sponsored event in Minnesota, celebrating African-American stories, achievement, and culture, and working to preserve and accurately interpret the contributions of the community of Rondo (rondodays.net). Kendrick spoke to the tutor about his paper and noticed she was unfamiliar with the topic. She refused to help him, giving him no reason for denying him her help. He told his instructor about the incident and was referred to another tutor. Kendrick visited with the other tutor, who offered him different perspectives and points of view, which ultimately strengthened the quality of his assignment.

Also in the Writing Center, Athena described being on the receiving end of a microaggression as a tutor. During one of her shifts as a Writing Center tutor, a white student approached her looking for help on his paper. She enthusiastically offered her assistance, but he

"refused" her help. When she asked him "why," he told her he didn't feel she was qualified to help him. When describing this incident, Athena did not appear downtrodden or angered. She concluded, "So, that's one of the many times I've been profiled on campus. And it will happen anywhere, but I just really would not like it to happen in my classrooms." Athena is skilled at sensing and identifying instances of racial bias toward herself and others, and recognizes the frequency at which they happen in different environments on campus. Although Athena talks about these incidents as very matter-of-fact, at various times during the interviews, she used the term "exhausting," when describing how she felt about dealing with microaggressions on campus, which to her seem ubiquitous.

During her first year at Lakerock, Arlene took a Composition class in which she got a 'C'. Because dental school is in Arlene's plans, she is aware that her transcript must appear nearly perfect. Upon approaching her instructor, she asked him what she could have done for a better grade. His response, she described, was, "It's kind of, good enough. It's as good as it can be." This response made her feel, "not so great." She was well aware of his assumption, that she was incapable of earning anything better than a 'C', but did not associate his assumption with racial bias towards her. She stated she was unsure whether or not "[her] skin color" had anything to do with his remarks.

In their descriptions of incidents on campus, both Kendrick and Arlene were hesitant to specify race as a factor in the responses and behaviors of the writing center staff member and of Arlene's Composition instructor. Kendrick did not say specifically how he felt about the interaction, but was compelled to contact his instructor to let her know about the incident. Both participants were, at the time of interviewing, aware of the nature and topic of this research study, and likely would not have shared these experiences had they not felt racialized. Arlene is

an academically gifted student who prides herself on attaining 'A's in all of her courses, aspires to take on the rigors of dental school at a Research One university, and is well aware of the dedication and focus required to get there. She described a classic discriminatory response from her instructor based on his low expectations. Low expectations of faculty placed upon African American students has been well documented in educational research literature for decades (Solorzano, 2000; Appio, 2010). It remains the dominant narrative permeating biased thoughts and behaviors of educational practitioners, such as Arlene's Composition instructor.

This research study sought to examine the lived experiences of African American students at a predominantly white community college. In doing so, participants recounted their experiences, which exposed myriad forms of racism in the form of microaggressions, stereotypes, and racial bias in their interactions with others on campus. At systematic and institutional levels, microagressions privilege and support liberal ideals such as colorblindness and race-neutrality, discussed later in this chapter. Consequently, these ideals are then played out on an individual level, through microagressions. They are a habitual occurrence in the lived experiences of students from marginalized groups. Students who experience racist instances not dissimilar to those described by participants in this study, struggle with self-doubt, frustration, and isolation. Hearing the stories of students affected by discriminatory practices that expose racism, and learning about the impact of these practices on African American students is of utmost importance in removing racism from its embeddedness in our educational structures. Counter-stories of these students demonstrate and expose intense racial climates across campuses (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Counter-stories

Counter-storytelling is a method of sharing the narratives of people on the margins of

society, whose stories often remain untold. It can be an instrument for exposing, inquiring into, and confronting the dominant discourse of racial privilege, as well as an instrument for survival and resistance among marginalized groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-stories assist in analyzing the campus climate and subsequently can provide opportunities for institutions to become more inclusive (Hiraldo, 2010). Each participant in the study is acutely cognizant of the dominant narrative around African Americans in society and more specifically in educational domains. They demonstrate the desire to overcome and reconstruct these narratives that disparage and defame African American communities.

Sandy discussed a lack of successful African Americans portrayed in television and film. In movies about college, there are few African American students on the campus, and images of successful students are usually white. They fail to show successful Black people. As a young person growing up, Sandy got the message that it is "not normal" for Black people to be in college, nor do they belong there. Sandy felt that having same-race role models and influencers would send positive messages to youth about possibilities for going to college and becoming a professional. She discussed the idea that more representation of Black instructors at Lakerock would make more Black students consider Lakerock as an option for college. These instructors could also be role models and mentors for African American students already enrolled.

Kendrick described the adversity African American students face, and feels "society doesn't let us win." Social media portrays African Americans as "thugs." The media "downgrades Black people," sending the message that they do not belong in college or in good jobs. Kendrick prides himself on "greatness," and the greatness of his community, even though society does not see Black people as great. He works hard at "not becoming another stat[istic],"

and refuses to be "average." He continues going to school because he wants to lift up the Black community so people will stop seeing them as "thugs and gangsters."

Coverage of crime in the media generates racial perceptions of crime. Because racial minorities are overly identified as criminals in the media, on television, and in film, non-minority individuals develop a lack of sensitivity and understanding toward people of color, who are frequently viewed as offenders, even if they have never committed a crime (Ghandnoosh, 2014). Further, these media outlets consistently overrepresent Black people as suspects of crime, and white people as victims of crime. This biased media coverage is consistent with "power structure, racial threat, and racial privilege," (p. 276) mirroring the views of dominant groups that nullify and disenfranchise Black people by characterizing them as criminal offenders (Bjornstrom, Kaufman, Peterson, & Slater, 2010).

Participants' awareness and understanding of how they are perceived by society and those around them, made them eager to denounce dominant narratives that rhetorically portray them as violence-prone, and omit them from images of college-going culture as seen in film, television, and many other forms of media. Participants worked hard to avoid internalizing these images and stories in order to successfully move through their schooling. Each of them developed strategies to overcome the pressure and exhaustion that accompany derogatory and oppressive messaging targeted at them. In her narrative, Arlene also discussed the derogatory portrayal of African Americans throughout all sources of media. She insisted, however, that Black people are "stronger and tougher" because of all they have had to endure in their lives. Her strategy is to internalize that strength and toughness to ward off the effects of microaggressions and derogatory or disparaging messages toward her or about African American communities in general.

Critique of Liberalism

In CRT, critique of liberalism is derived from notions of colorblindness, race-neutrality, and equal opportunity for all (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The problem with this is, colorblindness and race-neutrality permit individuals and systems to ignore racist policies that preserve social inequities. They promote surreptitious acts of racism and apathy in addressing racial injustices (Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). Three examples from the data are used to explore and exemplify the following realities related to this tenet: 1) Instruction renders African American students deficient and in need of remediation (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Hiraldo, 2010). 2) There is an absence of race-consciousness in student development theories most widely used in the student affairs on college campuses. 3) Academic curricula is devoid of representation of African Americans. Participants each contemplated aspects of their racial identity and how it influenced their educational experiences to this point in their schooling.

Luna reflected upon her observations and experiences in her schooling, questioning fairness in matters of race and class. She expressed her frustration with being at an academic disadvantage because she was placed into a lower level science class in middle school. There were low-income, white students in the class, but primarily the class was full of "Black, Mexican, Somalis, and people from all different backgrounds." Luna felt that being placed in this class in middle school perpetuated her inability to ever reach the level of comprehension required of her in college science courses. Based on what she observed of the class makeup, Luna believed that, because her family was low-income and Black, her chances of being placed in lower level courses were high. Luna felt her placement in this course was the outcome of biases and perceptions of school faculty, more so than her ability, science comprehension, or potential.

James and Athena discussed their frustration with the lack of representation of Black people from their coursework and the syllabus. James questioned the curricula in predominantly white institutions, "You're learning about all these people you don't even know or you can't really connect with." He wondered how he or his community "fit in" with what he was learning, and expressed the difficulty of staying focused when none of the course material seemed to apply to him or his experiences as a Black man.

Similarly, regarding colorblindness in the curriculum, Athena described her experience of confronting her instructor about the absence of Black writers in her syllabus. During an online Survey of American Literature course, she visited with her instructor during his office hours to request that, in addition to Frederick Douglas, he put more Black authors in the curriculum. He chuckled, and in a condescending tone, encouraged her to communicate with him via email, because it was an online class. He stated, "With online classes, you don't ever need to come to my office." She felt it was an important enough topic that she needed to discuss it with him face-to-face, but she was dismissed.

Athena further described her experiences during interactions with student affairs professionals. During her first semester, she recalled being stereotyped when she met with an advisor to discuss her major and course schedule. The advisor assumed she was "a poor Black woman who only cared about money," and discouraged her from her desire to be a poet because "poets don't make any money." Athena felt in general, staff in student support services did not take her seriously. At different points in her time at Lakerock, she felt the need and desire to talk to a counselor, but did not feel comfortable "going to talk to a white lady" about all that she is experiencing in school and in her life outside of school.

In addition to Athena's reluctance to use student support services, neither Arlene nor Sandy use support services. Even though they may struggle with course material, they prefer to figure things out on their own instead of seeking support from student affairs staff. Similarly, Nura discussed her experience of being "talked down to" when visiting the Biology tutoring area, and has since chosen to "struggle through assignments" on her own.

Race and racism and racialized student identities are commonly misunderstood by campus staff, which can interfere during interactions and preclude students from obtaining the help they seek from campus support professionals. This could be in part due to the idea that students' racial identities have been overlooked in theories pertaining to student development in college (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003; Patton et al., 2007). Athena's, Sandy's, Arlene's, and Nura's experiences validate the absence of race and race-consciousness in student development theory and how these theories are put to practice. Supporting literature (Bush & Bush, 2010; Moore & Bush, 2016) discusses the reticence of students of color to access campus support services, because they perceive these services to be prejudicial and therefore, unsafe. As a result, instructors, staff, and peers view this as apathy and disinterest in academic achievement.

Critical race scholars argue that teachers' subjective beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are critical to student learning. At early levels of schooling, students recognize the absence of their communities in their coursework. As James stated, it is difficult for multicultural students to get or stay engaged, when they are being taught white curriculum. Colorblindness in curricula ignores history and culture of students and perpetuates disparate outcomes for students of color, such as being placed in lower level or remedial courses (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Further, a race-neutral perspective on instruction views student of color deficiencies as individual, further isolating them. Instruction is created "as a generic set of teaching skills that should work for all

students." When these techniques fail to work, the students, as opposed to the techniques, are perceived to be lacking (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 22).

Implications for Postsecondary Practitioners and Decision Makers

A goal of this research study was to broaden assets-based empirical research and inspire effective practices contributing to African American student persistence in predominantly white community colleges. The findings suggest that African American students experience myriad forms of bias on the PWI that thrust them into silence, self-doubt, anger, frustration, escape, and often deep reflection. Every participant developed and honed methods drawn from their unique assets that bolstered their persistence beyond their first year at Lakerock. Institutions could prioritize resources to more effectively support Black students. Data undergird the need for different and improved practices that buttress enrollment and persistence of African American students on predominantly white campuses. The findings of this research study suggest the following implications for higher education practitioners and decision makers.

Centering Blackness

During interviews, participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to describe life events in ways that placed their identities as Black students at the center of their experiences. After a first interview, Luna expressed feeling "relieved" that she was able to "get all of this off her chest," stating she was looking forward to the next interview. Through different instances in school, she often wondered if her "skin color" was a reason for being treated poorly, but had never articulated these feeling to anyone before this study. Similarly, Athena described the need for a trusted faculty or staff member on campus, with whom she could describe her racialized experiences, and get help in processing and addressing them. These examples provide evidence

for participants' desire and need to talk through their racialized experiences on a predominantly white campus.

Higher education institutions should create spaces and opportunities for students to discuss their racialized experiences in their lives and on campus, allowing students to center their Blackness when talking about their experiences, sort out the details of an experience to identify discriminatory behavior, and discuss ways to respond to future incidents. This can occur with trusted mentors, counselors, faculty, peers, or support staff who understand the dynamics or interplay of race within the college environment. In student groups and spaces, this dialog allows students to learn, from one another, about myriad forms of racial bias and discriminatory behavior aimed at them. The BSA is an example of this type of space, where a relatable staff member can be present to witness and/or facilitate discussions. Discussions can create a community of support, as well as acknowledgement of a collective struggle, and a force that moves past society's perceptions and actions that work to push African American students down. Further, these community spaces can allow individuals to be producers of their own knowledge, and learn to trust their own senses, perceptions, feelings, and experiences, in their own supportive spaces.

Diversify faculty

Despite concerted efforts to increase the racial and ethnic composition of faculty, higher education institutions remain predominantly white among the faculty ranks, (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009; Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, & Brooke Vick 2017). Black faculty members comprise only 8% of the professoriate at public two-year institutions (NCES, 2011b). African American faculty should be hired to not only teach courses, but to connect with students in meaningful ways that address their unique experiences, culture, and needs as African

American students. Among the many benefits to students and communities of color, student persistence and graduation rates can significantly improve if faculty of color are hired and retained in community colleges (Robinson, Byrd, Louis, & Bonner, 2013). The need to hire and retain faculty of color should be at the forefront in community college practices. However, many of the events experienced by faculty of color on community college campuses are also experienced and described by participants in this research. Examples include, experiences of discrimination, isolation, microaggressions, tokenism, and lack of mentoring (Smith, 2011; Robinson, et al., 2013). Therefore, it cannot be overstated that, in addition to active recruitment and hiring of Black faculty, retention efforts must be implemented that offer, at the very least, opportunities for faculty to gain a sense-of-belonging, community, an environment that supports Black faculty, and opportunities for professional development that are not race-neutral.

Inclusive curricula and pedagogy

Create and deliver curricula and pedagogy across disciplines and through co- and extra-curricular activities that acknowledges the historicity of African American culture, presence, and contributions, and is inclusive of the experiences of African American students. One method is to remove colorblindness and race-neutrality from curricula, calling out race and racism in history, in order for students to contextualize what race and racism looks like today. Both James and Athena recognized the absence of Black community in their course lectures and readings, and believed that students of color would indeed engage more if they saw their experiences reflected in the curricula. James desired readings and stories about "Black heroes." When Athena began reading poetry written by Black writers and other poets of color, she discovered that her experiences were not isolated, and that others like her felt and experienced similar situations and circumstances. She went form a disengaged high school student with a mediocre GPA to a highly

engaged college student with a 3.5 GPA, demanding an inclusive syllabus from her literature instructor. By incorporating narratives through counter-storytelling, students can become aware of race and racism's "nuances and permutations" embedded in the experiences and knowledge of historically marginalized people (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015, p. 215). CRT scholars warn, however, that narratives and counter-stories should not be used without methods to critically examine dominant ways we have been taught. Stories that counter or challenge dominant teachings, should be accompanied by thoughtful pedagogy.

High school programs

Colleges should partner with high school students to develop out-of-class time programming. Components of this programming should include: 1) support for students to create and envision their higher education and professional goals, 2) curriculum that provides opportunities to learn about their cultural heritage and explore their ancestry, 3) activities that teach students how to form habits of self-care and self-preservation through individual and community practices, 4) mentorship and connection with influential others, 5) resources for healing racialized trauma. Participants in this research study were able to define their own personalized habits and influences they used to persevere through difficulty and challenge. Obtaining guidance in exploring these areas for development has the potential to equip students with these skills for life.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this research study, I suggest the following topics for future study. Participants discussed incidents of microaggressions and stereotyping they experienced on their campus. Arline Geronimus (2015) discussed weathering as physical, mental, emotional, and psychological effects of racism. Studies should be conducted that more specifically examine the

impact of weathering on academic outcomes of African American students. Additionally, and in line with assets-based research, future studies should explore students' reactions and behaviors in responding to microagressions, stereotypes, and other forms of racial bias on college campuses. Components of this study should include immediate physiological, psychological, and emotional responses to the incident, and action (or inaction) taken. Both students entering college, as well as students in college would have much to learn about dealing with and responding to racialized incidents on campus from the findings of this research.

Effective student support resources for African American students remain an area for further study, particularly students with intersecting identities such as race, gender, socioeconomic background, ability, religion, sexual orientation, parental status, citizenship, veteran status, to name a few. Community colleges are open door institutions, attracting and enrolling many students from all walks of life. Demands on student affairs professionals can be taxing if colleges fail to provide adequate resources, training, and support to both staff and students. Further, research assessing the effectiveness of support resources for African American students can be useful in creating environments where marginalized students feel safe, supported, and understood. Perhaps a study could be conducted on a community college campus where the majority student population is African American. This would allow researchers to learn if and how support services on these campuses are more effective in meeting students' needs.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored the experiences of successful African American students on a predominantly white community college campus, and learned that, as administrators, faculty, staff, and policy-makers, we have much to do in the way of creating campus environments that support the success and progress of African American students. I also learned that, in spite of the

barrage of bias and microaggressions described by participants, they developed unique methods to thrive on their campus, building from their inner strengths, self-motivation, and support from their communities and those on campus who demonstrated genuine care for their wellbeing and success. Participants made it clear that they were able to thrive when an influential individual believed they were capable of greatness. These forces allowed them to envision possibilities for themselves, and develop the knowledge and realization that hardships and challenges often become opportunities for growth and advancement.

Implications of this study can be used to work hard at launching and maintaining more assets-focused approaches to research and practice. Based on decades of deficits-based approaches, we have much work to do to change the narrative and restructure postsecondary institutions so that they become places for more students of color to succeed. It is imperative that we listen to the stories of students of color, and center their voices, so that dominant narratives that center whiteness can be challenged and redefined. It also remains critical, at this juncture to help students find their voices, and the language to express their perceptions and senses of racial bias in spaces where they feel safe to do so, allowing them find mechanisms to better cope with racism.

I hope this research study illuminates the challenges that successful African American students face, as well as the resilience and strength they used to support themselves through their academic journeys thus far. Understanding their assets and strengths, and how they have achieved success in the community college setting, remains an area in need of further exploration and study.

Finally, the data gathered and written up for this research study occurred just prior to COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Information about racial

disparities across Minnesota and particularly in the Twin Cities continues to surface, and will hopefully change the landscape for Black students on community college campuses for the better. More decisionmakers on college campuses are now paying attention to the experiences of Black communities. Now, more than ever, it is crucial to tell counter-stories, elevate, and center Blackness.

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APPENDIX A.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms are defined for this study:

- *Academic success* (as defined by the state system of colleges and universities of which Lakerock college is a member)– a 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale, and completion of at least thirty credits, which is the required number of credits to be a sophomore or second year student
- *Achievement gap* – the persistent disparity in educational attainment between African Americans and other racial groups, and white students.
- *African American* – individuals of African descent born and raised in the United States
- *Brown versus the Board of Education* – a landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court decided separate schools for Black and white children was unconstitutional
- *Community College* – a two-year, not for profit educational institution that offers the first sixty credits for transfer to a four-year college or university. Associate and associate of applied science degrees may be awarded at community colleges. Community colleges are also referred to as two-year colleges, therefore, community colleges and two-year colleges will be used interchangeably in this study
- *Microaggression* – a casual remark or slight aimed at an individual from a marginalized group
- *Persistence* - refers to students who are enrolled, transferred, or graduated by the second fall or spring term following the initial fall or spring term of enrollment

- *Predominantly white institution* – U.S. institutions whose enrollment consists of at least 50% white students
- *Retention* – refers to students who re-enroll for a second year at the same institution where they attended their first year of college
- *Stereotype Threat* – a fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one's own group

APPENDIX B.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

DIVISION OF RESEARCH & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

UND.edu

Institutional Review Board
Tech Accelerator, Suite 2050
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March 12, 2019

Principal Investigator:	Elena Favela
Project Title:	A Critical Race Examination of the Lived Experiences of African American Students at a Predominantly White Community College
IRB Project Number:	IRB-201903-236
Project Review Level:	Expedited 6, 7
Date of IRB Approval:	03/08/2019
Expiration Date of This Approval:	03/07/2020
Consent Form Approval Date:	03/08/2019

The application form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Attached is your original consent form that has been stamped with the UND IRB approval and expiration dates. Please maintain this original on file. ***You must use this original, stamped consent form to make copies for participant enrollment. No other consent form should be used.*** It must be signed by each participant prior to initiation of any research procedures. In addition, each participant must be given a copy of the consent form.

Prior to implementation, submit any changes to or departures from the protocol or consent form to the IRB for approval. No changes to approved research may take place without prior IRB approval.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP
IRB Manager

MLB/sb
Enclosures

Cc: Joshua Cohen, Ph.D.

The University of North Dakota is an equal opportunity / affirmative action institution.

APPENDIX C.

INFORMED CONSENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title:	A Critical Race Examination of the Lived Experiences of African American Students at a Predominantly White Community College
Principal Investigator:	Elena Favela
Phone/Email Address:	elena.favela@und.edu
Department:	Educational Leadership
Research Advisor:	Dr. Joshua Cohen
Research Advisor Phone/Email Address:	(701)777-3452 joshua.cohen@und.edu

What should I know about this research?

- The researcher will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don't take part, it won't be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won't be held against you
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

How long will I be in this research?

We expect that your taking part in this research will last three to five weeks, meeting three times for about 45 minutes to one hour each meeting.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of African American community college students who have been successful in college.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

If you decide to take part in this research study, the researcher will contact you to set up a time to meet for interviewing. You will meet with the researcher three times over three to five weeks. Each face-to-face interview will last about 45 minutes to one hour. You can choose where the interviews will take place, but it should be in a place with little distraction. The researcher will ask you about your experiences being an African American student at a college that is predominantly white, what those experiences mean to you, and how they have influenced you and your success as a college student. You are free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. The researcher will audio record the interviews and later transcribe them for analysis.

The researcher will keep the audio files for three years and then destroy them. Your identity will remain confidential, and the researcher will use a fake name for you so that no one will be able to know who you are.

Could being in this research hurt me?
The most important risks or discomforts that you may expect from taking part in this research include difficulty sharing something you experienced that may have been troubling, embarrassing, or uncomfortable. You may also experience feelings due to recalling an emotional time from your past or present experiences.

Will being in this research benefit me?
The most important benefits that you may expect from taking part in this research include sharing your experiences of success so that others can learn from you and maybe be successful too.

Possible benefits to others include future knowledge gained from the research.

How many people will participate in this research?
Approximately six to eight people will take part in this study at the University of North Dakota. The study will take place at with other students from [redacted].
Will it cost me money to take part in this research?
You will not have any costs for being in this research study. The only cost may be transportation to a location for the interviews. But, the interviews can be done at your school on a day you would be there anyway.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
You will be paid for being in this research study in the form of a $30 gift card. You must participate in all three interviews in order to receive the gift card.

Who is funding this research?
The University of North Dakota and the researcher are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

What happens to information collected for this research?
Your private information may be shared with individuals and organizations that conduct or watch over this research, including:
- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research
- The researcher's advisor

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Data collected in this research might be de-identified and used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research without your consent.

You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

The audio recordings will be used for educational purposes, and only the researcher will have access to them. The audio files will be kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's office. destroyed after three years. You have the right to review/edit the recordings.

What if I agree to be in the research and then change my mind?
If you decide to leave the study early, the we ask that you contact the researcher by email as soon as you decide to leave the study. You will not in any way be penalized for leaving the study early.

Who can answer my questions about this research?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at 701.777.4279 or UND.irb@UND.edu if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You may also visit the UND IRB website for more information about being a research participant: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's Name: _____

_____ _____
Signature of Subject Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

_____ _____
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent Date

APPENDIX D.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1) Tell me a little bit about growing up.
    a. Describe the characteristics that were instilled in you that got you where you are today.
    b. What were your goals and aspirations growing up?
    c. Who or what influenced your belief that you could successfully accomplish your goals?

2) Describe your overall experience in college.
    a. What are some specific things (people, events, incidents) that have influenced or impacted your experience?
    b. In what ways do you feel your racial identity has affected your educational goals or aspirations while in college?

3) Tell me about your decision to apply to college.
    a. What made you choose to attend a community college?
    b. What and/or who influenced you to go to college?
    c. What family members, friends, or mentors helped you or encouraged you in the process of finding a college to go to and applying?
    d. What does your family and friends think about you being in college?

4) What are some highlights of your year or years in college?
    a. What do you enjoy most about being in college?
    b. What are some things that make you enroll semester after semester?

5) Do you participate in class? In what ways?
    a. What motivates you to participate?
    b. What discourages you from participating?

6) Describe some assignments you have enjoyed completing.
7) Describe some assignments you have not enjoyed completing.
    a. What class was it for?
    b. What were you required to do?
    c. What did you like or not like about it?

8) Tell me about your instructors. Are they approachable in class, after class, or during their office hours?
    a. What makes an instructor approachable?
    b. What impact do your instructors have on your motivation to persist in college?
    c. Recall an experience, good or bad, you had with an instructor. Tell me about it.

9) What campus support resources have you used?
    a. Other than going to class, where do you go on campus?

b. Have you met with an advisor, a counselor, a tutor, a financial aid advisor?
c. What resources would you like to use but could not? Why?

10) In what areas of campus do you feel most comfortable and why?

11) Tell me about challenges or barriers that you experienced during your time in college?
a. In what ways do you feel your racial identity was connected to those challenges or barriers?
b. What skills or characteristics did you use to work through those challenges or barriers?

12) At any point in time, did you think about or feel like you wanted to drop out of school?
a. What were the reasons that contributed to these thoughts or feelings?
b. How did you persist in spite of those thoughts or reasons?
c. What helped you persevere and stay enrolled?

13) In what ways do you feel your racial identity has impacted your interactions with the college campus?
a. With your peers/classmates?
b. With faculty/your instructors?
c. With staff?

14) Take a minute to think about who you are as a person and as a student. What characteristics, strengths, talents, or traits have helped you persist in college?

15) What are the most significant challenges or barriers to your continued enrollment at Normandale Community College?
a. What do you feel you need in order to overcome these barriers?
b. What are you actively doing to overcome these barriers?
c. In what ways do you feel your racial identity is connected to these barriers?

16) In what ways has your racial identity helped you in college?

17) What do you consider to be the most significant challenges African American students face in attaining a college degree?

18) If you were invited to talk to first year African American students, what advice would you give them about what it takes to be successful in college?

19) Please reflect on the following and the provide your thoughts, feelings, and reactions. At Minnesota 2-year colleges, African American students graduate at the lowest rate compared to other racial ethnic groups. African American students graduate at 8%, Asian students at 15%, Latinos at 17%, American Indian at 11%, and White at 25%. (Resource: The Chronicle of Higher Education College Completion).

20) What should be done in order to improve the graduation rate for African American

students?

21) Where so you see yourself going with your college education?

22) Do you have any other information or thoughts you would like to share?

APPENDIX E.

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Join the study and earn

- Are you a successful college student?
- Have you completed at least one year of college at [redacted]?
- Do you identify as African American (of African descent and grew up in the United States)?
- Are you at least 18 years old?

If you answered "yes," consider sharing your perspective about

$30

Contact:
Elena
ph: [redacted]