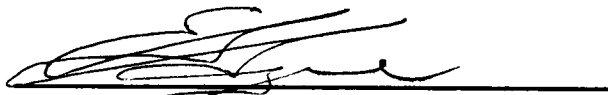


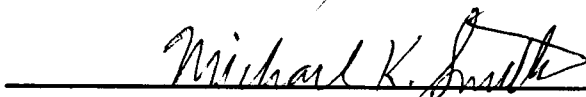
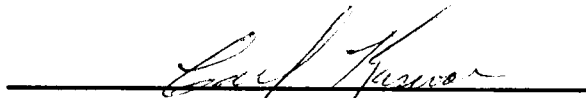
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jama Lea Bradley entitled "The Road to Success: Experiences of Black Women Students at a Predominantly White University." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D., with a major in education.



E. Grady Bogue, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS:
EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN STUDENTS AT A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jama Lea Bradley

May 1995

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For
Virgie Mary Bradley,
my grandmother

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The completion of this dissertation was dependent on many friends and colleagues. This acknowledgement is little compensation for their abundance of support.

First of all sincere gratitude goes to my committee chair, Dr. E. Grady Bogue. He has generously shared his knowledge and expertise with me during my doctoral program. His philosophy of respect and value for the individual makes him a notable mentor and teacher. I am also grateful to my other committee members: Dr. Carol Kasworm, Dr. Michael K. Smith and Dr. William Lyons. Dr. Kasworm provided support and insight into the analysis of interview data as well as pushed me to temporarily put aside my quantitative mind set for the world of qualitative inquiry. Dr. Smith provided moral and technical support throughout my doctoral program. He is, in my opinion, the ideal college professor: teacher, philosopher and researcher. My respect for Dr. Lyons comes from his ability to merge theory, research and practice. I am grateful for his support and patience.

I also take this opportunity to thank three very important people from the University of Tennessee. Dr. Nancy Lay, Dr. Jean Lewis and Dr. Trudy Banta. Each of these women not only believed in and encouraged me, they were wonderful mentors. I aspire to be as caring about students as Nancy Lay, as optimistic about each person's potential as Jean

Lewis, and as devoted to the improvement of higher education as Trudy Banta.

Special thanks to Gwynetta F. Draper, John Stuhl, Alice Syler, Diane C. Cudahy and Leslie K. Williams for supporting me in numerous ways during my doctoral program. No one could ask for a better set of friends and colleagues.

A very special thanks goes to Judith A. Bryant. Her encouragement and support not only allowed me to begin my doctoral program, but provided the financial and emotional support needed to complete my program. She has continuously given me unconditional support and boundless inspiration.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the women who shared their stories and who are the subject of this study. Each one of them gave of themselves in the hopes that they could somehow help those that come after them.

ABSTRACT

This study provided insight into the experiences of African American women students at a predominantly White University. In order to understand the meaning that Black women students attached to their collegiate experiences a qualitative methodology was employed.

Participants were 10 traditional age juniors and seniors. Each participant took part in two individual interviews and one focus group interview. In initial interviews, participants reflected on their expectations of what college would be like. Initial expectations of participants centered on: (a) finding friends and fitting in; (b) finding and being welcomed into a Black community at the university; and (c) the opportunity to get an education.

Some experiences of the participants in this study were atypical of the traditional experience. First, these participants were faced with the challenges of finding a community of Blackness with which to affiliate. When they found the Black community at Heritage unorganized and inactive, participants were pushed to form their own communities within the residence hall system. These communities provided participants with a sense of affiliation while providing a forum for expression and validation for their own ideas, culture and experiences.

Secondly, academic support programs were integral to the

success of the participants. Programs for the benefit of all students, such as the Writing Center of Tutorial Laboratories, assisted several of the participants in their academic endeavors. Additionally, the majority of the participants benefitted repeatedly from programs and services specifically for minority students.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding of this study is the realization that all of the participants had experiences tainted by racism and sexism. The campus climate proved to be an environment permeated with conflict. The women in this study realized early in their collegiate career that the University was still a haven for questionable policies and practices that involve disparities in the treatment of minorities on campus.

Last, the participants had made an effort to develop their understanding of themselves and others. While most participants found that their voices had little impact on changing the culture of Heritage University, most felt they had survived and flourished in a culture very different from their own.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The challenges facing higher education today are numerous. Perhaps one of the most significant of these challenges is what Sizemore (1990, p. 42) refers to as a need to "disturb the inertia of indifferent traditionalism." Specifically, higher education needs to understand and prepare for the students of tomorrow who look very much like the non-traditional students of today.

Already the collegiate population is in a state of transformation. More women are attending college than men. Older Americans are entering college for the first time or returning to further their college education (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1993). The student-age population is expected to experience a minority student increase to 39 percent by the year 2020 (Green, 1989). To meet the needs of this new population of students, research is needed to understand the experiences of today's non-traditional students. Changes need to be implemented that will improve the campus environment and thereby increase the opportunities for the students of tomorrow.

Leaders and researchers in higher education have stated that determining the experiences and impact of college for the various groups of non-traditional students is an important

step in meeting the challenges of the coming decade (Kuh, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Today, according to Levine (1989), only one-sixth of the undergraduate population is considered traditional.

Only in the last decade has research associated with higher education began to focus attention on non-traditional and minority college students (Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Inquiry into the collegiate experiences of minority students at American colleges and universities has been somewhat limited. However, there is a growing interest in and body of knowledge on investigating the experience of being an African American college student.

Currently, the majority of research associated with African American students has centered on the experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions and concentrated on factors associated with retention and persistence. An analysis of a cross-section of research on the impact of college on African American students suggest that "Black students who attend predominantly White colleges and universities (PWCUs) experience greater difficulty in achieving levels of congruence than their White counterparts" (Thompson and Fretz, 1991). For example, Wright (1981) found that Black students perceive higher levels of racial tension and hostility in their environment than their White classmates.

Additionally, the research of Suen (1983), Allen (1987) and Fleming (1988) found that Black students often experience feelings of isolation and alienation. Allen (1981), Allen, BoBo and Fleuranges (1984) and Gibbs (1982) have suggested that Black students are usually less satisfied and identify less with their institution than their White peers. Previous research has provided a starting point in understanding the African American collegiate experience; however, it has been somewhat limited to predominantly White institutions and co-educational populations.

Educators (Kuh, 1993; Moses, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) have confirmed the need to explore and profile what happens to Black women students on PWCUs. Scholars (Castle, 1993; Clewell & Fricklen, 1986; Green, 1989;) have stated that if colleges and universities are to develop and implement effective programs to assist in the persistence of minority students, that each campus must not only take into account national statistics but must also reflect on its own uniqueness and the unique experiences of its students in order to develop and implement effective intervention strategies.

The new generation of college students include a substantial number of African American women on predominantly White campuses. Further research will assist in the development of theory associated with African American women students, as well as provide insight for practice for college

administrators, faculty and staff (Castle, 1993; Fleming, 1988; Moses, 1989).

The purpose of this study was to explore and gain insight into the college experiences of Black undergraduate women at a predominantly White university by asking undergraduates to reflect on and talk about their collegiate experience. One primary research question that directed this study and served as a guide for inquiry: What was the experience of being a Black female college student at the University? The primary goal was to generate a portrait of the perceptions and experiences of this non-traditional group of women by listening to their words and stories.

Qualitative Inquiry

In order to study the experiences of Black women college students, an interpretivist framework and qualitative methodology were used. While the majority of research on the college experience employs the positivist research paradigm and quantitative methodology, there is a history of employing an interpretivist framework and qualitative research methods to explore what happens to students during college (Freedman, 1967; Kuh, 1993; Madison, 1969, White, 1966). The interpretivist approach springs from a phenomenological world view and attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday experience. According to Manen (1990), phenomenology differs from other sciences in that it

attempts to gain insightful descriptions of experience without classifying, theorizing or abstracting the experience.

Consequently, interpretivist inquiry allows for the exploration and understanding of the uniqueness of individual experience. Interpretive scholars consider each human situation novel, emergent and filled with multiple, and often conflicting meanings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Through the use of qualitative methods, interpretivist researchers attempt to build understanding, discover meaning, and gain knowledge about human experience (Kuh, 1993).

Theory in qualitative research is quite different from theory associated with the quantitative model. Theory is used in a variety of ways in qualitative inquiry. One common use of theory in qualitative research is referred to as middle-range propositions. Middle-range theories rely on variables that are found for more than one case. Qualitative researchers often use middle-range theories as a framework for asking questions of their study as well as in the discussion of findings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). According to Turner (1985), middle-range theories try to explain phenomena--for example, college dropout rate, delinquency, discrimination.

As with many qualitative studies, this investigation primarily relied on middle-range theory to help form initial questions and working hypotheses during the early research stages. As data analysis progressed, a conceptual framework with descriptive categories (grounded in the data and placed

within a broad structure), provided a framework that assisted the researcher in examining the data from different perspectives and theoretical bases (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Additionally, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the results of this study were not designed to propose theory for the purpose of explanation and prediction as in the positivist model, but to illuminate through discovery as in the sense of "grounded theory." Grounded theory, another qualitative use of theory, provided understanding of direct lived experience through thick description rather than abstract generalizations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 19).

The Role of the Researcher

Phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings people ascribe to their experiences. As suggested by Manen (1990), in qualitative inquiry there is a "need to realize that experiential accounts of lived-experience descriptions, whether caught in oral or in written discourse, are never identical to lived experience itself" (p. 54). Qualitative research suggests that: (a) realities are multiple, constructed and holistic; (b) variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure; (c) subject matter is primary; and (d) emic or insiders' point of view is preferable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Qualitative researchers understand that experiences are transformed by the meaning participants give to that lived

experience. The experiential data collected by qualitative research reflects only the experience as interpreted by the participant. Therefore, the participant's interpretation (perceptions) of the experience is the meaning the participant attaches to it.

Time, distance, as well as many other factors influence the perceptions of and reflections on lived experience recounted by participants. Because it is a past experience, things are less vivid than the actual experience and cannot be relived or retold in full. In essence, participants tend to remember and relate the important or pivotal details of lived experience rather than a meticulous and full description.

It is also the intention of qualitative research to contemplate multiple, socially constructed realities that are complex and inseparable into discrete variables as with quantitative designs. Qualitative researchers believe their goal is to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Qualitative research is systematic in nature. It uses specific modes of inquiry including reflecting, observing, interviewing and focus groups. Qualitative research is explicit in that it attempts to articulate the structures of meaning inherent in lived experience (Manen, 1990). As it is a human science, qualitative inquiry is intersubjective in

that it needs the participant in order to determine the relationships and meanings attached to phenomena.

The objectivity of qualitative research "is evaluated in terms of the reliability and validity of its observations" (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p. 13). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 107), one difference between qualitative and quantitative research approaches is that qualitative researchers recognize and affirm "the role of the instrument, the human interviewer. The instrument is therefore a marvelously smart, adaptable and flexible instrument that can respond to situations with skill, tact and understanding."

Reliability associated with interviews and observations can be addressed in several ways by qualitative researchers. In qualitative inquiry interviews, and observations require the recording of the reaction to some stimulus, even if the only stimulus is the act of measurement. Reliability depends on explicitly described observational procedures (Kirk and Miller, 1986, p. 41).

Time spent on multiple contacts with participants, probing for reiteration and more detailed information allows the researcher to confirm and further explore data collected. Sharing of data collected with the research participants and asking for their comments is also another way to further explore and confirm informational data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulated findings assist in determining if information being gathered is reliable. For example,

triangulation of observation, interview, and questionnaire data can confirm the consistency of information (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Qualitative researchers have argued with the conventional assumptions underlying the notion of validity. Researchers like Mishler (1986) want a new vocabulary with which to discuss validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested the word trustworthiness for that of validity. They argue that researchers inform practice "by concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability" (pp. 289-332).

The methodological development of qualitative research over the last century has been aimed at increasing validity. Frameworks and structures have been developed in order to minimize the effect that interviewer or observer can have on the participant and their stories (Seidman, 1991). Those being trained in qualitative research are typically educated in the art of listening, interviewing, probing, cultural sensitivity and observation in an effort to insure minimal influence on those being and interviewed and observed.

According to Seidman (1991), researchers strive to have meaning made by the participant. In order to do this, researchers must recognize that meaning is, to some degree, a part of the interactive nature of qualitative inquiry. By recognizing that interaction, researchers can use their skills to minimize distortion.

Qualitative researchers employ multiple contacts and measures to insure internal and external validity. Most qualitative research involves observing and interviewing a number of participants several times. Asking the wrong question is the source of most validity errors, however, a diversity of methods (triangulation) is a strong way to guard against validity error (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Internal and external consistency of dialogue, syntax, diction, nonverbal communication, and the discovery and sense of the experience are also evidence of authenticity and validity in qualitative research (Seidman, 1991, p. 19).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn and understand the meaning Black women students attached to their experiences at a predominantly White university. As suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), reviewing the literature on the research topic of interest before data collection outweigh the possible influence it might have on the researcher. It is in this light, that the review of literature for this study began before data collection and continued throughout the research process.

Review of the literature prior to this study provided a general knowledge about what inquiry had been done on the experiences of African American college students. The literature review helped find focus for the purpose of this investigation by informing the research on how others have considered, researched and explained phenomena associated with African American college students. Additionally, the review of literature influenced the methodology of this investigation. The successes and failures of other researchers, as read in the literature, provided valuable information in the design of this study.

The literature on the experiences of African American college students suggested a review of three primary areas;

campus climate, academic and social integration, and the role of culture in the college experience. Acknowledging demographic projections and developing an understanding of the campus climate of colleges and universities is necessary to inform policies and practices of higher education, both now and in the future. The theories and perspectives presented as part of the review of literature serve as a series of lenses through which experiences may be viewed and examined. The cultural development models suggest a critical view of monoculturalism as a problem that negatively impacts and limits all members of higher education and society.

Campus Climate

The literature reveals that higher education is becoming increasingly aware and concerned about the rise in African American enrollment in colleges and universities (Astin, 1982; Christoffel, 1986; Dervarics, 1990; Castle, 1993). According to Castle (1993), this interest is primarily focused on African Americans at predominantly White colleges and universities (PWCUs) and 2-year colleges, since most African Americans attend these two types of institutions.

Current demographic indicators and predictions for future enrollment suggest the need for rethinking the monocultural tradition of higher education. The student-age population is expected to increase in minority representation. By the year 2000, minority students will account for approximately 39

percent of the student population (Green, 1989). The first 300 years of higher education was marked by the education of men. Recently, the redistribution of the college population reflect gender changes with women making up over 50 percent of students enrolled in higher education. Currently, women make up 55 percent of those graduating from American colleges (The Institute for Research on Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania, 1993).

Predicted workforce demands and demographics changes present challenges for higher education. By the year 2000, African Americans and Hispanics are expected to account for half of all new hires in the workforce (Nussbaum, 1988). Faced with the reality of increasing technology and global competition, the workforce will have to be well educated. Skill requirements are expected to rise significantly. The Hudson Institute projects that of the new jobs created between 1988 and the year 2000, 52 percent will require at least one year of college and 30 percent will require a four year degree or graduate training (Castle, 1993).

It is the goal of colleges and universities to provide a diversified campus environment where all students can learn to live effectively with all kinds of people from all types of backgrounds (Parker, Archer, and Scott, 1992). However, higher education continues to be influenced by nonpluralistic institutional orientations which result in inhospitable campus

environments for the non-traditional student (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991; Castle, 1993; Epps, 1990; Wilson, 1988).

The experiences and perceptions of Black students on PWCUs has been of particular interest to researchers over the last two decades. Hughes (1987) reported a decrease in African American enrollment in higher education from 1979 to 1983. She concluded that Black men and women are aware that most PWCUs are not necessarily healthy environments for African Americans. Her research suggests that nurturance, confidence building, and positive identity formation of African Americans are stifled on PWCUs.

Abraham (1990) and Beckman (1987-88) have reached similar conclusions, stating that Black students perceive that their presence on campus is tolerated rather than accepted. Abraham (1990) and Beckman (1987-1988) also reported that Black students feel that they are not accepted as equals by their White peers. Moreover, these authors found that Black students feel that White students and faculty view them as products of affirmative action, special programs, tokenism and quotas. As a result, they discount their knowledge, skills and achievements.

Black students continue to view the PWCUs as lacking in role models. Tachibana (1990) noted the concern about the lack of Black faculty and administrators by African American students. She quotes a Black student whose comments summarized the feeling of other students in her study:

In my three years at the University, I have only had one Black professor. There are no Black faculty members in my department. It seems that the university does not see the importance of having Black faculty members-not only as role models for Black students but for White students as well (Tachibana, p. 6).

The perceptions of few Black role models was validated by 1992 statistics on Black faculty and staff in higher education. According to the 1993 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, only 3.2 percent of all full-time college professors were African American. At public higher education institutions, the percentage of African American full-time faculty dropped to 1.6 percent.

Women enrolled in higher education institutions face a similar fate. Statistics for 1992 show that female role models on college campuses were limited. The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (1993) reported approximately 27 percent of all full-time college faculty were women. Examination of the statistics for both African Americans and women suggests that few African American women role models exist on predominantly White college and university campuses.

Academic and Social Integration

Retention and persistence of students at higher education institutions are two primary concerns. College persistence and retention studies often focus on academic and social factors affecting students (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988;

Christie & Dinham, 1991; Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1986; Sanders, 1987).

Academic integration is interpreted as one of the major factors in student retention and degree attainment (Pascarella, Duby & Iverson, 1983; Tinto, 1975). Academic integration is often defined as student interactions with peers and faculty that focus on intellectual development. Researchers report that interaction with faculty outside the classroom positively influences academic integration (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988; Chickering, 1969; Cope, 1978; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979; Spady, 1971; Wilson, 1975;).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) investigated student-faculty relationships and their effect on educational outcomes. They found that "the frequency of students' informal contacts with faculty were positively associated with academic performance and influenced measures of intellectual development" (p. 108). Pascarella, Duby and Iverson (1983) discovered that the quality of interaction with faculty, rather than the frequency of contact, played a significant role in the academic growth and persistence of students.

Both Tinto's Student Integration Model and Bean's Student Attrition Model recognize social integration as an important factor in student satisfaction and persistence. Bean (1980), Tinto (1975, 1987) and van Gannep (1960) have asserted that external relationships (family, high school friends) may have

an effect on the integration of students. Tinto suggests that three mechanisms: (1) separation from past communities, (2) transition into the new college community, and (3) incorporation of the norms and behaviors of the new environment into the college community, are pertinent to the integration of the student into the college environment.

Christie and Dinham (1991) pointed out two types of institutional experiences that positively influence the social integration of students: living in a residence hall and participating in extracurricular activities. Their findings suggest that extracurricular activities influence social integration in ways similar to the influences of living in a residence hall. Extracurricular activities provide increased opportunities to meet other students and develop friendships. These influences are seen by the students as "more explicitly linking them to the college environment" (p.422). A few students, according to Christie and Dinham (1991), expressed that extracurricular activities made a difference in their decision to return for their second year. Christie and Dinham's study echoes the social integration findings of Tinto (1975, 1987) and Terenzini, Pascarella, Theophilides & Lorang (1985).

Academic and Social Integration of Minority Students

The academic and social integration of African American students has been the focus of several minority retention

studies. Family support is an important factor for all students; however, it is especially significant for Black students. Tracy and Sedlacek (1985) examined the noncognitive variables that contribute to the academic success of Black students. They found that the support of family for college plans was a significant factor in persistence through the first year of college. Raymond, Rhoads and Raymond (1980) drew similar conclusions, stating that the importance of family relationships are central to the success of Blacks college students.

In the classroom, college and university curricula tend to be monocultural and a deterrent to the academic success of minority students (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988). Most required courses are taught in the western European perspective, while elective courses may include Afro-American studies, Eastern philosophy or Native American culture. The multicultural perspective of these elective courses reach few students due to their elective status. The required courses, based on monocultural curriculum, result in perceived emphasis on western culture and discounting of other cultures within the classroom (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988).

Howard and Hammond (1985) noted that Black students are sensitive to the fact that some faculty members do not perceive them as capable. Armstrong-West and de la Teja (1988) have observed that faculty members often assume that a Black student is enrolled only because of a special admissions

program. The authors continue in their criticism of the faculty, noting that in most instances faculty members have had limited training and interaction with cultures other than their own and lack the understanding to adequately evaluate the abilities and needs of minority students. Fleming (1984) in her study of Black men and women students in predominantly White colleges also found that overt and covert racism in college classrooms creates a climate of hostility and rejection for Black students.

Academic retention programs are a critical component of some college and university efforts. Typically these programs are proactive interventions prior to and during the first year of college. These interventions often include the provision of support services. Academic support services such as advising and tutoring are essential in minority retention strategies (McCoy, 1994). In the effort to increase minority student/faculty involvement other services have included: faculty mentor programs, minority internships with faculty members, and career advising services. Many of these programs and services have made inroads into the minority retention strategies of many colleges and universities.

In contrast to social integration, social isolation is often cited as one of the most common reasons why minority students do not persist (Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1986; and Sanders, 1987). As noted previously, Thompson and Fretz's (1991) analysis of a cross-section of research on the impact

of college on African American students suggests that "Black students who attend predominantly White colleges and universities (PWCUs) experience greater difficulty in achieving levels of connectedness than their White counterparts." The research of Suen (1983), Allen (1987) and Fleming (1988) suggests that Black students often experience feelings of isolation and alienation. Allen (1981), Allen, BoBo and Fleuranges (1984) and Gibbs (1982) have suggested that Black students are usually less satisfied and identify less with their institution than their White counterparts.

Taylor (1986) lists several social factors that affect the integration of minority students on predominantly white campuses:

- * institutional racism
- * cultural conflicts
- * socialization

Taylor (1986) states that perceptions of institutional racism almost always involve disparities in the treatment of minorities on campus. The following examples listed by Armstrong-West and de la Teja (1988) provide insight into questionable policies and practices associated with the collegiate environment. Research indicates that minority groups do not perform well on standardized academic achievement tests; however, these same test are primary for admission to most institutions. Greek fraternities and sororities have a tradition and history of excluding minorities from their organizations, yet these organization

flourish and are supported on our college campuses. Christoffel (1986), after reviewing approximately 40 studies on minority retention programs concluded that successful retention "is more of an issue of institutional reform" than specific academic intervention programs. Cultural conflicts, the third of Taylor's factors, are likely in an organization where one group is dominant in number or status. Black students, like Native Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics, experience cultural and language differences in the predominantly White college setting. These cultural and language differences may create conflict for the student as they move back and forth between cultures (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988; Taylor, 1986). Family members of the minority student may not understand the pressure and stress associated with adjusting to a bimodal cultural climate. If the minority student rejects the values or behaviors of the dominant campus culture, he or she faces the rejection of peers and faculty (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988).

Taylor (1986), like others in the field of higher education, believes that the socialization of minority student groups is an important factor in minority retention. He contends that higher education must become knowledgeable of the factors that influence or impede social integration of minority students on PWCUs.

Academic and Social Integration of African American Women

As mentioned previously, rarely is the impact of racism and sexism on Black women college students examined (Allen 1986). However, several gender specific studies do exist on the academic and social integration of Black women. The research of Allen (1986) and Fleming (1988, 1984) have explored the different experiences of Black men and women in college. Their research suggests:

- * Black women become less assertive when they are educated with men
- * Black women often believe that they are less competent than men
- * Black women often lose some social assertiveness in coed Black colleges, but not in White colleges where Black men are fewer in number
- * Black women attending predominantly White colleges and universities often suffer from emotional pain, social isolation, and fears about their competence.

Fleming (1984), Allen (1987) and Wright (1987) have suggested that Black women students on college campuses may also suffer from invisibility, hostility and indifference on predominantly White campuses.

Black women may be treated differently by faculty members because of their race and gender. The research of Hall and Sandler (1984) noted that in PWCUs a contradiction of under- and over-attention is experienced by Black women. Black women and their comments may be ignored in some classes by faculty and peers while they may be called upon periodically to

represent or recite the opinions of their race in other classes. Hall and Sandler (1984) also found that students whose research focuses on issues of particular concern to Black women may be devalued or not be supported by faculty members.

Summary of Academic and Social Integration

In conclusion, the research suggests that students who become integrated into the academic and social systems of their colleges through participation in extracurricular activities, interactions with other students and interactions with faculty are more likely to matriculate to graduation. This integration process is likely to be difficult for any student, but particularly so for Black women who do not fit the traditional college profile.

Theories, Perspectives and Models Associated with Culture

Concepts of culture are important when attempting to frame and gain insight into the experiences of others. Culture defines the particular ways in which a group lives out and makes sense of its given circumstances and conditions of life to include: a set of practices, ideologies and values from which different groups draw on to make sense of their world.

Researchers investigating the impact of college have incorporated several theories of culture to explore the

collegiate experience for minority students. The following discussion of theories center on the interactive context between the individual and society (McLaren, 1989).

Theories of culture are often associated with one of two categories: the dominant culture and the subordinate culture. Dominant culture refers to the practices that affirm the values, interest and concerns of the controlling class (McLaren, 1989). Giroux (1981) refers to the dominant culture's ability to exercise domination over subordinated groups as hegemony. He continues to define hegemony as the social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites, such as higher education, that maintain the dominant culture. Subordinate culture approach emphasizes a critique of social order from a class, gender, style, and race perspective (McLaren, 1989). For the purpose of this study, the review of cultural theories, perspectives and cultural models will primarily focus on the subordinate culture while realizing that it does not exist without the dominant culture.

Critical Theory

One lens that may be used to examine the experiences of a college students is critical theory. Critical theory looks at human agency within a social institution. Critical social science suggests a whole range of questions that cannot be explored within the bounds of conventional quantitative means,

but can be addressed using a critical perspective (Lincoln, 1991).

Fay (1987) suggests that critical perspective embraces four sub-theories: (1) a theory of false consciousness, (2) a theory of crisis, (3) a theory of education, and (4) a theory of transformative action. The sub-theory of crisis and the sub-theory of transformative action are useful in the examination of the college environment and college students.

With respect to these sub-theories and college students, probably one of the most immediate social crisis facing higher education are the issues of welcoming and educating racial and ethnic minorities (Arbeiter, 1987; Franklin, 1987). This task is becoming increasingly important as the number of students of color attending colleges and universities continues to rise. Higher education's failure to move to a more diverse and welcoming context is creating a social crisis between majority and minority groups (Lincoln, 1991).

The transformative action theory isolates those aspects of a society which must be altered if the social crisis is to be resolved (Fay, 1987). A research agenda for the probing repressive aspects of the college community would attempt to identify oppressive and repressive structures operating within higher education that prevent opportunities for students to enter, to engage and to become empowered (Lincoln, 1991).

In summary, critical theory does not constitute a homogenous philosophy; rather, it is more "accurate to say

that critical theorists are united in their objectives: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (McLaren, 1989). Therefore, research guided by critical theory attempts to identify, disclose and challenge the role society (and higher education) plays in political and cultural life (McLaren, 1989).

Feminist Theory

Feminists argue that White male experience has been synonymous with theories of human experience, upon which general theories, methodologies, concepts, and governments have been built. It is therefore logical that the new feminist theory agenda calls for addressing the issues of gender, race and class (Goodman, 1990). Feminist researchers usually utilize feminist theory to frame questions and to interpret data.

Noddings (1990) described the current feminist research on gender and education as that which explores the special qualities and values of women and how those qualities and values can be advanced and appreciated as important in the world view. Feminist researchers and theorists have been creating new frameworks and relational theories of the self which value connection, interdependence, empathy and contextual thinking (Goodman, 1990). Gilligan (1982) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) have pioneered new frameworks of development that reconceptualize growth,

self, relationships and empowerment. According to Gilligan (1982), women tend to have conceptions of themselves as interdependent with others and prefer an ethos based on care and responsibility.

Both Belenky's, et. al., (1986) and Gilligan's (1982) findings recognize the importance women place on being connected. In educational as well as social settings, women seek a connection to the situation and others. Women tend to learn best when connectedness and cooperation are a part of the learning experience.

Black Feminist Perspective

Black women's experiences as members of a specific race, class, and gender as well as their historical situations play important roles in their perspectives. Therefore, it is evident that Black women experiences are different from White women or Black men (Collins, 1990).

African American women share a common experience of being Black women in a society that devalues women of African descent. Cannon (1985) suggests that several core themes are characteristic of being a Black women in American society. First, "the interrelationship of White supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black woman's reality as a situation of struggle" (p. 30). Collins (1990) states that despite differences, such as age, social class or sexual

orientation, "the legacy of struggle against racism and sexism is a common thread binding African American women" (p. 22).

A second theme common to writing and research associated with African American women centers on the connection between experience and consciousness. As stated previously, being Black and female exposes African American women to some common experiences. These common experiences may predispose Black women to a "distinctive group consciousness." The group consciousness of African American women, when articulated is often problematic to and suppressed by the dominant group. In other words, the voices and viewpoints of Black women in American society are seldom heard (Collins, 1990).

A third theme indicative of the voicelessness and views of Black women in American society focuses on relationships. Afrocentrism has a context similar to the feminist world view. Harding (1987) describes an Afrocentric perspective as one in which the person is dependent on others, defined through contact, dialogue and relationships to others, and on self-interest tied to the welfare of the community. In Black families there tends to be close ties and a reliance on one another for affirmation and validation.

Black women's relationships with one another have provided safe havens for the expression of thought and the sharing of experiences. The mother/daughter relationship is fundamental to the African American women. According to Joseph and Lewis (1981) Black mothers have empowered their

daughters by passing on essential knowledge about survival as an African American woman. Through conversations with friends, sisters and mentors, Black women have confirmed their uniqueness and their right to exist (Collins, 1990). O'Neale (1986) notes that extended families, community organizations, and churches have also served as important and familiar places of discourse for Black women.

African American women also draw on the Afrocentric worldview to cope with racial oppression (Collins, 1990). In societies where African ideas and people are devalued, the process of African Americans valuing an Afrocentric worldview "is the result of self-conscious struggle (Collins, 1990). As part of this conscious struggle, African American women are raised to be self-reliant while being taught survival skills in and for the Black community (Joseph & Lewis, 1981). According to Robinson (1985) the Black woman has devised a coping strategy for the care of herself that follows a tradition of self-reliance as well as independence.

A similar perspective that is making inroads into Black feminist thought is the humanist vision. African American women scholars have advanced the thought that the struggles of Black women are a part of the wider struggle for human dignity and empowerment. This idea has been expressed by many African American scholars including Alice Walker. She suggests that by defining all people as "people of color," universalizes the

struggle of the individual to the struggle of humanity (Collins, 1990).

Cultural Development Models

In an effort to bring theory and practice together, several models of cultural awareness and cultural identity have been developed and employed to assist individuals and organizations in their attempts to move from a monocultural perspective to a multicultural (humanist) world view. To summarize some of the literature on cultural development theories, several models utilized on college campus to promote cultural awareness and the need for diversity are discussed.

Minority Development Model. An examination of an individual's own racial and ethical development and identity is helpful in understanding the attitudes and feelings one may have toward others, unlike themselves (Parker, Archer, and Scott, 1992). The Minority Identity Development Model (MID) advanced by Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1979) has several assumptions:

- * Conflict is not a negative entity to be avoided, rather, it is a part of everyday life.
- * Individual and group identities are different concepts, with self-identity preceding cultural identity.
- * Confusion and self-doubt are significant aspects of identity development. Development does not proceed without self-questioning and uncertainty.

The MID has five stages: (1) conformity, (2) dissonance, (3) resistance and immersion, (4) introspection, and (5) synergetic articulation and awareness (Atkinson, et. al., 1979). Each stage involves the self, others and the dominant group. According to Parker, Archer and Scott (1992), minority individuals "evolve through these stages as they encounter experiences in which their race or ethnic affiliation is a factor" (p.17).

The MID Model allows an insightful platform from which student experience can be viewed. Manning (1994) suggests examples of how the MID can be helpful to educators, White students, and students of color in that it helps each of them to "understand the ethnocentrically driven rage of the resistance and immersion stage, the need for culturally-similar friends of the dissonance stage or the linguistic 'switching' of the awareness stage" (p.180).

White Racial Identity Model. Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model is based on the assumption that in order to develop a healthy White identity, White persons must overcome one or more aspects of racism (Helms, 1984). Helms' (1984) model reflects Freirian (1985) concepts. Both Freire and Helms state that oppression negatively affects both the oppressed as well as the oppressor. According to Stage and Manning (1992), campus administrators have been challenged to

realize that racism is not a "Black problem;" but, a problem for all people.

Helms' (1990) model divides White racial identity into two phases:

- (1) Abandonment of racism along with the "recognition of and active opposition to institutional and cultural racism" (p. 55).
- (2) Defining a nonracist attitude and identity which includes the acknowledgement that the White race "perpetuates racism" (p. 61).

Manning (1994) summarizes the tasks leading to White racial identity. She concludes that "accepting one's whiteness, understanding the cultural implications of being White, and defining a White identity absent feelings of cultural superiority" are important steps in identity development (p. 180).

The Cultural Environment Transitions Model. The Cultural Environment Transitions Model takes a look at organizations and their attempts to go from a monocultural tradition to a multicultural perspective (Manning, 1994). Like the views of Helms and Freire, the Cultural Environment Transitions Model portrays racism as an "institutional phenomena perpetuated by the intentional and unintentional actions of both well-meaning and mean-spirited people" (Manning, 1994, p. 180).

The Cultural Environment Transitions Model helps leaders and organizations identify the visible and invisible structures that perpetuate monocultural influence and control.

By examining practices (e.g., policies, structures, politics and traditions) that promote racism, organizations can confront and reverse monocultural practices that perpetuate a racial or ethnic hierarchy of privilege (Manning, 1994).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to explore and gain insight into the experiences of African American women students at a predominantly White institution. To understand the meaning participants attach to their experiences, this project required an inductive approach guided by an interpretivist framework.

Several limitations are characteristic of this type of investigation. The participants for this study were limited to a group of 10 juniors and seniors who were traditional age African American women attending a large, public, predominantly White university in the southern region of the United States. The data gathered was limited to a demographic survey, individual interviews, and a focus group interview of all participants. Therefore, the goal of this study was to enrich the body of knowledge by gaining insight and understanding about the collegiate experience of a particular group of undergraduate African American women, not to generalize, control, or predict their behavior.

There are limitations and biases inherent in a White female conducting research with African American women. To assist in exploring and minimizing bias, the researcher participated in two bracketing interviews to explore possible bias and enhance cultural sensitivity. In addition, to

heighten cultural awareness, the researcher attended six events sponsored by African American student organizations; two geared specifically toward African American women.

The Setting - Heritage University

Heritage University (a pseudonym) was chosen for this investigation because it is a large, public research university with a history typical of a traditional, southern, predominantly White institution. Heritage University is often referred to as the flagship university of the state university system.

Heritage University has a strong tradition within the state boasting one of the largest Division I athletics programs in the country. Greek social fraternities and sororities are prominent student organizations both in number of members and facilities they occupy on campus. Heritage was founded during the latter part of the 18th century and is looking forward to celebrating its 200th anniversary.

Heritage University is located in the southeast region of the United States. Though Heritage is a land grant institution it was not officially integrated until the early 1960s. Like most major colleges and universities, Heritage experienced rapid growth during the 1970s and early 1980s when enrollment reached approximately 30,000. Currently, Heritage serves 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

Despite a decade of efforts to recruit and serve more minority students, the university's African American population is approximately five percent. The African American population of the state is 16 percent with the largest city in the state hosting an Black population of over 50 percent (Mattson, 1992).

Participants

All schools, offices and names of individual participants involved in this study have been changed to protect the identity of the participants and the confidentiality of responses. Written, informed consent was obtained from all participants interviewed for this study. See Appendix A for a copy of the consent forms.

Identification and Selection of Participants

The researcher wanted to investigate the experiences of Black women college students. To get a full range of experiences, the population for this study was narrowed to upperlevel (juniors and seniors) undergraduate students with several years experience at Heritage University. Upperlevel students were chosen because they have had an opportunity to experience a variety of circumstances involving what the institution is about and what it has to offer.

In order to gain knowledge about the pool of participants available for this study, the Admissions and Records Office at

Heritage University was contacted. A request was made for a list of currently enrolled full-time students who fit the following demographic profile: African American, female, 18-24 years old, junior or senior, attended college only at Heritage University. Using the profile, the Admissions and Records Office provided the names and addresses of 129 women. This list of 129 women comprised the population of potential participants.

Initial contact was made with the 129 potential participants via the U.S. Postal Service or Campus Mail Services. A packet was sent that included four pieces of information: (a) a letter from the researcher, (b) a letter of support, (c) a demographic survey, and (d) a return envelope. The letter from the researcher included an explanation of the study as well as an invitation to participate. The letter of support was written and signed by two African American faculty/staff members from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who were colleagues of the researcher. In addition to encouraging the students to participate in the study through their written comments, these two African American women read and reviewed the proposal for this investigation and provide insight and support for its completion.

The demographic survey enclosed in the packet was similar to many surveys used at colleges and universities to obtain a demographic profile of enrolled students. The intent of the demographic survey was two-fold. First, the researcher wanted

to get a demographic profile of the African American upperlevel female population of Heritage University. Secondly, the demographic information was used to choose a diverse set of participants to be interviewed. For a copy of the contents of the packet, excluding the return envelope, see Appendix B.

Of the 129 persons mailed packets, three were returned for address problems. Within 14 days, thirty-two persons responded positively to the invitation to participate in the study. This return rate of approximately 25 percent, with no follow-up mailing, was deemed reasonable by the researcher under Dillman's (1978) recommendations for mail surveys.

The literature suggests that several demographic factors may be related to how individuals experience their college environment. Academic and familial backgrounds of Black and White students account for part of the differences in persistence rates (Astin, 1982; Pascarella, 1985). Therefore, several academic and family characteristics were used to select as diverse a group of individuals as possible for the interview phase of this study. Four items suggested by the literature were considered to identify women to be interviewed: (a) major field of study, (b) hometown, (c) ethnic make-up of high school attended, and (d) educational level of parents.

After reviewing the demographic characteristics of the women who replied to the survey, 10 were chosen for their

diversity of responses to participate in the study. These 10 African American women represent eight different colleges and nine different majors at Heritage University. Eight of the participants are from the southern state in which Heritage University is located. Five are from the west side of the state where Heritage University has concentrated minority recruitment efforts. One woman is from the middle part of the state, and two are from the east side of the state within an hour drive of Heritage. The participants are from a mix of rural communities, small and large cities.

The literature, as well as African American colleagues, recommended that the ethnic mix of participants' high school might be an important factor in participants' perceptions of a predominantly White university. The literature suggests that students from a predominantly White high school may have an easier time adjusting to a predominantly White college or university. Therefore, "type of high school attended" was an important factor in categorizing participants. Five participants attended predominantly White high schools. Four participants attended predominantly Black high schools. One participant attended a ethnically mixed high school.

The fourth factor that assisted in selecting the group of participants was "education level of parents." The literature suggests that the educational level of parents is an indicator of both social and economic class as well as a prominent factor in the issue of retention. The group of participants

included one participant whose parents had not graduated from high school. Several participants had parents with high school diplomas and some college. Several participants had two parents that had completed an undergraduate degree. Six participants had at least one parent with graduate school training.

To ascertain their interest and willingness to participate, these 10 women were contacted by telephone. After a more detailed description of the requirements of the study, all 10 potential participants agreed to participate. Participants were then scheduled for their first individual interview. Participants, after agreeing to participate in the study, were also told that they would be given a \$50.00 gift certificate at the end of the study to thank them for their time and full participation.

Data Collection

Data collection focused on three techniques: (a) demographic survey, (b) individual interviews, and (c) a focus group interview. The goal of this study was to elicit and describe the experiences of a specific group of individuals in such a way as to inform and increase the knowledge base associated with African American women students.

Preliminary Efforts

Prior to beginning this study, an informed consent form for the individual interviews and the focus group interview were developed and approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee. See Appendix A for a copy of the two forms. Interview guides were also developed for the two individual interviews. These guides were also reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee and are listed in Appendix C.

An initial draft of interview questions was suggested by the literature and a previous study by the researcher. Committee members, a qualitative research professor and several colleagues reviewed the draft of possible interview questions and provided constructive comments and suggestions for the final slate of questions.

Individual Participant Interviews

Interviewing is a technique that is particularly valuable in obtaining an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of others (Kale, 1993). Major sources that guided the conducting of the individual interviews included Seidman (1991) and Thompson, Locander & Pollio (1989). Two types of individual interviews were chosen for this study. The initial interview with each participant was a phenomenological interview. A phenomenological interview is an open-ended interview centered on one primary question. The goal of this

type of interview is to obtain first-person description of an aspect of human experience that serves as a resource for understanding of human phenomenon (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). In essence, the participant is asked to reconstruct her experience and the meaning the experience had for her (Seidman, 1991).

The second interview conducted with each participant was an ethnographic interview. The ethnographic interview is more structured than the phenomenological interview, yet dialogic and open-ended (Spradley, 1979). The ethnographic interview may be used to look more closely into the meaning of an experience depicted in the phenomenological interview (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). The ethnographic approach helps to bring clarity and fullness to the phenomenological narrative. In this study, the ethnographic interview was used to further explore specific topics addressed by the participants in the phenomenological interview.

Individual interviews were conducted at Heritage University. All individual interviews were conducted within a six week period of time. Individual interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. Time and location of the interviews were chosen by the participant in order to provide as comfortable of a setting as possible. All interviews were audio-taped with the consent of the participant and according to the guidelines of the Human Subjects Committee. Audio equipment was checked immediately prior to each interview.

The use of audiotapes assist in insuring accurate recording and transcribing of data as well as added to the internal reliability of data collection (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

The Phenomenological Interview

The early moments of the first meeting with each participant were used for formal introductions and casual conversation. Participants were then re-introduced to the purpose of the study. Participants were given a copy of the Informed Consent Form to read and sign. The researcher fielded questions about the study and the Informed Consent Form. All participants were told there were no right or wrong answers and they did not have to participate and could drop out of the study at any time. Participants signed the form and agreed to be audiotaped. Participants then chose a pseudonym and recorded it on the Informed Consent Form. This form served as the only record of the identity of the participant and, as required by Human Subjects, is under lock and key with access limited to the researcher. These precautions assured a minimal risk to the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of responses.

To formally begin the first interview, the participant was asked if she was ready. Upon receiving a positive reply, the audiotape recorder was turned on. The objective of the first interview (and the phenomenological interview methodology) was to gain an understanding of what each

participant considered central in her experience of being a Black female on a predominantly White campus. Therefore, using the interview guide, the one phenomenological question asked of each participant for the first interview was: "Tell me about the experience of being a student at Heritage University?"

During the first interview, the researcher listened carefully, made notes of participant's body language and gestures. The researcher occasionally prompted the participant or asked for the definition of some term or phrase in order to interpret the meaning intended by the participant. The researcher attempted to make no comments or reveal any overt emotions in an effort not to influence participants. However, the researcher did occasionally laugh with participants, though she tried to limit reactions to smiles and affirmative nods.

At the conclusion of the first interview, the recorder was turned off. Informal dialogue resumed and the participant was requested to schedule the time and location of the second interview. The participant was thanked and escorted from the meeting area. Immediately after the conclusion of the meeting, the researcher recorded impressions of the participant and the interview.

After the 10 initial interviews were complete, the researcher used the interview notes to devise a set of question for the second interview with each participant.

The Ethnographic Interview

The second interview employed the ethnographic approach. The major distinction between an ethnographic and phenomenological interview is that there is more direction provided by the researcher in the ethnographic interview. The researcher has questions about specific topics in the ethnographic format. For this study, the ethnographic interview questions flowed from the previous phenomenological interview and a review of the literature.

The second interview was conducted in much the same manner as the initial interview. Each interview lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and was audiotaped to insure accuracy. See Appendix C for the interview guide for the ethnographic interview.

The Focus Group Interview

According to Morgan (1988) the focus group is an explicit use of group interaction that produces data and insights that would be less accessible without group interaction. Triangulating focus groups with individual interviews provides the researcher and participants the opportunity to clarify areas in which there are several viewpoints and to explore issues that have come up during preliminary analysis (Morgan, 1988).

The final interview session for the participants was a focus group interview in which all participants were brought

together to expand on and delve further into interpretation of results from the earlier interviews. To accommodate the hectic schedules of the participants, the focus group was held on campus, early one evening, several weeks prior to the end of the term. A two hour timeframe was allowed for the focus group session.

Prior to the arrival of the participants, the room was made ready by assembling the proper number of chairs around a large table, setting up a easel with paper pad, and setting up and testing the recording equipment. Light refreshments were also provided.

As the participants arrived, they were greeted at the door and offered refreshments. When all participants had arrived and casual conversation had tapered, the researcher opened the session by welcoming everyone and reviewing the purpose and goal of the meeting. In order to insure anonymity and confidentiality, participants were asked to sign a separate Informed Consent Form specifically for the focus group interview. The Informed Consent Form stated that participants would not discuss the focus group meeting or the participants involved with anyone else. This was done to insure the anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of responses. See Appendix A for a copy of the focus group informed consent form.

The focus group members were then asked to comment on a series of preliminary questions and findings from the

individual interviews. For a list of topics discussed during the focus group see Appendix D. Each member of the group was given an opportunity to comment on each topic. Additional information and comments were recorded on the pad, held by the easel, so that each member of the group could comment on the responses of others.

The focus group lasted two hours. After formal discussion had ended, the participants were verbally thanked and praised for their efforts and given a \$50.00 gift certificate for their participation. Many of the participants stayed afterwards to informally continue the discussion and to mingle with the other members of the group.

Data Analysis

A researcher must enter the research study, particularly the data analysis phase, with a so-called "clean slate" (Rowan, 1981). This is the primary reason for the bracketing interviews conducted with the researcher prior to data collection (see section on assumptions, limitations, and biases in chapter 1). The researcher must come to the transcript data prepared to let the data "breathe and speak for itself" (Seidman, 1991).

Initial Analysis

To accomplish the purpose of this study two different types of data analysis were utilized. The first part of the

data analysis was deductive in nature centering on the demographic survey information collected from the participants. This data was used to gain insight into the demographic make up of the upperlevel African American women student population at Heritage University and to detect demographic similarities and differences between the participants. The second type of data analysis used was inductive in nature and centered on interview data.

The inductive data analysis was an on-going process. It began with the initial gathering of information and ended long after data collection was completed. For this study, analytic inductive processes were used to analyze data gathered from individual interviews, interview notes, the focus group discussion and the researcher's journal.

The task of analyzing data from the first individual interviews began immediately after the interview with each participant. Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible, usually within 24 hours. The initial analysis included the noting of topics the participant chose to discuss during the phenomenological interview. The transcripts were read and reread for themes, concepts and patterns. These themes were recorded and used to refine the set of questions for the second individual interview.

Interview notes were initially analyzed in an attempt to become more familiar with the participants. Participant gestures, physical characteristics and personal information

gleaned from casual conversation, demographic survey and the interview assisted the interviewer in becoming acquainted with participants.

The second interview was initially analyzed in much the same way as the first in order to prepare for the focus group interview. An analysis was done for categories, themes and concepts specific to each of the questions asked.

The focus group interview served to further explore and confirm the categories, themes and concepts that emerged from the initial data analysis. The recommendations of Morgan (1988) served as a guide for analyzing data confirmed and expanded by the focus group. Analyzing of focus group data required that the group be the fundamental unit of analysis. Since the focus group in this case was used to clarify and confirm previous results, an ethnographic summary was determined the most appropriate methodology for analysis.

Secondary Analysis

The intense two month period of data collection and initial data analysis was followed by a six week hiatus. This time was used to unwind from the process to allow the secondary analysis to begin with a clear mind and a focused purpose.

The secondary analysis was guided primarily by the recommendations of Seidman (1991) on interview data analysis. The secondary phase of data analysis began much like the

first, by reading through all the individual interviews. This process was somewhat easier this time, as the researcher was aided by the context of the focus group discussion. The researcher then read the interviews and searched for themes and patterns. Next, excerpts were marked that reflected the themes and patterns identified. The researcher then searched the excerpts from all participants for patterns and connections among the themes.

These excerpts were also examined for language and phrases that characterized or described a theme or pattern. The words and phrases were used as the beginning set of labels or categories to begin depicting connections and interrelated themes. Finally, taxonomies were constructed and connections among the experiences of the participants were articulated.

Sharing Interview Data

In conjunction with the secondary phase of analysis, three colleagues engaged in qualitative research, served as "extra eyes" and reviewed several of the interviews. Names, places and any identifying label in the interviews were altered to protect the anonymity of the participants. These colleagues independently read three sets of interviews and noted themes, patterns and significant excerpts.

The researcher then met with each of the colleagues to exchange and discuss findings. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to confirm themes and patterns as well as

acknowledge and discuss themes and patterns initially overlooked. Additionally, this step assisted in enlarging and validating the data analysis process. Discussion with these colleagues also provided an opportunity to discuss potential categories and taxonomies to help organize the data. The comments of these three colleagues were very important to this study, for they aided the researcher in remaining grounded in the data, as well as adding to the reliability of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In phenomenological research the emphasis is on the meaning people give to their lived experiences (Manen, 1990). As noted previously, the purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into the meaning and perceptions Black women attribute to their collegiate experiences at a predominantly White university. This discussion presents findings from the analysis of the survey data and interview data. It should be noted that all personal and proper names utilized are pseudonyms. For example the name Heritage University was substituted for the name of the university the participants attended. This discussion begins with information from the demographic summary about those students who responded to the survey and those invited to participate more formally in this study.

The summary of survey data is followed by individual portraits of each of the 10 women chosen to participate in the interview portion of this study. Finally, the findings of the individual interviews and focus group are presented. The researcher, through inductive analysis processes, used a taxonomy approach to organize information. The findings are organized under two categories representing the meaning

participants convey through the stories of their collegiate experiences: (a) expectations, (b) the road to success.

Student Demographics

In order to identify potential participants for this study, student addresses were obtained for all African American women at Heritage University who were full-time juniors or seniors in the spring of 1994, of traditional age and who had only attended Heritage University. As previously noted, of the 126 potential respondents, 32 students completed the demographic survey in response to the invitation to participate in the study. The following demographic profile of the 32 respondents indicates the diversity of African American women attending Heritage University.

The respondents included 16 juniors and 16 seniors, all were between the ages of 19 and 23. One student was married while 31 students were single. Twenty-four (75%) participants were from the same state in which Heritage is located. Three (9%) students reported being from other southern states. One respondent was from the northeast; two participants were from the midwest. Fourteen (44%) of the students attended predominantly White high schools. Four (12%) students attended ethnically mixed high schools, and 14 (44%) students attended predominantly Black High Schools.

Twenty-eight of the 32 students (87%) resided in one of the many residence halls of Heritage University. This

proportion was high compared to the number of White juniors and seniors living on campus. For the 1993-1994 school year, Heritage accommodated approximately 7,000 students on campus. These 7,000 slots were primarily filled by freshmen and sophomores.

Research has suggested that parents' education may be an important factor in retention and persistence of college students. In order to interview participants whom reflected a wide range of social and economic status, the educational level of parents was part of the demographic survey. Responses of participants indicated a wide range of education levels for both their mothers and fathers. Table 4.1 portrays the range of education for both parents.

Traditionally, women have tended to cluster in certain majors. However, the women responding to the demographic survey were dispersed throughout 10 of the 11 colleges at Heritage University. Table 4.2 depicts the diversity the diversity of the academic pursuits of these respondents. Participants chosen for the interview portion of this study represented nine of the 11 colleges at the university.

Participants Profiles

The 10 participants for this study were chosen for their diverse characteristics in four primary areas: (1) academic major, (2) hometown, (3) type of high school attended, and

Table 4.1

Parents' Educational Level

	Number of Students Reporting Mothers' Educational Level	Number of Students Reporting Fathers' Educational Level
Less than High School	3	3
High School Graduate	8	8
Some College	9	5
College Graduate	8	7
Graduate Training	4	7
Don't Know	0	2
TOTAL	32	32

Table 4.2

**College or School at Heritage University in which
Respondents were Enrolled**

College or School	Number of Students Enrolled
Agriculture	1
Architecture	0
Business	4
Communication	4
Education	4
Engineering	6
Human Ecology	1
Liberal Arts - Humanities	3
Liberal Arts - Science	1
Liberal Arts - Social Sciences	5
Nursing	3
TOTAL	32

(4) educational level of parents. The following pages attempt to present an individual description of each participant and highlight the four areas listed above. Additional individual characteristics are included to distinguish the personality of each participant.

Adidas

Adidas chose her pseudonym from a nickname she picked up many years ago at summer camp. She came to Heritage from a nearby small town but has developed an international perspective. She is very interested in people with backgrounds very different than her own. Adidas was energetic and enthusiastic about people and culture. Because she was very much into ethnicity and culture, Adidas considered herself "a bit of a radical" on the campus. She found most of the students on campus politically and culturally apathetic. She, on the other hand, "loves to wear her African wraps" and talk about political issues.

Adidas was gregarious and thought provoking. I felt our interviews could have lasted for days. Her energy was contagious. Her thirst for knowledge about African American culture was infectious. She spoke very quickly with large elaborate gestures.

Originally a humanities major, Adidas had switched to microbiology. She recently became engaged to an international student from Poland. Adidas loved to travel and had spent

December in the homeland of her boyfriend. She hoped to spend the summer working and learning in Africa.

Christine

Christine was from a large city on the west side of the state. She wore a big smile, jewelry, and long fingernails. She was well spoken, calm and enjoyed a good laugh. She attended a predominantly Black high school and was recruited by Heritage University. After talking with a Heritage recruiter and several agriculture students, Christine thought she might be interested in forestry. Coming from the big city and growing up with "only one tree in the yard," Christine found the first semester at Heritage as an agriculture major difficult.

"...I left high school as a top student...I came to Heritage, and started off in agriculture and was lost in just about every class I went in. I had so many classmates that had [grown] up on farms, that knew a lot of the things about agriculture that were just so foreign to me, I mean they just caught on to so many things so quickly, and I just got totally lost."

Despite a rough start, Christine has been successful as a student and as an intern for the National Forestry Service.

Christine lived in an apartment near campus. She occasionally volunteered at the local YMCA. She was also a member of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS). She had developed strong relationships with many of the faculty members in agriculture. She was a regular guest speaker at area elementary and high

schools, speaking on the environment and opportunities available in the field of forestry.

Eunice

Eunice chose her pseudonym for its humor. She was from a nearby community approximately 30 minutes from the university. Eunice was a tall slender women with large eyes and a long narrow face with high cheekbones. She was half African American and half Caucasian. She was adopted by a White family as an infant. Eunice is one of 10 children, half of which are adopted. "Needless to say, we're Catholic." Eunice's eyes lit up and a smile graced her face when she talked of her family.

Eunice went to a predominantly White, private high school. Her parents are alumni of Heritage. Her father was a pediatrician and her mother was an attorney. Growing up, she always knew she was going to college. At Heritage, Eunice was active in several campus programming groups early in her university career and was a member of the SGA Freshman Council. She was also one of the lead characters in a locally written university play. "I had to kiss this guy in the play, in front of my mother, father and my brothers and sisters!"

Eunice was very job-oriented at this point in her academic career. Having completed several co-op internships as a finance major, she had a job waiting for her on the west coast after graduation. With her new career, Eunice said she

was not interested in getting married or a family at this time and couldn't see being interested in it in the near future.

Janice

Janice was from the west side of the state. Janice was a serious student as well as a warm and genuine individual. She appeared, in many ways, to be the most interesting academic success story among the participants interviewed. Neither of Janice's parents graduated from high school. Yet, just recently, after surviving three years at the university, Janice was admitted to Heritage University's School of Nursing program. She considered it one of her greatest successes in life.

During Janice's three years she had taken out students loans, received Pell grant support, and had participated in the college work-study program. Janice's work-study job had not only provided her with money but with a mentor as well. Janice's boss was an administrator at Heritage and an African American woman. In addition to her boss, Janice had several mentors at the university that have supported her in many ways: "They've helped me a lot, like we talk about things that bother me, discuss issues, go to lunch, things like that."

Janice, like her father who was working on his GED and was a part-time minister among other things, found time to be heavily involved in the community. She was a "Big Sister" to

one of the children in her church. She was a member of a university volunteer group that had traveled to different parts of the country to help hurricane and flood victims and she spent time each week assisting the local Job Corps program.

Janice was also dedicated to bringing more minorities to the university and assisted Heritage by helping out with the minority phone-a-thon and university opportunity programs for minority students.

JoAnne

JoAnne was a very tall and slender pre-medicine and communications major. She was a senior and attended the university on a full communications scholarship. Even though she was an "A" student, she described her time at the university in relation to her extracurricular activities. She needed persistent prompting before she would talk about her academic experiences.

JoAnne was from a small city located in the middle part of the state. Both her mother and father were highly involved in higher education as a professor and administrator, respectively. JoAnne spent most of her time at college involved in gymnastics and cheerleading.

JoAnne was one of the few participants who did not live on campus. She had opted for a small apartment with a roommate on the edge of campus. In addition to gymnastics and

cheerleading, JoAnne volunteered at a local hospital and hoped to enter medical school in the fall of 1995.

Karyn

Karyn was a tall, dark-skinned woman with long fingernails and matching outfits accented with lots of jewelry. After I complimented her attire, she waved her long slender arms in the air and exclaimed "I love clothes." Karyn was the youngest of five children. Her parents were older, retired and recently divorced.

At the urging of her two engineering brothers, she had spent the previous three years as an engineering major at Heritage. Her greatest satisfaction during that time was her affiliation and work with the National Society of Black Engineers. However, recently Karyn decided to follow her heart and made the move to the College of Human Ecology with an emphasis in retail and commercial science.

Karyn had been active in a dozen organizations including student government, the National Society of Black Engineers and the NAACP. She also volunteered throughout the university and the local community (i.e. Campus Recycling program, Peer Mentor program and Habitat for Humanity). Additionally, Karyn worked this past summer for several U. S. senators.

Kelly

Kelly was originally from the midwest. Her mother was previously employed by the military and they have lived in several different parts of the country. Kelly was a short, jovial, round-faced, energetic woman. She married a year or so after entering the university. Besides her husband, Kelly's family included a soon be one-year-old daughter. Kelly wanted the best for herself and her family and believed education and hard work would provide it.

Kelly had a humorous attitude about life and school and talked easily of her expectations of and experiences at the university. Kelly also talked about her daughter. She wanted her to be well educated and independent when she grew up: "You need to be independent...I'm trying to make her strong and I'm doing a good job...." Kelly also wanted her little girl to be a part of her story, so she chose the pseudonym "Donna" for her daughter.

Kelly was avidly recruited by Yale and Illinois State University, but chose Heritage. "Heritage just worked harder" to get her to come to the university. As a political science major, she was usually one of the "only Blacks" in her classes. Kelly received an academic scholarship of \$1000 a year from the university and worked at a local fast food restaurant 30 hours a week to support her family and her educational efforts.

Despite her hectic life, Kelly was extremely organized and mentioned several times during the interviews her obsessions with being on time and being prepared. When asked about these obsessions, Kelly stated "I'm one of those types!"

Nana

Nana was from the west side of the state and attended an ethnically mixed high school. She was in her third year at the university. She was an outgoing individual who played intramurals and was active in several volunteer organizations.

Nana was from a dysfunctional family and was legally under the guardianship of her best friend's parents. She was an "A" student in high school and her guardians wanted and encouraged her to go to college. She came to the university with her best friend. They have roomed together since coming to Heritage.

Nana was also recently admitted to the School of Nursing at Heritage University. She believed she would major in Neonatal Care.

"I would like to work with babies. I think that out of everybody in the world, babies are the people less likely to hurt you."

Nana's goal beyond her undergraduate degree and first job, was to get her master and Ph.D. degrees in hospital administration.

Rachel

Laughing, Rachel described herself with the words "happy, happy, joy, joy." After floating in and out of different courses for the last three years she had decided to pursue a degree in community health. Rachel was from a nearby southern state, where her mother still lived. She most often appeared in lots of jewelry, jeans, flannel or t-shirt and her "beeper" attached at her waist.

Rachel had been very active in residential life at the university. Rachel wanted to be a resident assistant in her dorm. She saw herself as a counselor to her peers: "the person everyone comes to talk about their problems." She had served on the residence hall council and spear-headed food and clothes drives in the dorms.

Rachel spent a lot of time laughing at herself and me during the interviews. She usually had a humorous comment about every topic she addressed. Before Rachel spoke of how wonderful the people at the library were in assisting her with her homework, she mused:

"Back across the street, you know, that big building right over there. Not the old one with the dust and mice and stuff - that one - I don't like that one! But the new one with the real bright, pretty lights! And automatic doors that us lazy people can open with just a stand on. Okay, you know! Anyway, let's see, um, the staff there is excellent."

Rachel came to Heritage University after spending a couple of summers with relatives who lived near the university: "...I'd visit at the campus, and I thought that it

had a whole lot to offer me." She also received scholarships and financial aid incentives to attend Heritage University.

Thelma

Thelma saw herself as different from most students. She came to Heritage on a full scholarship. She originally took business classes, but found them "boring" and they gave her a "headache." Loving to read, she switched to liberal arts and the college honors program. Thelma enjoyed classes in French and English. She wrote on her demographic survey that she loved:

"analyzing literature in French and Francophone societies and applying them to the life of 20thc. [20th century] African American women by writing my own stories."

Thelma had little trouble adjusting to Heritage University. Many of her friends from the west part of the state came to Heritage. She knew many of the students in her dorm before coming to college. As a freshman, Thelma and her friends immediately became involved in the Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity and the sunshine society.

Since her second semester, Thelma had a private room in "the most popular dorm." Thelma's dormitory room reflected her interests. The walls were filled with posters bearing French cliches and her bookshelves were filled with art and how-to books.

Thelma loved to travel and planned to spend a year abroad, paid in part by her scholarship. She hoped to spend

her year abroad based in France while visiting as many nearby countries as possible.

Findings of Participant Interviews

The following section of this chapter describes and discusses the findings of this study. These findings emerged from inductive analysis of interview transcripts and were confirmed and expanded through the use of a focus group interview with all participants. Two major categories arose from the interview data: (a) expectations and (b) the road to success. Within each of these categories, themes emerged. As shown in Table 4.3, these categories and themes reflect the sum of the expressed expectations and experiences of the participant group.

Expectations

When asked about the experiences of being students at Heritage University, many of the participants began their stories with the initial expectations and fears they had about going to college. As their stories progressed it became apparent that participants used their expectations as a prologue for conveying the meaning of their actual experiences. In essence, the participants used initial expectations of college as an introduction and reference point for the meaning they associated with their actual collegiate

TABLE 4.3
Taxonomy of Findings

<u>EXPECTATIONS</u>	<u>ROAD TO SUCCESS</u>
Fitting In	Challenges
Community of Blackness	-Meeting and making friends -Finding an academic home -Finding the Blackness
Getting an Education	Support and Connection -Influences of Orientation -Mentors -Academic support services -Internships -Activities and organizations -Forming of community -Conflicting campus climate Expanding Sense of Self -Knowledge in chosen major -Understanding of cultures -Sense of self through others

experience. A typical response to "Tell me about your experiences at Heritage University" was, "Well what I expected was...."

Participants found it helpful to start at the beginning, relating their experiences in a chronological order. What they thought about during their senior year of high school, while deciding where to attend college, was a natural "beginning" point for most participants. As Eunice stated, "I guess I need to start near the end of high school or in high school."

Initial expectations conveyed by participants suggested three themes: (a) fitting in, (b) a community of Blackness and (c) getting an education. These three themes provided an insightful backdrop into the meaning participants attached to their collegiate experience.

Fitting In

Participants used the term "fitting in" with ease and frequency. They indicated that before coming to Heritage their freshman year they worried about "fitting in." Specifically, most participants worried about finding and making new friends. Participants expressed this concern in much the same way. They wanted to find others like themselves with similar interests. They wanted to be part of a group. Participants wanted a group of college friends with which to talk and do things.

Rachel expressed her fear of not being able to make friends at college. "I worried about not having any friends. Not knowing anybody." Janice expressed similar concerns. "My two basic fears were the large classes, and not knowing anybody." Adidas relayed her expectations of fitting in with a sense of adventure rather than fear.

...I wanted to know what it was like to be "in." I wanted to be like those people who, you know, who would you would have somebody to go wherever you wanted to go. You know, you really didn't have to go alone...you didn't have to eat alone, when you go to some meeting or something, you didn't have to be alone, and, you know, you'd always have somebody hanging on your shoulder, and to talk to, and ... I wanted to have a group to be in....I was just going to wonder around until I found my place.

Fitting in was the primary expectation of the majority of the participants. Much of their initial anxiety about college centered on finding and fitting in with a new group of friends. This suggested that participant concerns about "fitting in" related some of the anxiety they felt about the social expectations of their collegiate experience. As Eunice stated, "I was worried about fitting in. Basically, that's about it."

A Community of Blackness

Participants in this study expected to find a community of Black people with interests and values similar to theirs at Heritage University. Participants also expected that this "community of Blackness" would welcome and accept them into their circle. They expected to find the community supportive and helpful in negotiating a predominantly White university. They expected the community to be a place to find friends and information on resources, classes, and social events. One participant, in relating her expectations, reflected the sentiments of the group:

I came from a school that was ninety-seven, eight, nine percent White, and I thought, Oh, there's going to be more Black people. I'll get to talk to them. And, you know, since there really won't be that many of us, even though there will still be more, you know, we'll bond, and all this kind of stuff....You know, I was thinking that because there were so many Black students in my dorm, you know, I would have people to relate with, which, you know, is good.

Additionally, participants expected that the Black community at Heritage University would provide them with an opportunity to further explore and practice their culture. One participant thought that the other Blacks at Heritage would "accept" her and understand where she was "coming from."

Another participant said she "expected it (the Black Community) to be close knit."

In essence, participants felt that this Black community would provide them with the people and resources that they would need to survive in college. They expected and felt that

this Black community would be an important part of their college education, providing them with support and understanding in a predominantly White environment.

Getting an Education

A third theme that was primary in the expectations of participants focused on (a) opportunities associated with a college education and (b) the college classroom. First, many participants were excited about the new opportunities that a college education would bring them. Independence and the ability to take care of themselves and their families were the meanings the participants attached to getting a college education. Kelly's expectations were typical of the group:

I expected to do really well, I expected my life to change dramatically, I expected to learn a lot and become more independent, I expected to have this vast, enormous knowledge that I have not quite accumulated yet!

Participants expressed the belief that education was an important part of becoming independent and self-sufficient. They did not perceive or foresee anyone but themselves being responsible for their future well-being. Kelly, with a husband and child, voiced her view on the value of education: "I'm on my own...I've got to make ends meet...and I just have to do it for myself."

In a more in depth perspective, the meaning participants associated with independence centered on economic independence. As one participant put it; "I don't want to

live from paycheck to paycheck like my parents." For many of the participants, economic independence meant taking care of aging parents and helping siblings through college as well as being financially self-sufficient.

Participants also believed that trying to obtain an education would provide new classroom opportunities as well as new demands. They believed that material covered in courses would be much more thought provoking, in depth and more difficult than material covered in high school. Adidas thought she would "get to explore certain topics and ideas, get some liberals against the conservatives...and it was going to be real good and juicy...."

Others participants were anxious about the difficulty of coursework and the size of classes. Christine, like several of her peers, "expected the subjects, the courses, to be just a little bit harder and a little more in depth" than her high school courses. Janice expected to be in large classes where she would be "just a number" to her instructors and professors. Kelly expected coursework to be more difficult: "I mean I heard some things about college being hard, but, you know, I thought it can't be that hard if you really try....If you apply yourself, you know."

Discussion on Expectations

The expectational responses of the participants are reflected in various areas of research associated with higher

education and Black perspective. Like the social integration aspects of both Tinto's (1975, 1987) and Bean's (1980) models, the initial concerns of participants centered on fitting in and making friends at Heritage University. Participants expressed the need to find and make friends so they would have someone with which to talk and do things. This fear of being alone or isolated is characteristic of the literature associated with minority student retention (Suen, 1983; Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1986; Allen, 1987; Sanders, 1987; and Fleming, 1988).

The expectation of the existence of a Black community at Heritage University by the participants was indicative of the literature associated with Black feminist thought. For example, Harding (1987) describes the Afrocentric perspective as one in which a person is defined through contact, dialogue and relationships to others; relying on close ties to one another and the community for affirmation and validation. The expressed expectation of the participants that the Black community would provided them with information and support is indicative of the writings and research of Joseph and Lewis (1981). They suggest that Black women's relationships have served as safe havens, provided survival information, as well as furnish Black women with friends and mentors.

The expectation of getting a college education for the participants in this study meant the possibility of an independent and self-sufficient life. A college education

also meant the ability to economically contribute to the success and welfare of others, especially family members. Robinson (1985) and Collins (1990) have suggested through an Afrocentric worldview, that African American women are raised to be self-reliant and independent while caring for the community. For the participants in this study, the Afrocentric view seems to include educational attainment and economic success.

The expectations of the participants were similar to, yet somewhat different from, the typical entering college student. Research as well as common sense suggest that most traditional age students face the need and challenge of finding new friends and fitting in to the college environment. However, most students attend an institution where they are the majority. These majority students do not expect to have to look beyond their residence hall floor to find a community of their peers. They do not expect to find a campus building where their images are not adequately represented in the classroom.

In this day and time, the majority of traditional age students come to college in search of financial success; however, the participants in this study not only seek economic independence but also the ability to take care of themselves and others. The ties to the family and greater community are apparent in their goals and are inherent in the Black feminist perspective.

The Road to Success

The second category inherent in the perceptions of the participants was their impressions and meanings associated with their actual collegiate experience. Participants were hesitant to put a definite label (i.e. good or bad) on their experiences at Heritage University; however, they were eager and excited about the opportunity to tell their stories. Inductive analysis of the collegiate experiences of the participants gave rise to three major themes: (a) challenges, (b) support and connection and (c) expanding sense of self.

Challenges

Participants often expressed their collegiate experiences in the form of stories about challenges that they had met and overcome. In addition, the stories of participants were often told with feelings of excitement, pride and success. As one participant talked about her prosperous experiences, she gestured her success by patting herself on her back. As a result, the meaning participants attached to their collegiate experiences were shaped and influenced by the challenges that they had faced and successfully overcome.

Meeting and Making Friends. The most frequent and consistent theme related by the participants was the challenge of meeting and making new friends. The women interviewed spoke of the challenge of getting to know other college

students as well as finding, interacting with and being accepted by a larger group of friends. As JoAnne noted, "for me the biggest adjustment was, you know, being away from home, and not really having any close friends coming to the same school." Christine best expressed the notion of meeting and learning to interact with a large group of new friends:

My biggest challenge was, I guess, learning to get along with a big group of people. When I first came to school I met a lot of girls on my floor. All through high school I had one best friend and I mean we hung together, in and out. That was just about it. I mean I had other friends and stuff, but as far as a friend that I did stuff with, you know, and I always talked to her. I had that one just really one basic friend, and then I came to school and they have all the freshmen mixers...I guess there are maybe about eight of us, that just really were together. We group in the hallways, you know, we walked to class together, we do stuff together.

The majority of the participants related that they had found campus organizations a good way to meet and make new friends. Participants were or had been involved with campus-wide organizations including the student government association, residence hall councils, service sororities and fraternities and social greek organizations. Students were involved in a variety of activities sponsored by Heritage University. Several students played intramural sports, swam or took fitness classes with the women on their residence hall floor. Several participants worked on campus and had formed social groups with their work mates.

Although some participants related difficulty in making new friends, all eventually experienced success in forming new

friendships. One participant noted her success: "[I] met a lot of people, made a lot of friends. I did better than I thought I would. I was impressed with myself."

Finding an Academic Home. It was understandable that fitting into the academic setting was something of a challenge for participants. To participants in this study, finding an academic home meant feeling good about themselves, their peers and the faculty within an academic major. Additionally, participants related the need to become connected and comfortable with their chosen academic field as part of finding a home within the University. For participants finding an academic home was accomplished in several ways.

Learning to interact with others in the academic setting was primarily revealed in participants asking peers and faculty for assistance with course materials. Initially participants felt intimidated and uncomfortable seeking assistance. However, participants were amazed at how receptive and helpful students and faculty were when approached for assistance. Nana wished that she would have approached her professors sooner; "I think if I had of known how to go to my professors and just sit down and tell them the problems I was having...I would have gotten a better start." Christine found it a challenge to approach her peers for help with agriculture classes:

So coming to school and then having to start asking people myself. "Could you help me?" This was kind

of a challenge for me, because I had never had to do that before. After a while you know you have to get some help or fail.

Several participants immediately connected with students and faculty in their chosen academic major. For example, JoAnne found that the College of Communications provided a monthly dinner meeting for new scholarship students and department faculty. These efforts helped JoAnne quickly meet other communication students and faculty as well as helped her feel comfortable with others associated with her chosen major.

Some participants found it more difficult to find an academic home. Thelma, who was enrolled in the College Honors program, was originally miserable in the College of Business. Thelma eventually found a comfortable home and connection in the College of Liberal Arts:

I just didn't fit in, in the College of Business....I am definitely a liberal arts person....I feel like literature is applicable to anybody--that if you ever want to know what a society thinks--in goods and value--just read their books!

Karyn summed up the importance of finding an academic home. After several unhappy years in the College of Engineering, she found a home in the College of Human Ecology.

[I] found a major, grades started going up....The College [of Human Ecology] has a sense of family...you don't feel afraid to talk to your teachers or your advisors, and, they're always asking, you know, "How are you doing?"

In essence, two factors emerged central to participants' successfully connecting with the academic side of Heritage University. In order to feel good about themselves and their

academic major, participants had to learn to feel comfortable interacting with other students and faculty members. Secondly, participants needed to find a major field of study they felt connected with personally as well as intellectually.

Finding the Blackness. Participants felt that finding a place or space within the University that represented their own culture was important in maintaining a link with their culture, other Blacks and themselves. Prior to coming to Heritage University, many of the participants expressed excitement and/or concern about finding and interacting with other Blacks on campus.

While the participants in this study were disappointed in the lack of a defined Black cultural community, participants spoke of finding African American friends and community through the residence halls and campus organizations. Those participants who lived in the residence halls at Heritage quickly met other Black women residents and formed close friendships and communal social groups. However, those commuting to Heritage had a more difficult time meeting other African Americans students. Adidas, who did not live on campus her freshman year had trouble meeting and making friends with other Black students:

You feel like nobody's there for you, you know...not only did I not fit in with the White students, I didn't fit in with the Black students.

Student clubs, organizations and activities provided all participants opportunities to meet other students. Karyn found that belonging to the campus chapter of the NAACP and the National Society of Black Engineers gave her a network to meet other African American students and professionals. Christine met other African American college students by joining and attending local meetings of the Natural Resources Management Organization for minorities in agriculture.

Most of the participants joined organizations and activities sponsored by the Black Cultural Center (BCC) at one time or another during their college career, although most participants were no longer active in the organization. Eunice enjoyed her time with one committee associated with the BCC:

[The] Black Cultural Programming Committee was a real good experience. I got to work on different projects and things like that. I was treasurer, so--a lot of responsibility and we had a few harsh words said among members, but for the most part, it was a real good experience. I just think it helped me fit in and feel more comfortable with the Black community.

The majority of the participants found some link with the Black community through volunteer work in the community surrounding Heritage University. Several participants joined area Black churches and supported church volunteer efforts in Black neighborhoods. Some participants gave their time to the local Boys and Girls Club. Several participants volunteered their time to projects geared toward bringing more African

Americans to Heritage University. See Table 4.4 for a listing of volunteer efforts by participants.

Volunteer activities of the participants allowed them to experience "the Blackness" of Heritage University and the local community in a unique way. Not only did it allow them to feel connected to their heritage and culture, but it also allowed them to give something back to people they perceived as very much like themselves.

Discussion of Challenges

The challenges associated with the experiences of the women interviewed were central to the stories related by participants about their collegiate experiences. It is important to note that the challenges that most participants expressed centered on finding and fitting into the University community in a variety of ways. Finding friends, feeling a part of their major and finding a group to relate to in a cultural sense appeared to be an integral part of the initial collegiate success of the participants in this study.

The theme of meeting and making friends is reflected in current writings and research on college students. The challenge of meeting and making new friends is indicative of retention and persistence research in higher education. As

Table 4.4

Volunteer Efforts by Participants

Participant	Volunteer Efforts
Christine	YMCA, Area K-12 schools
Janice	Church volunteer, Job Corps, Campus volunteer program, University minority recruitment programs
JoAnne	University medical center
Karyn	Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Sexual assault & date rape center, Habitat for Humanity, National Political Congress of Black Women
Nana	Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Homeless project, Job Corps, Campus volunteer program, University minority recruiting programs
Rachel	University food drives, clothing drives, peer counseling organization
Thelma	Greek service fraternity, Humane Society

noted previously, research associated with both Tinto's (1975) and Bean's (1980) models have confirmed the notion that making new friends is an important consideration in connecting with the collegiate environment. The participants in this study seem to have overcome the challenge of finding new friends and thus avoided sustained feelings of isolation and alienation reported by several research studies on Black students at predominantly White institutions (Suen, 1983; Allen, 1987; and Fleming, 1988).

Participants also managed to find an academic home. As suggested by the research of Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) and emphasized by Black higher education scholars (Allen, 1987; Fleming, 1988), student contact with faculty, both formally and informally, is an important factor in involving, supporting and retaining students. The women in this study felt more connected with the institution when they had found what they perceived to be in a comfortable and caring academic home.

The research of O'Neale (1986) proposes that extended families, community organizations, and churches have served as important and familiar places of discourse for Black women. The participants in this study overcame the lack of a defined community of Blackness on campus by reaching out to the surrounding community. They joined churches, campus and professional societies and local organizations which provided contact with other African American groups. In the

Afrocentric worldview, these women often chose primarily Black organizations that were reaching out and helping other African Americans, thus following an Afrocentric tradition of care for the Black community (Harding, 1987).

Support and Connection

Heritage University, like many other higher education institutions, had made efforts to recruit African American students, faculty and staff as well as provide support programs and services for African American students. Though most of the participants indicated that they had not had African American professors "in the classroom," many participants had received support from students, faculty and professional staff at Heritage University. Additionally, academic support programs and other student activities have provided support, resources and connection.

Influences of Orientation Programs. During the time when the participants in this study were getting ready to attend college, Heritage University offered several orientation options to incoming students. First, orientation was optional and not required for students enrolling or attending the university. Secondly, African American students who chose to attend an orientation program had the option of attending a typical two-day orientation session designed for all incoming new students or attending an orientation session designed for

African American freshman. Half of the participants chose to attend the orientation session designed specifically for African American students. Several participants chose to attend the regular orientation session and two participants opted not to attend any orientation session.

It was obvious from the interviews that participants had shared their orientation experiences with other students. Participants compared how they felt about "their" orientation program with other orientation sessions. Orientation programs were also a current topic of discussion among Black students at Heritage due to the fact that the African American orientation session had recently been discontinued by the University.

Participants who attended the African American orientation session consistently communicated the perception that they had been able to negotiate the University much better than their African American peers who had attended the standard orientation session. Other participants indicated that they felt that they had learned more about the academic support services and programs available to Heritage University students by attending orientation with other African Americans. Participants believed that the minority orientation session positively influenced their collegiate experiences. Participants indicated that the minority orientation session was where they first began to form social groups.

Mentors. Often interwoven in the stories of participant experiences were references to mentors. While the majority of Heritage University faculty are male and White, it is of interest to note that the majority of participant mentors mentioned by participants were Black and White women. To the participants, these mentors were not only college faculty and staff with wisdom to impart, but valued friends. The majority of the participants had two or more collegiate mentors that they referred to as friends and supporters.

Mentors provided participants with a feeling of support and association with the academic community at Heritage. Participants noted a variety of professionals who had become their mentors. Several mentioned their academic advisor, student affairs staff members and/or their bosses in various departments. Christine, one of the only Black forestry student at Heritage, found the predominantly White faculty on the Agriculture campus to be part of her support network:

I was afraid to talk to them [faculty] at first, you know. I would go, you know, to talk to a couple of them, and I just felt like...I couldn't relate to them, or they wouldn't understand where I was coming from, and now, those same professors, I think I'm probably a whole lot closer to, now. I can go see them with just about anything, call them up on the phone, and tell them, "Look, this is what's going on, I need some help with this...."

Professional staff, from very different areas of campus life, were mentioned by participants as valuable resources. Though not highly involved in the Black Cultural Center where Mr. X is employed, over half of the participants mentioned

this African American student affairs professional as a friend and supporter:

He is always, you know, looking out for me, and I know he looks out for a lot of other students, too. He is always aware of what's going on, in relation to your major, or with you, or he will call you to make sure you're okay, and stuff like that.

Another participant said of this same individual:

He lets me know when there is a job announcement or internship that I might be interested in. He sends us all congratulation notes when we make the dean's list or do something good.

Some participants found friends and supporters in unusual places: two students found a supportive staff member in the financial aid office and one participant noted a woman in the bursar's office.

Some of the participants were matched with one or more mentors at Heritage University through a program offered by the Minority Student Center. Janice's and Kelly's mentor experiences were typical of the group. Janice, like several other participants, was assigned a mentor through the program. Janice's mentor was a White woman from the division of student affairs. Besides supporting her academic endeavors, Janice's mentor occasionally took her to lunch or dinner and helped her raise money to go on a trip to help hurricane victims. They frequently talked on the telephone about classes, friends, family and campus events. Janice saw her mentor as a friend and supporter.

Kelly was mentored by two librarians at Heritage. One was a White woman and the other a Black woman. Kelly's

mentors initially provided academic support by teaching her about the library. Later on, her mentors took her to baseball games, assisted her with registration and helped her negotiate her way around the financial aid office.

Academic Support Services. All participants noted the importance of support services to their success at Heritage University. Some of the participants benefitted from their association with the Black Cultural Center. Most of the Black Cultural Center benefits were in the area of academic support services such as tutoring or referring students to academic centers on campus. Many participants mentioned using the campus Writing Center, the Chemistry Tutorial Center and the Math Tutorial Center. It is of interest to note that participants in this study valued the Black Cultural Center for the academic support services and information it provided. However, the participants seem to have discounted its value in the areas of programming and serving as a cultural center for the African American community. The majority of the participants indicated that the BCC's lack of resources, organization and staff involvement were reasons for their lack of interest.

While the participants indicated some dissatisfaction with the Black Cultural Center, participants raved about the Educational Advancement Program for minority students (EAP) at Heritage University. Eight of the ten participants in this

study were involved in EAP. EAP not only provided resources for academic tutoring and career opportunities, but also supported the students in all areas of campus life. Adidas's experience with EAP was echoed by many of the participants:

I came here, went through EAP and it was like -- when I would talk to my [EAP] advisors they would talk to me, you know, I mean, they wanted to know how I was doing, They wanted to know how I was fitting in, and then, like last year, I went on--to look at some graduate schools...EAP was like the biggest resource for me...

Internships. Several of the students constantly referred to their internship experiences. Participants received internships in several ways including referral from faculty and through their own networking efforts. Participants felt that the intern experience accentuated their academic program as well as provided them with a network of professionals and friends in their chosen field.

Academic internships within their academic major furnished participants with resources and supporters outside the university. Three of the participants took part in one or more academic internships. Eunice believed her internships had given her the courage to reach out and talk with her major professor:

I was pretty intimidated--but-- you know, after my co-op experiences and working with managers, and meeting with vice presidents, I think it was easier for me to relate, to be more at ease with him [major professor].

Christine's internships had provided her with African American friends and mentors from across the country. She believed the experience had made her stronger as a person as well as exposed her to the possibilities associated with the field of forestry.

Forming of Community. As noted previously, the participants in this study found other students to be supportive. The campus residence hall system not only provided students with the opportunity to find and meet other students with similar needs but afforded a context for the forming of community. Participants reported that living in a residence hall allowed them to find friends, supporters, confidants and study partners while furnishing them with a ready made network of individuals who were going through similar adjustments and experiences.

While some participants noted that they didn't fit in at the Minority Student Center, or the Black fraternities or sororities, all participants had positive comments about living in the residence halls at Heritage. In essence, participants seemed to find a "fit" within the residence hall system.

The Black women living on the Heritage campus tended to group together on certain floors in three of the eight residence halls. The participants joined with other African

American students in their residence hall and made themselves a comfortable place, a community of their own:

All the dorms have some kind of community going on...they get to know each other...I'd advise everyone to spend two, maybe even three years in the dorm.

Rachel, who lived in one of the residence hall preferred by African American students, had spent three years in the same dorm. She remarked:

I think of my dorm floor as an organization, because it's like 30, 40 girls, that just hang out....We have the capabilities to do so many different things, because there are so many different girls that live there that have so many different interests....We watch movies together, we do clothes drives...do things with the Boys and Girls Club, and all kinds of things like that.

Several participants indicated that the residence halls were a safe haven and a community of support. Eunice commented, "I found something from the dorm, and it carried me through."

During the focus group interview participants confirmed that dorm life was very important to them. Before coming to Heritage, participants learned through "word of mouth" which dorms the Black students lived in and most participants intentionally signed up to live in those dorms. Participants indicated that the dorm served as a communication network to advertise and let everyone know about Black student activities and events.

Conflicting Campus Climate: Navigating a New Culture.

In relating the experiences of the African American women in

this study, it is essential that the campus climate be described through the voices of the participants. When participants chose to relate either positive or negative experiences, the story most always included their perspective on a particular aspect of the campus environment.

As freshmen, the African American women in this study came to Heritage excited about the diversity they hoped to find. As entering freshmen, participants were familiar with the predominantly White demographics of Heritage University. They believed they would easily cope with and adapt to the campus environment. Participants initially experienced "culture shock" upon arriving for their freshman year. Participants failed to predict the impact of seeing "White faces 24 hours a day."

Some people said if you come from an all White school, then you should be used to it, but Heritage is just really concentrated...really concentrated, it's different. Everything you do, everywhere you go, it's so concentrated.

As they spoke of their experiences, participants disclosed several insights into their perceptions of the campus climate:

I mean I like the institution, it's just the atmosphere, sometimes the people, like the students create all that kind of stuff. You know, some just come from real restricted backgrounds...that's really the problem, they have crazy ideas about Black people.

This is the Black part of campus. This is the White part of campus. I always knew that being Black you weren't accepted at everything. Now I see that I am not accepted at everything here.

Well, the Heritage library is great, it has a lot of stuff, but it's written from an American perspective. Our perspective wasn't there.

Participants did relate some positive aspects of the Heritage University climate. The participants perceived the Minority Student Center, Educational Advancement Programs, and the Black Cultural Programming Committee as initial inroads toward a more diverse and welcoming campus climate for all students. Participants often talked of special events sponsored by the Minority Student Center or the Black Cultural Program Committee that they attended and enjoyed: Eunice related: "I really liked the Boy's Choir of Harlem and the Black student picnic. We had a Black Ball [dance] and it was just awesome."

All participants, at one time or another during their collegiate careers, indicated that they had benefitted from one or more of these programs, special events and services offered by the above organizations. As juniors and seniors, many participants related that one of the things they liked about Heritage University was the opportunity to "meet and get to know a lot of different people from all over the country and the world."

The Classroom. The majority of negative experiences related by participants occurred in the classroom. As suggested by the literature on African American college students, the participants experienced occasional incidents of

isolation, alienation, and racism. Feelings of isolation in the classroom were noted by most participants. Participants felt that these feelings were primarily related to ethnicity. The majority of participants recounted experiences of being "the only Black student" in most of their classes. Several students also felt somewhat isolated being in major fields of study traditionally dominated by White men.

Participants reported feelings of alienation within the classrooms of Heritage University. They often encountered White students who had not yet moved beyond the negative stereotypes associated with race. Some examples of how participants described their perceptions of being alienated included:

I volunteered to write the dialogue, and he goes "well do you know what dialogue is?" I wanted to say "I am here on a four year academic scholarship!" It was little, small problems like that, when people just really question your abilities.

If I'm the only Black student or whatever, if I raise my hand to ask a question, then all of them [White students] look at me like, oh, what a stupid question. I know some of them have these questions too. I'm just the only one who's willing to ask.

I was the only Black student in my class, and so we had to do this skit, and it was on the family, and of course, I always had to be the friend of the family, because I'm not White.

Though participants in this study consistently praised the efforts of faculty members, many of them had at least one unfortunate encounter with a professor. Kelly believed that some professors expected less from her because of her race.

Two other students had professors make racial slurs during class.

The participants had taken classes that they perceived as excellent. The excellent classes mentioned by the participants had one thing in common: the professor allowed and encouraged everyone to voice his/her opinions and perceptions. Several participants remarked that the courses taken in African American studies were some of their better classes. According to one student, "African American studies was the greatest, we got to hear all those stereotypes that we only thought people had."

Discussion on Support and Connection

The second theme associated with participant experiences provided insight into the various opportunities for support and connection experienced by the participants. To participants, feeling supported and connected served as a signal that they were a part of the collegiate experience at Heritage University.

While Heritage is lacking in the number of available Black role models and the presence of an established Black community, opportunities for support and connection existed for these participants. Faculty and staff mentors not only assisted students in navigating the rigors associated with academics, but also provided a personal and meaningful connection to the University.

Academic support services provided participants with a means to achieve academic success. It also furnished participants with access to additional supportive faculty and staff members. Internships allowed several participants to expand their abilities and network beyond Heritage and into the "real world." They provided participants with a connection to their academic major and allowed them to feel more comfortable talking with students and faculty about their interests.

O'Neale (1986) notes that extended families, community organizations and churches have served as important places of discourse for Black women. This seems equally true for the participants in this study. In an Afrocentric manner, Black women students at Heritage University have chosen to live together in communal type groups within the residence hall system. The residence halls have served as a community for the participants to find friends, assist one another, and discuss and validate their feelings and experiences.

Participants have also chosen to support and assist the Black community in the city surrounding Heritage University. Through their volunteer efforts they have become valued members of the Black community surrounding Heritage. This membership has afforded them the opportunity to draw upon their skills and knowledge to encourage and support other African Americans.

Culture defines the way in which a group lives out and makes sense of its circumstances and conditions. Navigating the culture of Heritage University has proven difficult for the majority of the participants. As suggested by Lincoln (1991), higher education's failure to move to a more diverse and welcoming environment has created a social crisis between the majority and minority groups. Participants initial experiences at Heritage included living with "White faces" 24 hours a day, all White sorority and fraternity rush, parts of campus that they felt were off limits to Blacks and a few White peers with "crazy ideas" about Black people.

Participants in this study also experienced several incidents in which faculty and/or peers did not perceive them as capable. Howard and Hammond (1985) have also noted that Black students are sensitive to the fact that faculty members may believe them as less competent. Armstrong-West and de la Teja (1988) have suggested that faculty members often assume that minority students are a result of special admission programs or affirmative action policies.

Research exists on the motives associated with racial incidents within the classroom by majority students. Parker, Archer, and Scott (1992) suggests that the development of self-identity may play an important role in understanding cultural identity and acceptance of self and others. Helms' (1990) White Racial Identity Model also suggests that White persons must overcome one or more aspects of racism in order

to develop a healthy identity. As suggested by student development theorist, perhaps traditional age students are at a critical point in the development of self and are in need of information and guidance in developing a healthy identity and acceptance of self and others. The initial negative experiences of participants were related in part to the existing culture and traditions of Heritage University. As suggested by Fay (1987) and Lincoln (1991), Heritage University needs to research and isolate aspects of its culture that repress and/or prevent opportunities for minority students to fully engage and experience Heritage University.

Expanding Sense of Self

Prior to entering college, participants had high expectations about what they would find at the Heritage University. Not all of those expectations proved true. However, these participants were able to adjust and grow while at Heritage. Participants' stories reflected their impressions on their own personal growth since coming to Heritage. Participants readily articulated several developmental areas that were an important part of their collegiate experience.

Knowledge in a Chosen Major. The participants' concept of new skills obtained as part of the collegiate experience centered primarily on learning in the major field of interest.

Participants conveyed an attitude of pride and voiced confidence in the skills and knowledge they had gained in their chosen field of study. As a student in the College of Agriculture and the field of forestry, Christine's attitude of pride associated with her new skills was evident in her smile and words:

I guess I am so proud of it [my major] because I feel like it is a big accomplishment for me, because it is not exactly what I wanted to do in the first place. Now I love it so much. I know that whatever I do, wherever I go it is a part of me...with it I am going to be helping people out there in the present and the future.

Some participants were more specific about the new skills they had learned. Rachel believed the most valuable skill acquired at Heritage was "learning how to effectively communicate with people." Nana was more philosophical about new skills in her academic major. She noted that the skills associated with her degree would allow her to be in a field where she was happy and where she could help others.

Participants were confident in the skills they had obtained in their chosen field. They believed their college education would provide them and their families with financial security. Though not the phrase used by the participants, delayed gratification defines the way the participants viewed their need to obtain a college education. As Kelly's asserted, "I'm just going to sacrifice three years now. I'm young, I can do it and I'll have a lifetime of benefits from

it." Another student remarked, "you've got to pay the price to get what you want."

Understanding of Cultures. Over half of the participants interviewed indicated that being at Heritage allowed them to meet a wide variety of people from different cultures. During the focus group interview, all participants agreed that they believed Heritage was a lot like "the real world." They believed their collegiate experience was an opportunity to develop the ability to talk with and work with people from different backgrounds. Karyn summed it up best in her individual interview:

It helped me to deal with people of different cultures; a majority of all the cultures, internationally and nationally. So it's like real world situations that I would be working in. I think in the long run, that's why I came here [Heritage]. The community here is a real tough situation. If you can do it here, you can do it anywhere.

Eunice, a very bright and sophisticated finance major, related her most memorable experience about learning to deal with others who were different from herself:

My sophomore year, I had a different roommate. She was a redneck, basically! She loved Hank Williams, Jr., she drank too much, she wore this cowboy hat all the time...but I could deal with her.

Participants interviewed for this study felt that they had learned and adjusted to the culture of Heritage University. While most participants found they had little impact on changing the culture, all felt they had survived and

flourished in a culture very different from their own. As an added benefit, many participants found that interaction with others, who were ethnically and culturally different, helped to understand themselves and their own culture.

Sense of Self. Participants indicated that they had learned a lot about their major while at Heritage, but they also suggested that they had learned a lot about themselves. When asked what they had learned about themselves, two topics were clearly conveyed by the participants. First, maintaining one's own identity and culture in a bicultural environment became important to many of the women in this study as they attempted to balance their culture with that of the "real world." Secondly, the desire to help and serve others was an important personal aspiration to the majority of those interviewed.

Participants came to Heritage expecting to be embraced in a community of African American culture. Though disappointed in what they found, participants made their own communities within the residence halls. Through academic programs, services and other campus activities, participants were able to interact with African American peers, mentors, faculty and staff members.

The participants worked to create, find and maintain their culture while they learned to navigate and to cope with a predominantly White university embedded in a traditionally

White culture. The participants seemed to have achieved balance in managing their bicultural existence. As one student related, "You can do it at Heritage and still keep the Blackness about you."

Service to others was a hallmark associated with the participants' sense of identity and purpose. Several of the participants volunteered their services during high school, however many more of the participants became active volunteers in college.

As noted earlier, participants were involved in a variety of volunteer efforts. Of importance in terms of personal development was that these participants have internalized the significance of service to others. Participants felt good about the things they had done for others and were determined to help others in the future.

All participants saw themselves as continuing their volunteerism after college. Several of the participants believed their career would provide them with opportunities to help those less fortunate. JoAnne talked about one day being a doctor. When asked what she would do with a medical degree, she stated: "If somebody needs me, like intercity Detroit, well then I could be able to go there....I want to help people."

Discussion on Expanding Sense of Self

While much has been researched and written on the development of traditional age college students, few studies have looked at the development in terms of race or gender. It is evident that some of the experiences of Black women in this study are different than that of the traditional White college student. The majority of all college students may experience the thrill of mastering a field of study and the potential financial rewards associated with mastery; however, fewer students see financial success as a means to assist others (Astin, Dey, Korn, & Riggs, 1991).

One of the many goals of higher education is to provide insight and understanding to past, present and future worlds. Participants in this study seemed to have embraced opportunities to meet and work with people of different backgrounds and cultures. Participants saw the value of those opportunities in relation to their abilities to work with the diversity of people they would encounter in the "real world."

They saw this opportunity as indicative of attending a predominantly White institution.

Tinto (1987) suggests that students need to adopt the norms and behaviors of the campus environment in order to successfully integrate into the college culture. Minority students at a predominantly White institution may need to make additional adjustments (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988). Specifically, the need to adjust to and cope with living a

bicultural existence is unique to marginalized groups within a larger culture. Participants in this study recognized the need to learn and become a part of the culture of Heritage University while maintaining their own identity and strengthening their commitment to their own cultural heritage.

Summary

African American college students are not a homogenous population. They are a diverse group of individuals linked primarily by race and history. They are not monolithic in their views, aspirations or expectations of college (Brown, 1994). The demographic characteristics of the women in this study also indicate the diversity among African American students.

The small group of Black women participants in this study had many of the same expectations and experiences associated with the typical college experience. They left friends and family to become a part of a new community, Heritage University. They experienced anxiety associated with making new friends and becoming a part of a new community. Like the typical college student, participants went to college to get an education. Education meant financial security and the ability to help others.

As with any new experience or new journey, the participants found the college experience laced with challenges as well as opportunities. Fortunate for

participants, with challenges came support from individuals and the institution. All the participants in this study found support and assistance from a variety of people and programs. Within the university, this support came from other students, faculty, student affairs staff and academic support personnel.

With every journey comes growth. Throughout the college experience, participants learned not only the skills of their chosen profession, but also become more aware and knowledgeable of themselves and others.

What made the collegiate experiences of the women in this study unique? They are African American women. Their race and gender set them apart in a predominantly White, traditionally male university. Their experiences were impacted by society's marginalization of both African Americans and women.

Some experiences of the participants in this study were atypical. First, these participants were faced with the challenges of finding a community of Blackness with which to affiliate. When they found the Black community at Heritage unorganized and inactive, the participants were pushed to form their own small communities within the residence hall system. These small communities provided participants with a sense of affiliation and belonging while providing a forum for expression and validation for their own ideas, culture and experiences.

Participants also reached out to the community surrounding Heritage University and found the Black community through local churches and community organizations. This gave participants an additional outlet to establish their connection to an existing Black community.

Secondly, academic support programs were integral to the success of a majority of the participants. Programs for the benefit of all students, such as the Writing Center of Tutorial Laboratories, assisted several of the participants in their academic endeavors. However, the majority of the participants benefitted repeatedly from programs and services specifically for minority students. Mentor programs, EAP and Black student organizations provided participants with support and connection. Through these programs participants found caring professionals, both Black and White, interested in their academic development and personal well-being.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding of this study is the realization that all of the participants had experiences tainted by racism and sexism. The campus climate proved to be an environment permeated with conflict. The women in this study realized early in their collegiate career that the University was still a haven for questionable policies and practices that involve disparities in the treatment of minorities on campus. As early as their first week on campus, participants were faced with the awareness of an all White greek rush. Later they became cognizant of the notion that

they were not welcomed on all parts of campus or all student events. During their first years of college, the majority of the participants were involved in a hostile classroom environment in at least one college course.

Last, participants in this study had made an effort to develop their understanding of themselves and others. While most participants found that their voices had little impact on changing the culture of Heritage University, most felt they had survived and flourished in a culture very different from their own. While they did not expect the environment of Heritage University to progress toward a multicultural community at a brisk pace, they did believe their efforts had assisted some members of the Heritage community in achieving a better understanding and appreciation of diversity.

Participants found that interaction with others, who were ethnically and cultural different, helped them to understand themselves and their culture. Participants in this study recognized the need to learn and become a part of the culture of Heritage University while maintaining their own identity and commitment to their own cultural heritage. The participants felt that they had become quite successful in living and negotiating a bicultural existence.

The perception of the students in this study was that Heritage University had made strides in welcoming and retaining African American students. However, they also perceived that Heritage University needed to move from a

somewhat monocultural campus environment to a thriving multicultural community.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Introduction

While it is difficult to depict the meaning students attach to their collegiate experiences, this study attempted to explore the collegiate experience of a group of African American women students at Heritage University. This study provided insight into the perceived experiences of one group at one institution at one point in time. Even though the results of this study are specific to one group, the process and product of this study may serve to inform other researchers and practitioners in the field of student learning and higher education.

Implications for Research

This study was a qualitative effort to discover the perceptions of a select group of individuals at a predominantly White university. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized. Further study is needed to determine if the experiences of the women in this study were unique to one institution or typical of the African American experience at predominantly White institutions.

This study did support the findings of persistence studies that student interaction with faculty, staff and peers is an important factor in student success and satisfaction.

This study also corroborated the positive impact of academic support services in minority student success found in previous studies.

Replication of this study at other universities is recommended. The categories and themes which emerged in this study may or may not be unique for this group of participants and Heritage University. Additionally, participants in this study could not determine if their incidents and experiences were a result of ethnicity, gender, a combination of the two or something else.

The findings of this study suggest that further study is needed on the importance of an "academic home" on student retention and satisfaction. The participants in this study believed that becoming involved in a major was very important in their feeling connected to the institution. Research has suggested that interaction between faculty and students is an important factor in student retention and satisfaction. However, the literature does not currently address the notion of an "academic home" as an important factor and it deserves exploration.

While much has been written on the importance of community in feminist literature and Black feminist perspective, little research exists on the importance of a Black community for African American college women at a predominantly White institution. Further research into the importance of community to African American women college

students is needed. As the population of American colleges and universities becomes more diverse, awareness of the needs of various groups may assist educators in providing a more welcoming and favorable environment for learning.

In this study, the voices of those African American women who left the university prematurely are not represented. Therefore research on African American women who did not persist may provide further insight on the experiences of Black women students at predominantly White institutions.

Implications for Practice

The select group of African American women in this study have experienced college solely at Heritage University. Still, their experiences and the literature suggest that higher education professionals should be cognizant that students need to find friends and feel like they belong. Students need to feel connected to and supported by individual members of the institution and the organization itself.

In order for the institution to more fully examine and reflect upon the perceived collegiate experiences of it's students, Heritage University may want to incorporate opportunities for students to convey their perceptions and experiences. This could be accomplished in a number of ways. For example, Heritage University could encourage faculty to include an opportunity for students to express their experiences as part of a capstone course. Other options

include participation by graduating students in focus groups or exit interviews.

If the findings of this study are confirmed by additional research, several implications for practice are proposed. Although not all students experience the university in the same way, the literature suggests, and this study notes that some experiences may be typical for the majority of students. Each student and each group experience the university in a variety of ways, but what seems common place for the White traditional age student is not always common or comfortable for minority students. College administrators, faculty, staff and students should consider the implications of its policies, traditions or circumstances on all members of the campus community, not just the majority group. The recognition that some experiences are unique to various groups can help colleges provide an environment conducive to the success of all its citizens.

Additionally, Heritage University should consider devising a system for the identification and evaluation of policies and practices that perpetuates disparities in the treatment of minority students. This practice would assist the university in moving toward a more multicultural environment in which the concerns of all its citizens are known and considered.

Heritage University may want to encourage the development of an African American community at the institution. While

Heritage provides a place for minority students, the participants perceived that it did not serve as a center of African American culture or community. Participants saw the Minority Center as being limited in vision, leadership and direction. The institution may want to support the formation and development of an active minority community on campus that focuses on culture and social activities.

Heritage University should continue academic support services and programs that encourage connection between the student and the institution. Participants in this study benefitted in many ways from the encouragement and support that they received through mentor programs, tutoring, and educational advancement programs. Heritage University may also want to assess the effects of all academic support services on the retention and success of minority students.

Heritage University should provide members of its community with information on cultural awareness and cultural identity to assist individuals and campus organizations in their efforts to understand and value a diverse community. Such efforts may assist the institution in moving from a monocultural to a multicultural perspective.

Heritage University's assessment agenda should incorporate data collection on the collegiate perceptions and experiences of majority and minority students. Results could assist the institution in its efforts to attract, welcome and retain students from all backgrounds.

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APPENDICES

Appendices

- A. Informed Consent Forms for Participants**
- B. Contents of Packet Mailed to Potential Participants**
- C. Interview Guide for First Interview with Each Participant**
- D. List of Topics for Focus Groups**

Appendix A

Informed Consent Forms for Participants

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS
FOR FEMALE AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Participating in a Qualitative Interview Study about the
Experience of Being a Black Female Student a predominantly
White Institution

You have been asked to participate in a research project about African American women student and their experiences in college. I will be asking you about the experience of being an African American female on a predominantly White campus. I will audiotape our conversations so that I might listen to your story later as I analyze it. These tapes will be kept confidential and will be destroyed after five years. Our two individual interviews should take about 60 to 90 minutes. You will also complete a demographic survey of approximately 20 questions.

After I have listened to your individual stories, we will gather again as a group so that participants may elaborate on themes identified in the individual interviews. You will be provided with a separate Informed Consent Form for the focus group interview. You will be asked not to discuss the focus group meeting or the participants in order to insure confidentiality.

Throughout the research process I will use a name of your choice (pseudonym) to protect your identity. I will give you a copy of your story and of the group's story at the conclusion of the project.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You may stop at any time without penalty.

Benefits to the participants include the opportunity for reflection on their experiences at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and your decision to attend college. In addition, participants may feel personally satisfied in that they are adding to an important body of knowledge, in their own voice, about African American women.

Risks to the student participants in this study are minimal. No physical or mental discomforts are foreseen. If you become uncomfortable at any time, you may withdraw from the study without penalty.

Do you have any questions at this time for me?

I understand that I am participating in a research project about the experiences of African American college students. The information the researcher is gathering will be used to produce a final written analysis. I agree to participate in this project as it has been described.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

pseudonym _____

Jama L. Bradley
212 Claxton Education Bldg. work (615) 974-5894

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM for Focus Group Interview
FOR FEMALE African American COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**Participating in a Qualitative Interview Study about the
Experience of Being a Black Female Student a predominantly
White Institution**

You have been asked to participate in a research project about African American women student and their experiences in college. As a final meeting for this project we will gather as a group to discuss and clarify findings of previous interviews. I will ask you again about to elaborate on themes identified in the individual interviews. I will audiotape our conversation so that I might listen to your stories later as I analyze them. These tapes will be kept confidential and will be destroyed after five years. Our focus group today should take about 60 to 90 minutes.

You, as a participant, agree not to discuss or disclose in any manner any of the content of the focus group meeting or the participants in order to insure confidentiality.

Throughout the research process I will use a name of your choice (pseudonym) to protect your identity. I will use a name of your choice to protect your identity. I will give you a copy of your story and of the group's story at the conclusion of the project.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You may stop at any time without penalty.

Benefits to the participants include the opportunity for reflection on their experiences at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and your decision to attend college. In addition, participants may feel personally satisfied in that they are adding to an important body of knowledge, in their own voice, about African American women.

Risks to the student participants in this study are minimal. No physical or mental discomforts are foreseen. If you become uncomfortable at any time, you may withdraw from the study without penalty.

Do you have any questions at this time for me?

I understand that I am participating in a research project about the experiences of African American college students. The information the researcher is gathering will be used to produce a final written analysis. I agree to participate in this project as it has been described.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

pseudonym _____

pseudonym _____

Jama L. Bradley
212 Claxton Education Bldg. work (615) 974-5894

Appendix B

Content of Packets for Potential Participants

22, 1994

February

Dear Student,

The fastest growing segment of the college population is women. In addition, African American women are attending in larger numbers than ever before. In the future, to be effective, higher education must address the needs of this group.

As part of my doctoral study in education, I am interested in finding out more about the experience of African American women at Heritage University. I have been given permission to conduct qualitative research involving the feedback from eight to ten students. This letter invites all African American junior and senior women who have exclusively attended the University of Tennessee to participate in this study. Eight to ten of those responding will be selected for two private interviews and one group discussion. Responses will be anonymous and a pseudonym used to describe each person's response in the final paper.

Because the two personal interviews will require about 60 to 90 minutes each and the group discussion will last about the same amount of time, a UT Bookstore gift certificate will be awarded to each participant at the conclusion of the group interview. Each interaction will be taped and transcribed for analysis. A copy of the results will be available to each participant.

Please let me know if you would be willing to participate in this study. Complete the enclosed survey and return it to me at the University of Tennessee, 212 Claxton Education Building. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at work (974-5894), at home (687-1097), or visit me at the University of Tennessee, College of Education in room C 101. I would be grateful for your assistance and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jama Bradley
Doctoral Student
College of Education

P.S. I would appreciate your response by March 15, 1994,
Thank you.

February 22, 1994

Dear UT Student,

Jama Bradley has asked us to write a letter of support in her effort to study the experience of African American women at Heritage University. It is our pleasure to do so. The subject matter is too important to leave to speculation and honest research is needed to improve the quality of education for this important group of people.

This study is also unique. Instead of conducting an empirical analysis of data from a large survey, Jama is attempting to get in-depth feedback from a small number of students. Interviews, instead of surveys, are used to give the participants the chance to say whatever they like. It is expected that each experience will be unique and the results will attempt to highlight those differences as well as the similarities in your experience.

This is an excellent opportunity to see the research process first hand. You will have a chance to give your perspective on your education and give future students the benefit of your learning. I hope you will consider this opportunity and make time in your busy schedule to participate.

If you have questions about the study, you can call either one of us for additional information.

Sincerely,

Rosa Emory Thomas
Wellness Educator
Student Health Center

Barbara F. Booker
Assistant Director
Academic Advisor
Liberal Arts

Demographic Survey

Name _____

Telephone Number _____

I would like to participate in the study on African American students.

Signature _____

1. Most of the time while you have attended UTK, have you been a part-time or full-time student?

- 1 PART-TIME
- 2 FULL-TIME

2. Are you presently receiving aid through the University?
(Circle all that apply)

- 1 NO
- 2 YES - SCHOLARSHIP
- 3 YES - LOAN
- 4 YES - WORK STUDY

3. Where do you live while attending UTK?

- 1 DORMITORY
- 2 APARTMENT IN UTK AREA
- 3 APARTMENT NOT IN UTK AREA
- 4 FRATERNITY HOUSE
- 5 AT HOME WITH PARENTS
- 6 MARRIED STUDENT HOUSING
- 7 OTHER

4. Which of the following best describes your program at UTK?

- 1 BUSINESS
- 2 NURSING
- 3 ENGINEERING
- 4 AGRICULTURE
- 5 COMMUNICATIONS
- 6 LIBERAL ARTS - HUMANITIES
- 7 LIBERAL ARTS - SCIENCES
- 8 LIBERAL ARTS - SOCIAL SCIENCES
- 9 EDUCATION
- 10 ARCHITECTURE
- 11 HUMAN ECOLOGY
- 12 SOCIAL WORK
- 13 OTHER

5. What is your classification?

- 1 JUNIOR
- 2 SENIOR

6. What is your age?

_____ YEARS

7. What is your material status?

- 1 SINGLE
- 2 MARRIED
- 3 SEPARATED
- 4 DIVORCED

8. What proportion of your educational expenses are your parents providing?

- 1 NONE
- 2 SOME, BUT LESS THAN HALF
- 3 MORE THAN HALF

9. What is your overall G.P.A.?

- 1 LESS THAN 2.0
- 2 2.01 - 2.50
- 3 2.51 - 3.00
- 4 3.01 - 3.50
- 5 3.51 - 4.00

10. How many hours are you currently working at a job this term?

- 1 I AM NOT WORKING
- 2 1 TO 9 HOURS/WEEK
- 3 10 TO 19 HOURS/WEEK
- 4 20 TO 29 HOURS/WEEK
- 5 30 OR MORE HOURS/WEEK

11. Where is your hometown?

- 1 EAST TENNESSEE
- 2 MIDDLE TENNESSEE
- 3 WEST TENNESSEE
- 4 OTHER SOUTHEASTERN STATE
- 5 NORTHEAST
- 6 MIDWEST
- 7 SOUTHWEST
- 8 WEST OR NORTHWEST
- 9 OUTSIDE THE US

12. What was the size of the community in which you spent most of your life before you were sixteen?

- 1 A FARM
- 2 RURAL AREA, BUT NOT A FARM
- 3 TOWN LESS THAN 2,500
- 4 TOWN 2,500 - 24,999
- 5 SMALL CITY 25,000 - 100,000
- 6 LARGE CITY OVER 100,000

13. How long have you been in your major field?

- 1 JUST STARTING
- 2 ONE YEAR
- 3 TWO YEARS
- 4 THREE OR MORE YEARS
- 5 I HAVE NOT YET DECIDED ON A MAJOR

14. Please estimate your family's income from all sources.

- 1 UNDER \$10,000
- 2 \$10,000 - \$19,999
- 3 \$20,000 - \$29,999
- 4 \$30,000 - \$39,999
- 5 \$40,000 - \$49,999
- 6 \$50,000 - \$59,999
- 7 \$60,000 - \$69,999
- 8 \$70,000 - \$79,999
- 9 \$80,000 - \$89,999
- 10 \$90,000 - \$99,999
- 11 \$100,000 AND OVER
- 12 DON'T KNOW

15. What was the highest level of school completed by your mother?

- 1 LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL
- 2 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
- 3 SOME COLLEGE
- 4 COLLEGE GRADUATE
- 5 GRADUATE TRAINING
- 6 DON'T KNOW/DOES NOT APPLY

16. What was the highest level of school completed by your father?

- 1 LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL
- 2 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
- 3 SOME COLLEGE
- 4 COLLEGE GRADUATE
- 5 GRADUATE TRAINING
- 6 DON'T KNOW/DOES NOT APPLY

17. What was the racial mix of your high school?

- 1 PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
 - 2 PREDOMINANTLY BLACK
 - 3 MIXED (ABOUT 50/50)
 - 4 OTHER, EXPLAIN
-

18. How many siblings do you have in your family? _____

19. Other people that live in you parents household or your household? (i.e. Grandmother)

20. List Campus and Community groups or organizations which you participate in?

21. List Volunteer or community service efforts that you are engaged in?

22. List special programs or projects that you have been involved in while at UTK?

23. List the number of faculty you would feel comfortable asking for a reference at the UTK? _____

24. List the number of professional staff and student affairs professionals you would feel comfortable asking for a reference at UTK? _____

Appendix C

Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Phenomenological (first) Interview

Meeting Time _____

Meeting Place _____

Cover Story

I am Jama Bradley, a graduate student in Educational Leadership. I am doing a study on the experiences of Black female college students at Heritage University. I am doing this study in order to enhance my understanding of student issues and concerns.

This study is my dissertation project. I will use the information in the interviews to identify themes and patterns. All interviews will be taped under an assumed alias of your choosing. No one except you and I will know your identity. You have my promise of confidentiality and anonymity.

I expect our interview today will take about 60 to 90 minutes. The second interview, demographic survey and focus group interview will be conducted at a later date.

I would like to audiotape our interview. I will later transcribe the tape and use the transcription to complete data analysis. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions; no judgements will be made.
Do you have any questions?

Consent Form - Review and have participant sign form. Give participant their own copy of consent form to keep.

Pseudonym of Participant

Begin tape recording of interview. Review understanding and signing of consent form.

Phenomenological Question for the Interview

_____, Tell me about your experience as a student at Heritage University?

NOTES

Thank you for your help today.

Interview Guide for Ethnographic (second) Interview

Meeting Time _____ Meeting Place _____

Cover Story

As you know, I am Jama Bradley, a graduate student in Educational Leadership and I am doing a study on the experiences of Black female college students at Heritage University.

This study is my dissertation project. I will use the information in the interviews to identify themes and patterns. All interviews will be taped under an assumed alias of your choosing. No one except you and I will know your identity. You have my promise of confidentiality and anonymity.

I expect our interview today will take about 60 to 90 minutes. I would like to audiotape our interview. I will later transcribe the tape and use the transcription to complete data analysis. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions; no judgements will be made.

Do you have any questions?

Consent Form - Review. Give participant another copy of consent form to keep.

Pseudonym of Participant

Begin tape recording of interview. Review understanding and signing of consent form.

Ethnographic Questions for the Interview

What expectations did you have about college before arriving at Heritage University?

What challenges did you encounter during your first year at the university?

What successes did you experience during your first couple of years at Heritage University?

What resources and people have you found supportive and helpful while at the University?

Tell me about the academic program you are in?

What activities and interests have you become involved in at the university?

Why are you here at Heritage University?

What does Heritage University mean to you?

NOTES

Thank you for your help today.

Appendix D

List of Topics for Focus Groups

List of Topics for Focus Group Discussion

Fitting In

Community

Residence Life

Orientation

Culture Shock

Acceptance by Others

New Experiences

Racism/Tokenism

Relationships

Would You Recommend Heritage University to Your Black Friends? Why?

What Would You Change About Heritage University?

VITA

Jama Bradley is a native Tennessean. Raised in the small community of McEwen, she attended Waverly Central High School. Jama received her BS and MS degrees from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

As a student affairs professional, Jama served in various positions at the University of Tennessee and Oregon State University in the areas of Campus Recreation and Student Unions.

Jama has also worked in the area of assessment research in higher education. Previously, she held positions with the Clearinghouse for Higher Education Assessment Instruments and the Center for Assessment Research and Development. She is widely published in the area of student development associated with participation in campus recreation programs.

While finishing her Ph.D., Jama accepted a position with Georgia State University in the College of Arts and Sciences. She remains active in the areas of student learning and student development.