

ABSTRACT

“WHAT ABOUT ME? I’M SUCCESSFUL TOO”: BLACK FEMALES JOURNEY TOWARDS SUCCESS IN THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

By

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May 2015

Serving over two million students, the California Community College (CCC) system is a powerhouse in the nation for academics. Though many students attend and successfully complete this educational system, challenges for Black females are often overlooked for the mere fact that they complete at a slightly higher rate compared to their Black male counterparts. The purpose of this study is to explore how Black females within the CCC system make sense of their journey as they move towards graduation and/or transfer. To gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of Black women in the CCC, qualitative ethnographic interviews were conducted. The sample group included 15 Black female participants who are currently attending a community college in California. Four major themes emerged: support systems, educational awareness and expectations, self-awareness and foresightedness. These findings provide a new perspective that can assist in the promotion of programs, policies and resources specific to the needs of this population in order for them to be successful.

“WHAT ABOUT ME? I’M SUCCESSFUL TOO”: BLACK FEMALES JOURNEY
TOWARDS SUCCESS IN THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Educational Leadership

California State University, Long Beach

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in Educational Leadership

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May 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pre-Doctoral

My grandparents have always been a huge promoter of my education. “Whatever education you gain, it can never be taken away—it’s yours” are words that I live by. Reading and listening to the struggles of the past have provided me with the strength of a frontiersman towards the movement of more Black females earning doctoral and advanced degrees. Ms. Jacqueline Dodds your story moves me towards my goal, as I feel as though I am finishing where you left off.

I also must give my admiration to those who have come before me and paved the path so that I and other Black females could achieve all our educational and personal status of today. Ms. Mary Jane Patterson who in 1862 was the first African American woman to receive her B.A. from Oberlin became the catalyst for Black women to achieve higher education. Equally important, Dr. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, J.D. was the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. in the United States in 1921 and then went on to become the first Black woman to earn a law degree from University of Pennsylvania. You are my heroes and all that I aspire to be as a Black female in education—thank you for being the North Star for me to follow.

Doctoral

This study would not be possible without the help of so many wonderful women that I have met. Your stories have inspired me to continue doing the work that I do. You

all are amazing, and thank you for your time that you so graciously gave to me and for believing that your voices are important too.

It was a privilege to work directly with some phenomenal, educated Black women. This unique experience with my committee of Drs. Angela Locks, Shametrice Davis, and Adriene “Alex” Davis has been a privilege because I was able to work with such strong women.

Team Six—“squirrel” —Team Awesome. It’s been a wild ride-“SQUIRREL,” but we’ve made it. To my social capital—thanks being my conscience.

To my Zone family: Michael “Boss,” Sheehan, Laney and Alexis for keeping me level headed and reminding to stay focused on the goal. Thank you for listening to me rant and rave about—well EVERYTHING. You all are my superstars. To all my friends I left out thank you for your continued support.

To my editor Tyrone—you’re AMAZING—thanks for the crunch time hours.

To my family, we did it. Thank you for your sacrifice in allowing me to reach my goal as you waited patiently for me to finish yet another degree. I do it all for you. Mommah, I told you when I was a little girl that I wanted to graduate with a funny hat; well, I have one now. Thank you for allowing me to make it to this point.

Post-Doctoral

It would behoove me to acknowledge the reader; for it is your effort that will continue to bring change to academia. I would love to say that this is the end of my journey towards degree advancement, but those in my past and present know that education is always in my future. Here is to the next one. To the *past*, Present and FUTURE of education for Black women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	6
Purpose Statement	8
Research Questions	8
Conceptual Framework	8
Operational Definitions	14
Assumptions and Delimitations	15
Significance of the Study	16
Summary	18
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	19
Recent History of Blacks in Higher Education	21
Pre-College Socialization and Readiness	25
Black College Achievement	30
Post-College Success of Black Students	37
Persistence and Retention of Blacks in Higher Education	39
Summary	43
3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	44
Research Design	44
Data Collection	46
Instrumentation	47
Pilot	48
Sample	48

CHAPTER	Page
Site Information	49
Participants.....	50
Procedures.....	52
Protection of Subjects	53
Positionality	54
Data Analysis	56
Credibility and Trustworthiness.....	58
Limitations	59
Summary	60
 4. FINDINGS.....	 61
Participant Profiles	62
Findings.....	66
Summary.....	82
 5. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS.....	 83
Summary of Study	83
Summary of Findings.....	85
Discussion of the Findings	86
Presentation of Implications	98
Recommendations for Policy.....	99
Recommendations for Practice.....	100
Recommendations for Further Studies.....	105
Black Female Educational Achievement Model.....	108
Conclusions.....	109
 APPENDICES	 111
A. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT APPROVAL.....	 112
B. RECRUITMENT EMAIL.....	114
C. INFORMED CONSENT.....	117
D. QUESTIONNAIRE	121
E. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	124
F. TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT	128
G. SAMPLE MEMOS AND CODING SCHEMES	130

	Page
H. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	
ALIGNMENT.....	134
REFERENCES	139

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1. Race Demographics of the CCC	2
2. Credit Course Retention/Success Rate.....	42
3. RCC Racial Demographics	49
4. Participant Profile	52

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1. Anti-Deficit Achievement model.....	11
2. Black Feminist Thought.....	12
3. Conceptual framework.....	14
4. Coding process	58
5. Visual representation of major themes	67
6. Research questions and conceptual framework.	87
7. Major themes and conceptual framework.....	92
8. Themes interrupted	98
9. Black Female Educational Achievement model	109

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Never be limited by other people's limited imaginations.--Dr. Mae Jemison

In 2012, sources reported that 7.5 million students attended community colleges across the nation in pursuit of a higher education (Marti, 2008, p. 317; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012a). Of this population, the California community colleges (CCC) system enrolled over 2 million students and is the largest community college student population in the country (California Community College Chancellors Office [CCCCO], 2015; NCES, 2012a). The CCC as a whole is under financial pressures. Moreover, the number of students failing to meet degree benchmarks is growing. The United States ranked 12th in the world of students who completed college. Korea and Japan ranked first and second (NCES, 2012a). A 2013-14 study completed by National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2015) indicated that approximately 46% of four-year college graduates attended a two-year institution. As of 2012-2013, 70.2% of CCC students graduated, earned a certificate or transferred (CCC, 2013). Such pressures of financial and graduation/transfer rates are set by accreditation agencies and have led to the new clarion call: “the community college completion challenge” (Mullin, 2010, p. 4).

In 2013, the racial demographics of the CCC (see Table 1) were comprised of a majority of Hispanic and White racial backgrounds respectively. The overarching goal of

the CCC is open access to all students in order to reach their academic, personal and professional goal; thus, the CCC is an access point for minority students (Bailey & Morest, 2006). Sixty-five percent of students of color attend the CCC alone, making it one of the most racially and ethnically diverse student populations in the nation (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2010; California Tomorrow, 2008). The majority of this student of color population is first generation and/or come from underrepresented backgrounds (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2012). Additionally, females attending the CCC are enrolled in higher numbers (53%) compared to male students (45.9%).

TABLE 1. *Racial Demographics of the CCC*

Race	Percentage
White	30.20%
Black	7.20%
Hispanic	38.30%
Asian/Pacific Islander	15%
Native American	0.50%
Unknown or non-resident alien	5.70%

Source: American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2013a.

The Black student population in the CCC is among the lowest performing college going populations within the higher education system, excluding Native Americans

(CCC, 2013). College-prepared Black students, who were tracked during the periods of 2007-2013, earned a certificate or transferred at a 65% rate. However, those who were underprepared matriculated at a 33.5% rate. This compared to the overall statewide completion rate, which is roughly below 10%. At the same time, the overall completion rate in the CCCs is 48.1%. Compared to Native American (37.6%), Hispanic (39.1%) and Pacific Islander (42.7%) completion rates overall, Blacks complete at 37.5%. Furthermore, females are only slightly more likely to complete or transfer within 6 years; females (49.2%) and males (46.9%).

Historically, Blacks have been deprived of an education within the United States since slavery, and in the present day Blacks are still deprived of the skills necessary to be successful within higher education (Harper, 2012). Skills such as financial literacy, leadership, and knowledge with how to navigate the educational system are typically gained through the student's pre-college experience (Harper, 2012). These are the experiences that Black students have prior to college, which help them with the expertise necessary to successfully transition into higher education. According to Harper (2012), students' college experience provides them with the tools that enable them to be a productive member of society in their post-college experience.

Additionally, the student of color population is ill prepared for the rigors of higher education due to, but not limited to the following: (a) inadequate study skills, (b) financial barriers and (c) lack of understanding of the college system (Alford, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Yosso (2005) denotes how differing forms of capital are the ways in which students resist inhibitors based on their lived experiences and privilege. These six capitals (aspirational, navigational, resistance, linguistic, familial

and social) help or hinder a student as they matriculate through the college system. Each capital provides uniqueness towards the individual's higher education experience.

Aspirational capital enables the individual to go beyond their adversities and be resilient. Familial capital refers to the relationships developed within a family, which are gained through personal and cultural experiences. Linguistic capital refers to the communication systems, which are gained socially and intellectually. Navigational capital is how one circumnavigates through the educational and institutional systems. Resistance capital provides strength in order to confront internal and external structures that have been created to oppress underrepresented students. Lastly, social capital can be understood as the networks that are built over time to connect with people and resources (Yosso, 2005). Successful navigation of the educational system thus enables the students to be able to meet the overarching goal of graduation and transfer.

The completion rate of Black students can largely be based on lack of preparation for higher education (NCES, 2012b). Many incoming students are unaware of the resources that community colleges have to offer and how to matriculate through the community college system (Gibson & Slate, 2010, p. 373). Current state legislature, with the passing of The Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 (SB 1456), creates the following requirements:

Requires a college or district receiving matriculation funds to provide student support services including orientation, assessment and placement, counseling, and other education planning services and academic interventions for students to ensure academic success to achieve their educational goals;

Requires the college or district to evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Success and Support Program and other programs to facilitate student success, including disaggregated data by ethnicity, age, gender, disability and socioeconomic status;

Requires students to identify an educational goal such as degree, career technical certificates, transfer preparation, or career advancement, and to declare a specific course of study after a specified time period or unit accumulation;

Requires students qualifying for a BOG fee waiver to meet academic progress standards.

These requirements of the CCC were set into place as a means to close the achievement gap while also providing information to make students aware of their long-term goals. Additionally, these requirements encourage students to begin thinking about their goals early and for all populations to have full access to information that will help them attain these goals.

With this new assembly bill, there are a number of programs that have been established within the community college system in order to prepare students academically, socially and professionally. For example, Umoja was established to meet the specific unique needs of the Black student population within the CCC. *Umoja*, in Swahili, means “unity,” thereby creating “a community and critical resource dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African Americans and other students” (Umoja Community, 2015, para.1). For this purpose, Umoja is currently active at 29 CCCs and believes in understanding the past in order to focus on the future or *sankofa*. Students within this program are 25% more likely persist within the CCC system (Umoja Community, 2015).

However, it appears that despite much striving of the Black student population, as a whole, this population is not making any gains within higher education. Black CCC students have a 37.5% college completion rate, which is the lowest rate among ethnic and racial groups in the system, except for Native Americans (CCC, 2013). This completion rate is dwarfed by the rate for White students, which is at 52.5% (CCC, 2013; Moore & Shulock, 2010). The acknowledgement and understanding of the pre-college, college and post-college experiences and the overall journey of identity development of Black female students are important in the factors that promote persistence and retention, ultimately leading to academic and personal success. The Anti-Deficit Achievement framework (Harper, 2007) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1999) lens will guide this study.

Problem Statement

The CCC system defines *success* as the number of students who graduate, earn a certificate and or transfer to a baccalaureate granting institution (CCCSE, 2012). Horn and Berger (2004) noted that collectively, Black, Hispanic, and low-income students comprised the highest population of students enrolled in community colleges. Furthermore, the NCES (2012a) reported that Black students experienced the highest dropout rate (8%) from high school in 2010, compared to their White counterparts (5%). In all, Blacks represented 13% of all public high school graduates, 11% of associate's degree recipients, and 9% of bachelor's degree recipients during the 1999-2000 academic term (NCES, 2003). According to the NCES (2012a), within a six-year timeframe, Blacks were awarded bachelor degrees at a rate of 39% compared to 69% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, and rates of 62% and 39% for Whites and Latinos, respectively. Among all ethnic groups, Black students have the lowest persistence within the

community college system, dropping from a rate of 44% in 1989 to 40% in 1995 (Horn & Berger, 2004, p. 30). In addition, about 8% of Black students in California typically start out at a community college (AACC, 2013b).

Increasing the overall Black population within higher education is essential for the academic and social betterment of this population. The aforementioned research provides exemplars on the deficit of academic achievement among Black students in college overall. However, research is scarce related to understanding the path to their successes and even more so with the Black female CCC population. Even more startling is that this negative thinking approach has primarily focused on the successes of Black males, and very little literature is available on the successes of Black females within higher education. An understanding of this population is necessary to better assist Black female students in skillfully navigating the CCC system, ultimately leading to their personal and career successes. Increasing the number of Black female students graduating and transferring from CCCs can present role models for the next generation of Black female college-going students.

Currently, there appears to be a gap of literature that exists, and it speaks to the successful matriculation of Black females within CCCs. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the Black population has been denied the same opportunities for education and career advancement, which has kept this population out of the middle-class lifestyle (Gray, 2012). Increasing educational and career opportunities by implementing anti-deficit pedagogical practices might assist Black females overall.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore how Black female students within the CCC system make sense of their journey as they move towards graduation and or transfer. Additionally, this study will review the literature in order to gain an understanding of the success of Black female CCCs students as defined by the completion of degree(s) and or certificate(s) from a higher education institution (CCCSE, 2012). This study will also explore how incentives are perceived by Black female CCC students and whether or not they motivate and challenge this population of students toward reaching their success. This study will review literature on Black students and their lack of success within higher education, so that further investigation of this phenomenon may occur.

Research Questions

The following overarching and comprehensive research questions will guide this study:

1. How do Black females attending the California community colleges (CCCs) navigate their pathways toward success? A. What does success mean to a Black female attending a CCC?
2. How does race, gender, and class impact the educational and life experiences of Black females enrolled in CCCs?
3. How do Black females enrolled in CCCs make sense of their roles and the intersections of their roles and identities?

Conceptual Framework

This study will closely examine the lived experiences of Black female CCC students. Harper's (2007) Anti-Deficit Achievement theory and Collins's (1999) Black

Feminist Thought were drawn together to develop a conceptual framework and gained an understanding of the achievements of this population. This lens then provides a holistic view of Black females and their journey moving through the community college system and thus into their post-collegiate lives.

Anti-Deficit Achievement Theory

Harper's (2007, 2009) Anti-Deficit Achievement model (ADA) surfaced from his national study on Black male college achievement. This theoretical framework was developed by interviewing 219 Black male undergraduates from 42 colleges and universities with participants from 20 U.S. states. There were six types of institutions represented in his study: (a) public historically Black universities, (b) liberal arts colleges, (c) highly-selective private research universities, (d) public research universities, (e) private historically Black colleges and universities, and (f) comprehensive state universities. Specifically, the study examined the achievement patterns of Black males in college with the intent to deflect from the traditional role of "fixing" this population into a productive mindset of what can be learned from those who were successful (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2009). Fixing the problem in his study was defined as understanding why Black males are not successful in higher education.

Based on Bensimon's (2005) deficit cognitive frame, Harper (2007) developed a model that embraced three major components: (a) orientation, (b) discourse, and (c) strategies. Orientation focuses on stereotypical characteristics associated with the culture in terms of being disadvantaged and impoverished. Discourse is described as the lack of preparation, motivation, study skills, blaming students, and/or their backgrounds. Lastly, strategies are compensatory educational programs, remedial courses, and special

programs, all focused on fixing the student. Each of these components provides an informative viewpoint of what Black males need to do to be successful in college, and it is critical for their success in college (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 148).

Harper's (2007) framework is based on multiple disciplines including sociology, psychology, gender studies and education. His study was built from a series of questions that were oriented to the student from an anti-deficit reframing viewpoint (e.g., How were aspirations for postsecondary education cultivated among Black male students who are currently enrolled in college?) compared to a deficit-oriented viewpoint (e.g., Why do so few Black male students enroll in college?). The framework (see Figure 1) is comprised of three "pipeline points" that comprise this framework: (a) pre-college socialization and readiness, (b) college achievement, and (c) post-college success. Harper's (2007) framework also includes eight researchable dimensions of achievement: (a) familial factors, (b) K-12 school forces, (c) out-of-school college prep resources, (d) classroom experiences, (e) out-of-class engagement, (f) enriching educational experiences, (g) graduate school enrollment, and (h) career readiness (p. 5). Each of these pipeline points and dimensions provides a view of how Black students successfully matriculate through their education.



FIGURE 1. Anti-Deficit Achievement model (Harper, 2012).

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is deeply rooted in Black women's historical experience; BFT describes this population in American society in order to understand their varying aspects that aim to shape identity. Historically, charged from the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the Women's Liberation Movement, Patricia Collins (1999) introduced BFT to clarify and explore the experiences of Black women in American society while also providing a lens into their lived experiences.

Black Feminist Thought is comprised of four major themes: (a) acknowledgement of the historical struggles and oppressions of Black women; (b) examination of how Black women and their families understand and navigate through the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and social class; (c) elimination of negative Black womanhood image through understanding and access to knowledge;

and (d) activism through raising consciousness and awareness as well as empowerment of Black women and those that serve this population.

Ultimately, BFT seeks to have Black women define who they are within society and not have society define them. Additionally, it is the Black woman who must develop relationships and herself for the purposes of gaining an understanding of her identity. However, to do so, Black women have to recognize all aspects of self to gain a deep appreciation of their identity.

History	Family	Image	Awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Right • Women's Lib 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Class • Gender • Sexual Orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hair • Body Image • Portrayl in Society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consciousness • Empowerment

FIGURE 2. Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1999).

Conceptual Framework

Integrating Harper's (2012) and Collins's (1999) frameworks (see Figure 3) allows for a new conceptual model to develop. The integration of history, family, education and awareness at every key point (pre-college, college and post-college) in the Black female's life is imperative to capture in order to expand within this field. Each theory grants a view that a new population gains an identity within the literature, as well as a positive view on underrepresented populations. Both theories are distilled from the

knowledge of the students in which their voices resound and an understanding of their histories is presented.

Adoption of Harper's anti-deficit viewpoint bestows a new perspective in the literature and focuses on what has worked with students and how to implement it throughout the educational system. The ADA framework also provides a view of the educational experience for Black students beginning with their pre-college experience through career achievement. Collins gives a view of understanding the personal journey of the Black female as she develops her identity.

The cohesion of both Harper (2012) and Collins (1999) provides a unique lens to view the Black female attending a CCC. Harper (2007, 2010, 2012) reflects on the ADA looking to understand the academic and personal challenges of Black male students. Collins's (1999) BFT is from a broader perspective in that BFT looks at Black women in all areas of society and offers strategies to assist this population.

Both theories show evidence of understanding past events and experiences for the purpose of moving toward the future. Collins's (1999) focus on the historical struggles of Black women in society lends itself to the academic struggles of Black men as presented by Harper (2007, 2010, 2012). There is a direct integration of race, gender and social class between these two theories, which can produce a strong hold on understanding the successes of Black women in the community college setting. Knowledge of Black women's past events leads the way towards understanding their future successes. As the Black female moves through each experience, she has the opportunity to reflect on her past experiences to gain awareness and clarity. The knowledge base and perspective of Black researchers provides a specific point of view,

which is different from those outside of the culture. This overall cultural and academic awareness could lead towards her ultimate definition of success.

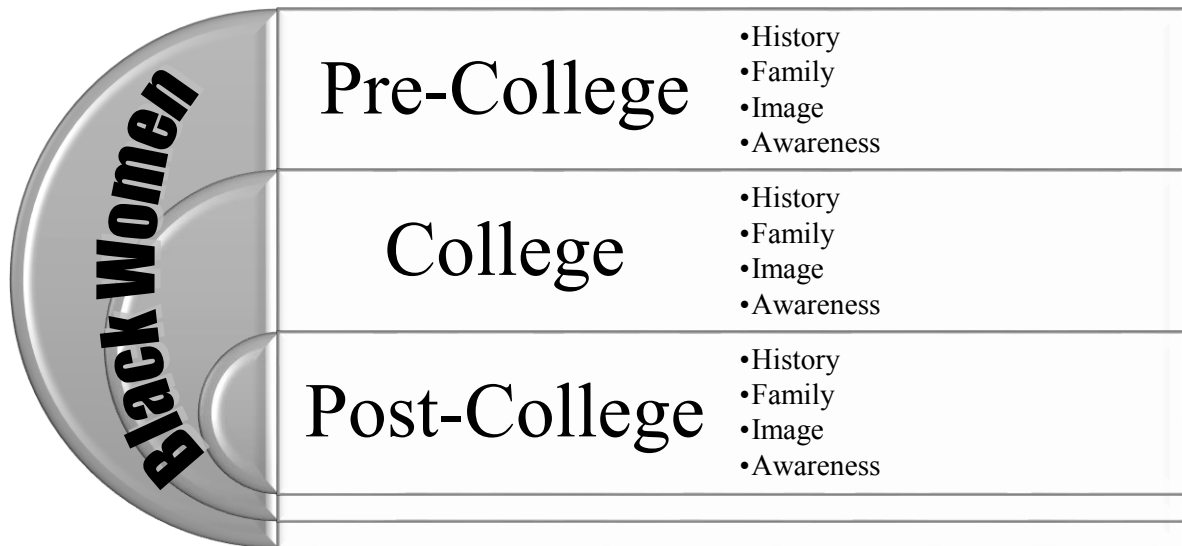


FIGURE 3. Conceptual framework (Collins, 1999; Harper, 2012).

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this paper, the following definitions will apply:

Black(s): According to U.S. Office of Management and Budgets, “Black or African American refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011).

California Community College: The CCC system is the largest system of higher education in the nation, with 2.1 million students attending 112 colleges (CCCCO, 2015).

Completion rate: Earning a degree, certificate, and/or transferring to a four-year institution is the completion rate (CCC, 2013).

Minority: The term “minority” means American Indian, Alaskan Native, Black (not of Hispanic origin), Hispanic (including persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central or South American origin), Pacific Islander or other ethnic group underrepresented in science and engineering (Hence, 2011).

Pell Grant: Federal funded, need-based grant program (Kantrowitz, 2011).

Persistence: Indicates continuous school enrollment from semester-to-semester (Pennington & Milliron, 2010).

Remediation: Under-prepared for college level work after graduation from high school (Bettinger, & Long, 2003).

Retention: The number and percentage of how many students will continue from academic year to academic year (Pennington & Milliron, 2010).

Success: The completion of degree(s) and or certificate(s) from a higher education institution (CCCSE, 2012).

Assumptions and Delimitations

This section will review assumptions and delimitations of the study that was conducted.

Assumptions

The following assumptions guided this study:

1. It is possible to identify Black female students at a California community college.
2. Participants who volunteered were able to provide the researcher information to the best of their abilities.

3. The methodological design in this study will aid constituents in understanding the experiences of this subgroup.

Delimitations

1. The study was only conducted at one California community college.
2. Participants from this study did not represent all the females within the California community college system.
3. Unavoidable variables such as social class, age, and religion may vary findings depending on region within the California community college system and nationwide.

Significance of the Study

Community college educators and administrators can tailor resources and interventions more accurately with a robust knowledge base regarding the Black student population. Limited knowledge about the successes and resources necessary for ensuring the success of this population hinder not only the Black female student population at community colleges but could ultimately lead towards the reduction of productive members of society (CCCSE, 2010; Reynolds, 2010). Increasing the success and completion rates for Blacks in higher education has become an important social justice issue (Templeton, 2011). Although Black females are doing slightly better than their male counterparts, progress still is necessary. The needs of this population may differ based on factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), parental education, high school grade point average (GPA) and a cultural understanding of what is necessary for their success (Baker & Robnett, 2012). President Obama stated that “[in order] to reach a national goal of leading the world with the highest share of college graduates by 2020, we must make college more affordable” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2012, para. 1). Many

Black students are financially disadvantaged, disabling them from attending higher education.

This study comes at a pivotal time with new California legislation, specifically because of the SB 1456, which aims “to provide critical support services to students on the front-end of their educational experience” (CCCCO, 2012). SB 1456 law was signed by Governor Jerry Brown in 2012 and is to be implemented by all CCCs by fall 2015. This law requires that all first-time students complete an orientation, assessment and educational plan within their first year of college. Such an act focuses specifically on the student’s success, which includes recognizing the resources necessary for them to be successful.

Overall, failing to recognize the disparities of Black female community college students is a social justice issue. SB 1456 aims to close the achievement gap for this population by providing additional resources and meeting students at the beginning of their higher education career. If the CCC fails to supply adequate access to Black females, it could potentially isolate them from being able to move up the social ladder and enable this student group to continue rely on the use of public assistance. According to a U.S. Department of Education report issued by the NCES (2011), Blacks are the second highest recipients of public assistance at 13.9% (American Indians are the highest with 16.1%) compared to Whites (4.4%), Hispanics (8.7%), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (5.9%) as of 2009. Furthermore, this study may provide insight into why Black females are disfranchised in the CCC system. Additionally, this study could provide a lens on how Black female students can prepare for their pre-college and college experiences so this population can be productive members of society.

Summary

An apparent void is presented in literature pertaining to Black females within the CCC system. This study is vetted to investigate the full journey of Black females as they navigate the CCC. The knowledge gained from looking at their journey could then provide avenues towards empowering this student group in their academic, social and personal goals. Also, the study could enable a new generation of Black female community college students through their journeys.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It's in the act of having to do things that you don't want to that you learn something about moving past the self. Past the ego.--bell hooks

The continuous debate over how to increase the number of Black students on campus is one that is socially charged. However, many Black students might not have had access to higher education had it not been for the community college system. The debate is then deepened with whether or not the community college is beneficial to minority populations at all (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 68). A large number of minority students fail to attend college because of the financial burden it may present to themselves and their families. Many minority populations who attended higher education overall are more likely to be dependent on their families for financial support (Kantrowitz, 2011). First-generation students are more likely to be Black or Hispanic and to come from low-income families compared to their peers whose parents were college graduates (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Due to financial constraints many Black students apply for financial aid, and many are eligible. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is completed annually, and minorities are more likely to receive aid compared to their White counterparts (Kantrowitz, 2011). The Federal Pell Grant is a need-based federal grant program for colleges and universities nationwide. Blacks comprise the largest minority population receiving Pell Grants at 46% compared to

Whites at 20.5% (2011). Financial literacy is necessary for these populations in order to receive financial benefit of having an advanced degree.

Historically, men were the majority gender on college campuses; however, recently these numbers have shifted slightly where women outnumber men attending and earning college degrees (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008). Hence, measures of success have been based on the male student population. The CCC as a whole is comprised of over 50% of students that identify as either female and or from a diverse ethnic background (CCCCO, 2015), and 44% of the student population attending nationwide community colleges identify as either female or from a diverse ethnic background (AACC, 2012). In terms of associate degrees to date, women are more likely to earn degrees within health, education, business and liberal arts compared to men who still dominate within the science, technology, engineering and mathematic (STEM) fields. Blacks and Hispanics comprise 16% of the completion population in these disciplines (Snyder & Hoffman, 2002). The state of California has a Black population of 6.3%. Of this population, 14% are attending the CCC (AACU, 2012).

In this section, a critical review of the literature will be conducted through the conceptual framework of ADA (Harper, 2012) and BFT (Collins, 1999) to provide an overview of existing literature that addresses what is known about Black females and their success within the CCC system. Additionally, this literature review sought to identify gaps within the literature as it pertains to this topic. These gaps in the literature can help the researcher to understand whether additional programs are available that can assist Black females in community college become successful college graduates. Lastly,

this literature review sets out to make apparent those voids within the literature. The sections within this literature review will include the following key topics:

1. Recent History of Blacks in Higher Education
2. Pre-College Socialization and Readiness
3. Black College Achievement
4. Post-College Success of Black Students
5. Persistence and Retention of Blacks in Higher Education.

Recent History of Blacks in Higher Education

This section will provide a brief overview of the literature on the recent history of Blacks in higher education. This review provides background information regarding the past struggles of this population within the United States regarding not only access to education, but social equality as a whole. As a people, Blacks were enslaved, emancipated, disenfranchised, segregated, and ultimately granted equality by law, although equality for this population was not always a common practice (Gump, 2010; Smith & Kozleski, 2005).

Throughout U.S. history there have been multiple barriers that Blacks have struggled to overcome: slavery, voting disenfranchisement, and unequal education opportunities. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 publically supported universities whose primary focus was on agricultural and teacher training at a lower cost compared to private institutions. Towards the end of the Civil War, the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1862 was passed and provided federal funding for higher education by state. That same year at Oberlin College, Mary Jane Patterson became the first recorded Black female college graduate with honors (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009, p. 393).

Patterson was supposed to continue on to the two-year college like the other females, yet she was granted access into the four-year college with men. The fact that she was graduated proves the progress towards righting injustices for Blacks and females alike.

In 1856, the establishment of Wilberforce University, as the first Black institution of higher learning, paved the way for the first college for Black women (Spelman College) in 1881. The second Morrill Act of 1890 recognized the idea of separate but equal in education. As the different educational systems continued to grow for Black students, additional support was necessary. In 1944, Frederick Douglass Patterson established the United Negro College Fund in an effort to support not only Black colleges but Black students as well.

In an effort towards equality, Blacks continued to strive for education of all types. Several court cases slowly provided the access necessary for Blacks and all underrepresented groups within education. *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954) was a lawsuit originating in Topeka, Kansas, which ended years of segregation between Whites and Blacks in school by overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which had legalized the doctrine of separate but equal facilities for Blacks and Whites. However, integration of Whites and Blacks in school did not come without consequences. In 1957, President Eisenhower sent federal troops to ensure integration at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. This was an all-White high school, and the first Black students who attended were later known as the Little Rock Nine. Federal troops required to oversee the integration process at Central High School gave the notion that people from both races were not tolerant of the integration.

Though *Brown v. Board of Education* was mandated in the K-12 public school system in 1954, the same desegregation was not seen in higher education until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson (Harper, 2009). Part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 that provided federal aid funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) was known as amendment Part B. An institution was categorized as an HBCU if it was established prior to 1964 and it met the following criteria:

principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation. (Karpman, 2010)

These federal funds enabled a higher number of Black students to attend college without the stress of financial support while attending school. Many of HBCUs were founded in response to the Morrill Act of 1890. Currently, there are 104 HBCUs, and because of affirmative action laws, some have now been categorized as predominantly Black serving institutions (NCES, 2011).

In 1968, San Francisco State University became the first four-year college to establish a Black studies department, leading to the Ford Foundation granting three universities one million dollars to prepare faculty to teach courses in African American history. The recognition that teaching this population about their history and culture paved the way to understanding that not all students learn in the same manner and that there is relevance toward teaching about diversity. An understanding of one's culture and history can provide motivation with the idea that others have been through similar

struggles. Black studies provided Black students with the knowledge to know that they can be successful and that they are an important part of society.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 provides protection against sex discrimination in education and activities where federal funds are utilized. The passing of this amendment allowed for more females to become empowered and included in activities, which they had historically been excluded from. Title IX specifically allowed for women's athletic teams to receive equal funding and opportunity for participation. The *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* case of 1978 held that affirmative action systems were constitutional; however, meeting a racial quota for an institution was unconstitutional. In 2003, the *Grutter v. Bollinger* Supreme Court case upheld the affirmative action policy, continuing the ruling that race can be a factor in colleges considering applicants.

Lastly, the Supreme Court is currently deciding the outcome of the 2008 case of *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, where Fisher claimed the University unconstitutionally discriminated against her. The main question in the case was should race be a criteria for admission. University of Texas at Austin is a highly selective flagship institution, and Fisher first brought the case before the courts in April 2008, alleging the University violated Federal Civil Rights statues. She was one of 29,501 applicants in 2008 from which 12,843 were admitted, and 6,715 were accepted and enrolled. Fisher failed to meet Texas's "Top 10 Percent Plan," which guaranteed admission to public Texas colleges as long as they were Texas residents and within the top tenth of their high school class. Therefore, Fisher was associated with an application pool where extra consideration was given to Black and Latino applicants.

These different acts and court cases have paved the way for Black individuals to obtain access to higher education. The current literature assists in understanding the ramifications of post-slavery for Black individuals. Likewise, this knowledge also provides assistance in understanding the effects of these acts and court cases on the psychological and socio-cultural Black population.

The history of Blacks in the United States could affect their view of higher education due to the different barriers that the population had to overcome. Though these court cases show progression of equal access into higher education, there are still many factors that inhibit Black students from being successful within higher education (Kuh, 2009). Such legislation as Title V, Title IX, and SB 1456 have recognized the importance of equal access and accessibility for all students, specifically those from marginalized populations. The anti-deficit framework will provide a lens to interpreting how Blacks have become successful within higher education even with institutional barriers.

Though much of the recent history with Blacks within U.S. history seems bleak, the history of Blacks and higher education indicates a movement towards success. Through different acts, bills, and laws there has been an upward momentum in order to provide equality for Black students. The conceptual framework of Harper (2012) and Collins (1999) allows for acknowledgement of the powerful and progressiveness of Blacks through this historical lens in higher education.

Pre-College Socialization and Readiness

This section will review the pre-college factors that can be associated with the success of Black college students. The ADA lens focuses on three segments within this

first pipeline: (a) familial factors, (b) K-12 school forces and (c) out-of-school college preparation resources (Harper, 2012). Moreover, the BFT lens focuses on the establishing of self-image and the importance of family figures within the development process (Collins, 1999). Each of these segments will be used as a guide in explaining the literature.

Familial Factors

Before a student attends college there is a journey they take to acquire the skills to be successful in college. In fact, Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) state that there are other factors besides academic preparation that affect Black students in their chances of succeeding in college. For example, the home and family life of a student greatly influence not only their academic but also their personal success in college and beyond. Sometimes Black parents and grandparents, even though they are strong supporters of their children, lack the knowledge of what to expect from academic culture as the student transitions from secondary to their post-secondary education (Huebner & Corbett, 2007). The parents of Black students are often from a lower socio-economic status, have less education, work within a lower paying job and live within a lower class area, which are contributing factors that affect how students prepare for college and beyond (Jones, 2001, p. 46). Parents who are college graduates are able to assist their children with educational goals, schoolwork, class registration and financial aid advice (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Thirty-eight percent of Black children under age 18 are living in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010) and 67% are from single-parent homes, which are the highest of any ethnic group (Kids Count Data Center, 2013). In 2007, 56% percent of

Black children lived with a female parent with no spouse present, and this family structure is attributed to additional financial stress of the family (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010, p. iii). Based on the NCES 2008 statistics, 17% of Black families had a bachelor's degree compared to 36% of White families, 51% of Asian families and 11% of Hispanic families (NCES, 2008). These astonishing statistics could be attributed to that lack of education within the Black community. Without an advanced education, the Black population continues the cycle of poverty. This poverty lifestyle is a part of the Black community and is difficult to overcome because of the lack of education, which is necessary for many careers.

Black families are often the greatest supporters of their child's success and have the long-term goal of social mobility from their current situation; however, the behaviors needed to reach those goals are not apparent within the literature (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). Cook and Ludwig (1998) found in their study that there were higher levels of parental commitment in Blacks compared to their White counterparts in terms of attending school meetings and communication with teachers. Likewise, Black families and parents were more likely to assist in homework, stressing the importance of an education. Buchmann, Condron, and Roscigno (2010) argue that families passing on their cultural and social capital are essential to a child's success in college and beyond. Though each of these capitals is necessary, the knowledge to navigate the professional environment is also necessary for success (Yosso, 2005).

Though many Black individuals are aware of the financial burdens college presents, they are equally unaware of how to navigate through the financial aid process. Navigational capital is optimal when gaining higher education because of preconceived

notions and ideologies about how to graduate and transfer from within the system. There is much debate over how the community college is a cooling out period for minorities and prevents them from moving into advanced degrees.

K-12 School Forces

In addition to the family, there are many individuals within the school setting that prepare Black students for higher education. However, the majority of these teachers and counselors lack the skills and training to work with this population. In 2007-08, 25% of secondary schools that had at least a 50% Black population had math teachers that were unqualified (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). In contrast, if a secondary school had at least a 50% White enrollment, their teachers had on average 14 years of experience (2010). Research has shown that Black and White students have different levels of exposure to novice teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Aliaga Diaz, 2004). The lack of teaching experience could inhibit Black students from gaining the adequate knowledge necessary to be academically successful.

School counselors are major resources for all students but specifically for Black students as they prepare to transition into the college setting. However, school counselors are resources that many Black students do not know how to utilize effectively; therefore, Black students are not equipped with the tools necessary to transition from the K-12 system into the college setting. In a 10-year span from 1999-2008, the number of Black and Hispanic students taking the Advanced Placement (AP) exam tripled from 94,000 to 318,000; however, Black students had among the lowest mean AP scores (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010, p. v). There is a gap in the attention and devotion that is paid towards college planning for Black students compared to their White counterparts,

and it has much to do with the capital that comes with higher education (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Jones, 2001).

There are few positive role models within the K-12 education system for Black students to motivate them in their educational pursuit (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

Teachers, counselors and administrators that resemble the ethnicity and or race of the students represent role models for this student population. These role models provide a sense of attainment for Black students, allowing this student group to feel that they can accomplish their educational goals.

Out of School College Preparation Resources

Lastly, there are out-of school resources that prepare Black students for college life. Lareau (1987) found indications of college expectations as early as first grade in middle-class families. Much of this was because of the multitude of resources that these students were afforded. Buchmann, Condron, and Roscigno (2010) argue that families with higher education levels and income can afford a “shadow education,” which will ultimately assist students in navigating the educational system in order to further their educational opportunities (pp. 437-439). These out of school activities may include test preparation courses for the SAT and ACT and private tutoring (Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010). Many of the resources that are provided for Black students are through their church or youth group, peers outside of the classroom, and the images they see within the media.

Many Black students do not have the same access to afterschool programs or private tutoring, resulting in other non-productive out of school activities. For example, 43% percent of Black students between 6th and 12th grades were suspended from school,

which is a higher percentage than any other race (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010, p. v). When Black students are not in the classroom, they are not gaining the needed skills to be successful within their academic or social life. Being suspended from school allows for other non-productive activities.

Factors that could contribute to their lack of preparation are poor time management skills, inhibited personal development and lack of capitals (i.e., navigational) that would assist Black females throughout their lives. Allen (1992) and Leach & Williams (2007) argue that the academic preparedness, psychological and social barriers, and social problems often pose as problematic obstacles for the Black population.

Black students are often unaware of how to balance the multiple demands of school, social life and personal development (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Jones, 2001). Black women in higher education have unique experiences and roles compared to the general population (Harley, 2008; Collins, 1999). These experiences, though keeping Black females actively involved in their personal lives, distract these women from their academic lives. Thus, looking towards out-of-school activities and educational resources could assist this population in their academic development.

Black College Achievement

This section will review the second pipeline point of college achievement. Within this pipeline the college experience, out-of-class engagement as well as enriching educational experiences will be viewed to better understand the Black college experience (Harper, 2012). Additionally, BFT (Collins, 1999) focuses primarily on the

empowerment of the Black female as they reflect on their past experiences towards their achievement.

The College Experience

The newfound freedom that many students experience in their first year of college can be exhilarating for some, and disorienting for others (Sax et al., 2004). The stress of transitioning from a world they understand to unfamiliar territory is difficult for many first-time students. For many Black students specifically, they feel guilty for pursuing their education (Ellsworth, 1989; Fordham, 1988). The separation from family members can even cause academic problems for students of color as they try to adjust to their new college lifestyle (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010, p. 313). This feeling of guilt is also accompanied with the notion that by achieving academic success students of color are acting White or code switching to match the dominate culture; thus, they are crossing cultural boundaries (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). By code switching, Black students sometimes abandon their own culture; consequently, they assimilate into dominate culture. This act allows for the Black student to maneuver throughout the educational system as well as society, but it may have psychological and cultural consequences.

There have been many opposing viewpoints to this notion of “acting White” in education means success (Cook & Ludwig, 1998; Harpalani, 2002). Harpalani (2002) directly critiques Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) article by providing data from Cook and Ludwig (1998) as well as understanding of racial identity based on Cross’ Nigrescence Model (1971). Cook and Ludwig (1998) found in their study using research from the 1990 National Education Longitudinal Survey that there was no difference in the expectation of college attendance between Black and White tenth grade students.

Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) argue that Fordham and Ogbu (1986) take a defeat model, negating Black identity in order to meet with societal norms. Horvat and Lewis (2003) counter previous work by finding that Black females were not likely to submit to “acting White” to gain academic successes. Ultimately, the greatest criticism comes from how society defines success for the Black community and a re-examination of that support and educational experiences of the Black community.

Furthermore, many Black students feel selfish for attending college due to college expenses taking away from the family’s resources (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010, p. 314). Being able to finance a collegiate career is a subject that many students must discuss with their families prior to attending college. The majority of Black students and their families do not have the adequate knowledge of how to complete the financial aid process, which results in a number of students not attending (Jones, 2001).

Overall, minority students are the largest population to receive federal aid. Of those who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), there were 83% of Blacks who received aid compared to 55.3% Whites. Of those who received need-based Pell grants, 46% of Blacks compared to 20.5% Whites received this grant (Kantrowitz, 2011). Ninety-five percent of need-based awards were given to families whose annual income was below \$50,000 (Kantrowitz, 2011).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a surge of Black students attending college; however, many dropped out prior to graduation due to financial challenges created by the educational cutbacks during the Reagan and Bush administrations (Jones, 2001, p. 49). In the early 1980s, federal and state grants were the largest forms of financial aid that were utilized by students. However, in 1982 loans

began to replace the types of free aid available to students (Geiger & Heller, 2011). For example, for every new dollar of grant money awarded from 1986 to 1989, two dollars of student loans were granted (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). According to the U.S. Department of Education (1995), the amount of need was greater in 1986-1989; however, there was a decline in the number of students who were eligible for aid (35% in 1986 compared to 30% in 1989). In contrast, 80% of full-time students received financial aid for the 2007-2008 academic year, and 92% of full-time Black college students received an average of \$13,500 from financial aid during the same period (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010, p. vi). Much of these funds are scholarships and grants; however, students still have to work to maintain their lifestyle.

Classroom Experiences

The relationship that is gained between students and faculty is critical to their academic success. However, a strong White faculty and Black student relationship is difficult to form especially at predominately White institutions (PWI). Black students feel that White faculty members are culturally insensitive to their needs (Fleming, 1984; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010, p. 312). Tinto (1993) suggests that having like qualities and similarities assists in the connection between student and faculty. Guiffrida's (2005) qualitative study of Black college students and their relationship with faculty at PWIs provides a lens to uncover students' perceptions of these relationships. Prior studies on minority students were conducted from a quantitative perspective and failed to understand the complexities of the relationships between student and faculty (Guiffrida, 2005; Love, 2008). Guiffrida (2005) interviewed 19 Black students (11 female, 8 male) who self-identified as high achieving at a PWI in the northeastern part of the United

States. The majority of the students interviewed (17 of 19) had received financial aid. The results of Guiffrida's study indicate that at this so-called "student-centered" campus, Black faculty was more student centered compared to White faculty.

Moreover, perceived racial/ethnic tension can significantly affect all minority students as they transition into the college setting (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 420). Minority students often are a minority within the classroom setting, and many feel that they must speak for their whole race or ethnicity. Much like the ostracizing they receive from home about code switching to dominate culture, within the classroom they are seen nothing more than being Black. Black students become a native informant for their race, specifically within PWIs. Being singled out within the classroom setting creates sense pressure to not be perceived as the stereotypical Black student as it will only result in affirming these stereotypical beliefs about the Black community (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p.158). Black students typically have a difficult time doing this if they are seen as representing the stereotypical Black community that is portrayed in the media. This stereotype then restricts the student from being their true self as they are consistently conscious of their perceived self.

Out of Class Engagement

Learning outside of the classroom is important to the enrichment of the Black student. The primary way that this learning happens is through engagement in extracurricular activities. Engagement is the process where the student develops a holistic sense of self that is produced by their environment and their involvement in the learning process (Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) interactionist theory aims to explain from a sociological perspective how students can enrich their college

experience. At first, the student must separate themselves from their previous associated groups (i.e., family, high school friends, etc.), the student must then transition into their college lives where they will then adopt the new culture of the campus community. In this progression the student will meet different individuals and begin to understand their place within the campus. Tinto's theory is set to assist students with social integration into campus life. Being involved on campus empowers students to finding their niche and in their self-discovery process. However, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) suggest that involvement in Black student organizations can isolate Black students from the larger campus community. Financial challenges though may limit students in their campus engagement with activities and hinder these populations from being completely involved in the campus community (St. John, 1991).

However, it is this involvement in campus activities, which deepen the student experience, and involvement in campus activities allow for leadership and self-discovery to happen. These out of the classroom activities also allow the Black student to build a sense of community and understand their purpose of gaining a college degree. Many of the students in Guiffrida's (2005) study stated that encouragement from their teachers helped to keep them motivated.

Campus involvement as a whole for Black students can be difficult as many feel isolated and ostracized. Patton (2006) found that Black students do not have a sense of school spirit or pride and that the campus environment can be quite stressful. Black culture centers (BCC) have slowly gained momentum on college campuses. These centers are geared towards educating Black students in their history, and the centers provide this student group with a place to socialize. They also provide validation and

personal support to Black students (Patton, 2006). Many have stated that such centers promote separatism on campus; however, Patton (2006) argues that such centers are to bring the campus together and engage non-Blacks to learn about Black culture. BCCs are just as important as the academics on campus, as these centers encourage socialization, leadership and engagement in a safe learning environment (2006). Students gain a sense of family where teachers and counselors became mother and father figures on campus encouraging Black students towards meeting their goal (Patton, 2006, p. 7).

Enriching Educational Experiences

Faculty, staff and administrators need to recognize the differences within the classroom and provide an environment that celebrates the diversity of all students. By doing so, specifically minority students are able to develop their identity and embrace their beliefs and their values (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 159). Similar to the high school teacher, the college instructor plays a pivotal role in the academic development of Black students. Ortiz and Santos (2009) suggest that institutions “need to create campus cultures that support and respect students’ past, acknowledge their different experiences, and support their development” (p. 249).

Learning communities however have been proven through research to be beneficial within minority communities (Kuh, 2009). Students gain a sense of family within learning communities and cultural centers where teachers and counselors become mother and father figures on campus, encouraging Black students towards meeting their goal (Patton, 2006, p. 7). This could be antiquated towards many minorities because their communities are of a collectivistic culture compared to White culture, which is typically seen as individualistic (Ogbu, 2003; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2011). Tinto (1993) stated

that students need to “break away” from past traditions so that they may be successful within the college community. However, Kuh (2009) and Guiffrida (2005) point out how minority students are more likely to do better when working collectively with others.

Post-College Success of Black Students

The third pipeline point of Harper’s (2012) ADA framework is post-college success. Within this pipeline there are two components of post-college success (graduate school enrollment and career readiness); however, for the purpose of this paper there will only be a focus on the career readiness of Black students in higher education. Likewise, Collin’s (1999) BFT provides the holistic reflection of where the Black female is at this point in their life. This reflection encompasses their family, perception and self-awareness of their heritage and themselves as a Black female in society. The conceptual framework provides an overview and thoughtfulness towards where the Black female was and where they want to be in terms of academics, professional career and family. In terms of career readiness, one of the first aspects to examine is the actual college completion rates of students since a bachelor’s degree is a common qualification for many careers. In 2008 alone, females earned more degrees than males within each racial/ethnic group, and Black females received over twice as many degrees as Black males (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010).

Many students seek employment once they earn their college degree; however, a college degree does not ensure a job. The unemployment rate for Blacks without a high school credential was 22%, compared with 11% for Blacks with a high school credential and 4% for Blacks with at least a bachelor’s degree (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). These statistics show that having a college degree does assist in career advancement.

However, the chances of being hired are higher for females than males. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that African-American and Latina women who attended private institutions were more likely to be hired (p. 478).

Few students, specifically minority students, are unaware of the possibility of internships while in college. These opportunities allow for application of theory they have learned in the classroom. Furthermore, students are able to build upon additional skills that will be useful in their career such as navigation of the professional environment and collaboration with colleagues (Hynie, Jensen, Johnny, Wedlock, & Phipps, 2011). Hynie, et al. (2011) argue that student internships better prepare students for the workforce; additionally, this experience allows for students to continue to build upon their career aspirations.

Black students who graduated from a HBCU had higher career aspirations and felt that they were better prepared for their career compared to those who attended a PWI (Cole, Barber, Bolyard & Linders, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 482). However, it should be noted that the research from DeSousa and Kuh (1996) as well as from Cole et al. (1999) suggests that students' precollege career objectives play a strong role in their post-college career path. The study by Cole et al. (1999) focused on the self-reported career choices of arts and science majors attending 34 different types of institutions. Their study identified that by attending an Ivy League institution there was a higher likelihood of career placement and advancement. Moreover, it was the major interest declared as a freshman that was the strongest predictor of career choice. Overall, the differences that were found in the study could merely be in a student's choice of

selecting a HBCU versus a PWI. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) there may be no statistical differences between the two institutions.

Black females are looking for work and looking to achieve their career goals; however, many industries are requiring more from the applicant pool. Thus, higher education is a way to gain employment and to move up the proverbial ladder. The community college is a way to begin career exploration and meet the academic needs of many professional fields. Additionally, the networking and skills that are learned will assist Black females to maneuver through their professional careers.

Persistence and Retention of Blacks in Higher Education

The low persistence and matriculation of Black students through the American education system has severely limited their access, participation and attainment of higher education. Some efforts have been made since desegregation to assist Black students academically with the introduction of specialized programs to assist Black and all underrepresented student populations in terms of their financial, academic and social development (Cornell & Mosley, 2006; Delano-Oriaran, 2012; Rendon, 2002; Sankar & Raju, 2011; Tinto, 1993). Some examples of this work includes the California Basic Skills Initiative and the Title V federal grant program. Achieving social integration in college as Tinto's theory (1993) explains then allows the student to become academically successful and to remain in college to complete their educational goals. Likewise, as students become involved in the campus community they are then able to build their own communities.

Overall, the research indicates Black students are not prepared for the rigors of college and what is necessary for this student population to continue towards graduation

and or transfer. The anti-deficit framework presented by Harper (2009) provides a new view on Black males within higher education. An understanding of all the barriers that the Black male population struggles with prior to higher education can assist practitioners as well as educational leaders towards meeting the direct demands of the Black male population. Likewise, many of these challenges that the Black male overcomes are similar to that of the Black female college student.

Harper's (2009) framework provides a lens to view how to assist Black students to move towards persisting and retaining in college. Prior college preparation as well as support while in college leads toward the student meeting their academic goals. Black students often lack the academic preparation required and are not financially prepared for college; thus, they are not able to meet their academic requirements within the prescribed timeframe to graduate or transfer (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013; Tinto, 1993). In addition, Black students frequently lack the knowledge of how to ask for assistance in navigating the college system. Financial barriers are the greatest predictors of persistence among students of color (Carter et al., 2013, p. 96; Tinto, 1993). Likewise, Black students not having adequate financial support are more likely to take a leave of absence while pursuing their academic degree (Hawley & Harris, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) suggest that the implementation of support services allows for students to become engaged with their campus community, thus increasing persistence and retention. Cano and Castillo (2010) add that students of color are more likely to be successful in college if they are able to stay connected to their families and communities. In fact, to persist year after year, Black students need the support of their families, peers and faculty as well as financial aid and academic support services (Carter et al., 2013).

Within the CCC success and retention rates have increased within the past 10 years for all racial backgrounds (see Table 2). However, within the Black population as a whole there is still a dismal number compared to other populations. There is almost a 13% difference between the success over the general population and Black students. Black women only have a retention and success rate of approximately one percent.

TABLE 2. Credit Course Retention/Success Rate

California Community College Students	Fall 2002 Degree Applicable Enrollment Count	Fall 2002 Degree Applicable Retention Rate	Fall 2002 Degree Applicable Success Rate	Fall 2012 Degree Applicable Success Count	Fall 2012 Degree Applicable Retention Rate	Fall 2012 Degree Applicable Success Rate
State of California Total	3,564,254	80.97%	66.49%	2,507,132	86.49%	70.42%
Female Total	1,965,198	81.07%	67.48%	1,328,980	86.57%	71.38%
African-American	161,603	74.52%	56.10%	82,131	80.65%	58.88%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	20,531	78.22%	62.42%	6,304	84.16%	66.16%
Asian	298,131	83.21%	72.17%	190,217	88.83%	78.02%
Hispanic	520,026	80.08%	63.28%	503,909	85.98%	67.81%
Pacific Islander	13,966	77.47%	61.60%	6,158	83.77%	64.71%
White Non-Hispanic	804,805	82.31%	70.74%	438,471	88.06%	76.39%
Male Total	1,578,909	80.86%	65.24%	1,157,204	86.40%	69.33%
African-American	117,119	76.43%	55.47%	70,176	82.33%	58.00%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	14,824	79.51%	62.82%	5,225	84.88%	66.34%
Asian	262,849	80.96%	66.56%	179,822	87.54%	73.82%
Hispanic	384,522	79.57%	61.12%	406,863	85.67%	65.91%
Pacific Islander	13,192	79.39%	62.12%	6,237	84.98%	65.18%
White Non-Hispanic	653,789	82.33%	68.51%	393,697	87.61%	73.48%

Note. (CCCCO, 2015)

Summary

This literature review was guided by the conceptual framework of Harper's ADA (2012) and Collins's BFT (1999) and provides a robust understanding of the journey that Black student's face within higher education. Their histories are a major component of their journey and enable an understanding through their pre-college, college, and post college experiences. This is leading towards the empowerment of Black individuals. Collins's BFT provides a bridge to Harper's ADA, allowing for an acknowledgement of the Black females roles while taking note of their educational experiences.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I am where I am because of the bridges that I crossed. Sojourner Truth was a bridge. Harriet Tubman was a bridge. Ida B. Wells was a bridge. Madame C. J. Walker was a bridge. Fannie Lou Hamer was a bridge.--Oprah Winfrey

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black females in the California community college system and their journey towards success. This chapter focuses directly on how this population was studied and provides an explanation of the ethnographic interviews utilized to gather data. Additionally, this section also provide evidence for why the ethnographic interview was selected for this study as well as how data was collected and analyzed to provide credibility. Again, researcher questions that will guide this study are the following:

1. How do Black females attending the California community colleges (CCCs) navigate their pathways toward success?
2. How does race, gender, and class impact the educational and life experiences of Black females enrolled in CCCs?
3. How do Black females enrolled in CCCs make sense of their roles and the intersections of their roles and identities?

Research Design

Qualitative research is one which allows the researcher to gain a significant depth of knowledge about a topic where little literature exists. This research design allows for a

number of different methods to be utilized in order to better understand the phenomenon such as interviews, observation and documentation (Creswell, 2013). Though there is a multitude of literature written about Black students in higher education (Collins, 1999; Harper, 2007, 2012; hooks, 1981; Parham, 2002), very few look specifically about the lived experiences of Black female and even less so of those within the CCC. These underpinnings allow for fresh prospective on this specific population.

There are many research design forms within qualitative research. Qualitative research is about exploring issues while understanding data that are unstructured (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Saldana, 2013). This research method aims to gain a deep and meaningful understanding of a specific group or event out of the larger population. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative does not manipulate variables or introduce treatments to subjects; rather, everyday situations are the cornerstone (Glaser, 2008) and allow for first-hand experiences of participants and how they make meaning of their environment and or situations. Interviews, open-ended questions, focus groups, literature reviews and document analysis are all methods in how this process is conducted (Ortiz, 2003). This study utilized a general qualitative method by use of ethnographic interviews.

The ethnographic interview is derived from ethnography, which is one form of qualitative research that provides descriptions of people, places and events (Berg, Lune, & Lune, 2004; Saldana, 2013). The ethnographic interview method uses a variety of research techniques such as observation, interviews and collection of artifacts (Ortiz, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2009). Ethnographic interview is a way to collect data in many variables that are not easily quantified (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, this method

assists in understanding hidden and non-obvious aspects of human behaviors, attitudes and feelings (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). This design allowed for a rich understanding of the Black female college student.

The ethnographic interview design is appropriate for this study because of its aim to gain a holistic understanding of Black females in the CCC environment. This study's intention was to follow the educational journey of the Black female from their first educational encounters to present day while also venturing into their future goals. The ethnographic approach allows for knowledge to be gained about a specific culture—Black females in the CCC—whereas ethnographic interviews allow the researcher to gather a saturation of stories to gain an understanding of this population. This method provides researchers with a comprehensive perspective of the population. Additionally, this method is continuous, and additional data can be combined to current data to provide a robust understanding of the culture being studied (Saldana, 2013). Thus, this method also allows for the Black female participants to think about their multiple roles as a Black, female, community college student as well as additional roles they maintain outside the educational setting (i.e., mother, daughter, wife, etc.) in addition to their lived experiences.

Data Collection

Prior to the interviews, the researcher presented the potential participant with two informed consent forms which were signed (Appendix C). The participant was then engaged in a semi-structured interview dialog in which questions were posed and answered. Interviews ranged from 30-90 minutes, and the participants were audio

recorded. Three participants did not provide their consent for audio recording; therefore, I then took copious notes throughout the interview.

After the interview concluded, the researcher then reflected on the interview process by memoing thoughts and feelings pertaining to the interview (see Appendix G). This process allowed for the researcher to become cognizant of her bias within the study. The researcher was able to create a coding scheme based on the interviews. Coding schemes are discussed later in the data analysis section (see Appendix G). Following the interviews, the researcher then transcribed notes and the audio recordings. Once this process was complete, transcripts were uploaded to NVivo to begin the coding process.

Instrumentation

The researcher designed a 22-question interview protocol (see Appendix D) to be administered to each participant. The protocol was based on the central research questions and relevant literature. Qualitative risk analysis is a technique utilized to discover the probability of risk in terms of probability and impact on a participant (Bass & Robichaux, 2001). The interview begins with low-risk questions, which set to establish rapport with the participant. All research questions have risk; however, low-risk questions, such as “tell me about yourself” and “tell me about your future career goals and personal aspirations,” have a lower probability of impact on the participant. As the interview progressed, the level of personal disclosure required to answer questions increased. Questions were semi-structured and open ended; some also included probing questions to gain an in-depth answer. Basic questions included “tell me about yourself,” and probing questions asked specifics about the participant’s family background, life

goals and financial situations. The use of open-ended questions allowed for unanticipated responses to be documented (Fowler, 2002).

Pilot

Two pilot interviews were conducted to determine how the interview protocol would be launched during the study. Additionally, conducting these pilot interviews helped to establish credibility of the protocol. Two individuals were interviewed and recorded for approximately 45 minutes each. During the interview, the researcher took copious notes, which provided assistance for editing the protocol. Lastly, the researcher was able to understand how the research questions were posed and interpreted by the participant.

Following the pilot process, the researcher deduced that many questions needed to be altered to match the research questions. Also, many probe questions were added to assist the participant to answer the questions thoroughly. Lastly, the researcher made additional adjustments to parallel the conceptual framework. With the framework in mind, the researcher posed more questions towards the participants' identity, academic path, and personal journey from a Black female's perspective. Based on the pilot interviews, probing questions were added to bring depth to the protocol and allow for the participant to fully answer questions based on their personal experiences.

Sample

This study was comprised of 15 self-identified Black females who are over the age of 18 and are currently enrolled at Rose City College (RCC), which is a pseudonym. Purposeful sampling was utilized to recruit participants for this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2009; Patton, 2001). Purposeful sampling was defined as sampling directed

towards a purpose or selected for a reason (Morse, 2003). Females were identified by faculty members on campus and asked to participate in the study. The potential participants were then asked how they identified based on their gender and ethnic backgrounds. To gain additional potential participants, snowballing was also utilized to gain saturation on the topic. Those who interviewed in the study along with faculty members assisted in the snowball sampling. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggested that the intentional selection of sites and participants permits focused analysis of the central phenomenon of the study. In this case, the phenomenon is the lived experiences of Black females as well as their journey through the development of their identity.

Site Information

This exploratory study was conducted at Rose City College (RCC), one of the 112 California community colleges. The campus is located in an urban area in Southern California. Of this student population at RCC as of 2011-2012, the following racial demographics were available.

TABLE 3. RCC Racial Demographics

Race	Population Size
White	18.4%
Asian or Pacific Islander	24.2%
Hispanic	36.3%
Black	5.8%
American Indian	0.4%
Filipino	4.1%
Other	0.6%

RCC is currently predominately a Hispanic campus as well as a Hispanic Serving Institution. The gender makeup of the college is 51.9% female and 48.1% male. RCC is known for its high transfer rates to four-year universities.

RCC was chosen as the sole site for this study because the college has implemented a number of academic, cultural and social programs which address the unique needs of its student population. Additionally, this site was selected because of rich student data collected by the Institutional Effectiveness Office (IEO) indicating the difference between those students who participate in these programs and those who do not. The IEO suggested that those students enrolled in the Umoja Program were more likely to persist and were retained throughout their community college experience. The connectivity and support system structured within the Umoja Program has assisted Black students in their educational development. RCC recognized this group for being successful as they graduate and transfer to four-year institutions. Though IEO recognized the Umoja Program as a viable source for recruitment, only two interviewees were involved in the program and gave little credit to their involvement.

Participants

Participants were all enrolled at RCC during the time of the interviews. Attendance in college varied between participants from one semester to over five years. Participants self-identified as Black females, though options of indicating other racial/ethnic backgrounds were also included. Information on the participants' age, ethnic backgrounds, college major and years in college are presented in Table 4. The study sought to understand the lived experiences of Black females attending the CCC system on their journey towards academic, professional and personal success. These

criteria are relevant to the research question because they enable the participant to have fluid knowledge about their college experience.

TABLE 4. Participant Profile

Name	Age	Race	Major	Years in College	Years at RCC	Income	Receive Financial Aid
Jessica	19	Black	Broadcast Journalism	1.5	1.5	100,000+	No
Cinnamon	21	Black, White, Native Indian	Speech Pathology	4	4	below 20,000	No
Brandi	23	Black	Communication: Public Relations	4	4	below 20,000	yes
Seida	56	Black	unknown	1	1	unknown	N/A
Keyanna	19	Black, White	Kinesiology	2	2	unknown	Yes
Genesis	20	Black, White	Sociology	3	3	20,000-49,000	Yes
Meaghan	18	Black	Mathematics	1.5	1.5	unknown	Yes
Beverly	18	Black	Kinesiology	1	1	50,000-75,000	Yes
Imani	19	Black, Latino	Communication: Public Relations	1	2.5	below 20,000	Yes
Faith	24	Black	Criminal Justice	1	0.5	75,000-100,000	Yes
Melissa	21	Black	Social and Behavioral (GE)	3	3	75,000-100,000	Yes
Clara	18	Black	Business	0.5	0.5	20,000-49,000	Yes
Jasmine	21	Black	Psychology	4	4	unknown	No
London	23	Black, White	Pre-Med	4	2	below 20,000	Yes
Sheela	21	Black	Art	3	3	unknown	Yes

Procedures

The researcher gained permission to conduct participant interviews by collaborating with the college's enrollment office. A recruitment letter was emailed to all eligible prospective participants on behalf of the researcher through the IEO (see Appendix A). Interested students were advised to contact the researcher by email or phone directly to participate in the study. The researcher responded to those interested individuals and then conducted interviews on a mutually agreed upon time, date and on-campus location. Most interviews were conducted at RCC in a private classroom or

office to ensure the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Those interviews which were not conducted in person were conducted by phone.

The participants signed a consent form stating that they could withdraw from the audio-recorded study at any time. The approximate hour-long interviews were audio-recorded to assist the researcher in data collection. The interviewer gathered data from participants that revealed the experiences of how student athletes that completed the first year experience program have continued to their second year. To understand the underlying phenomenon, five to ten structured interview questions were asked. The interview was then transcribed and coded to establish themes. From the themes, the researcher was able to determine which themes related to the central research questions. Based on the central research questions and the themes, exemplars aim to assist in the understanding of the Black female journey in the CCC.

Protection of Subjects

In order to provide confidentiality of the participants and to ensure their comfort, interviews were conducted in a private classroom or office on campus. Likewise, to protect participants from the possible risk of breaches in confidentiality, the research did the following: (a) allowed participants to create pseudonyms which were then used throughout the interview, (b) utilized pseudonyms during the interview transcriptions, (c) promised to destroy the interview recordings three years after the interviews were transcribed and (d) properly stored the informed consent forms in a separate location from the interview notes and transcriptions.

Positionality

Parallel to the conceptual framework of Harper (2007) and Collins (1999), the positionality statement directly aligns with the framework. Acknowledgement of my identity, educational attainment and career developments serve to address the bias I may possess as a researcher. My personal experiences have shaped the direction of this study.

Pre-College Experience and Development

As a child, I never knew that there were differences in gender, until I realized that I would have to share a room with a baby sister. After my parents gave birth to a little girl, a new life began for me. From a young age, I understood the physical differences between males and females; however, gender was not taught to me as a limitation for my success. Throughout my development, I was unaware of the difference of ethnicity and social class. The difference in individuals was not presented because it was never an issue as to who my friends were as long as a shared bond was presented. My lived experience has created a plethora of emotional and psychological troubles, and to this day I still aim to comprehend. Ultimately, I ask myself, how can social identities create such separation between individuals?

Throughout my education, I was overly active with extracurricular activities such as Girl Scouts, student government, band, yearbook and leadership. In addition to these campus activities, I took SAT prep classes and private music lessons on the weekends. I participated in each of these activities with preparation towards my goal of higher education. While both of my parents attended college, it was up to me to decide my educational pathway.

College Experience

I enrolled in a California community college and completed the necessary steps expected of any first year student, including the following: (a) taking the placement test, (b) participating in orientation, (c) meeting with a counselor and (d) registering for classes. Unbeknownst to me was that many individuals were unaware of the matriculation process and that my pathway would become the standard in California years later. I was recruited into the Ujima (oo-gee-ma) Program (translated as collective work and responsibility in Swahili), which is a learning community model created to engage students at a higher level to specifically meet the needs of first-year Black students. This was the first time I heard that I was “BLACK,” and at no time before this was my race a topic of concern other than enrolling in college. Only then did I realize I needed to learn what it meant to be “BLACK.” As I went through the program, I learned a great deal about myself and the world I live in. I struggled being within this learning community environment, mainly because I did not identify as being Black. Many of the students would refer to me as being “White,” and that “I was not “Black enough” or that I was an “Oreo” (individual that is of Black heritage, but has personality traits of a stereotypical White individual). Such statements and experiences forced me to delve into who I was and what it meant to be a Black educated female. I educated myself on the Black experience. Though I had a greater knowledge base, I shied away because of feelings of inadequacy of the Black race and my lack of connection to a group of people that could not accept me or who I was.

Post-College Experience

As an educator, I find that the majority of students I work with are trying to find themselves. These students work to better understand the world they live in and how their identity influences that world. However, students are limited in their exposure to their identities because they are often asked to check a box. These proverbial boxes are where an individual must decide if they are one identity versus another. Society as a whole is not comfortable with different individuals; thus, people develop boxes to better categorize individuals. These boxes are our individual selves: gender, race, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc. However, these boxes are limiting in that they separate each group. The exclusion of some individuals can create feelings of insecurity for those who do not fit into specific boxes, thus leading to a struggle of identity.

As a counselor, my job is to understand the individuals whom I work with and to provide each student with the support and resources necessary for their development throughout their educational experiences. A great deal of my work is to help students reach their academic, personal and professional goals. These successes can only be defined by the student; however, society does herd students into what the general population believes success to be. Ultimately, through this research, it is my duty to show that there are multiple successes for college students, not just those which society possess.

Data Analysis

Once transcriptions were completed, the researcher analyzed the data, coding, categories, established themes and then relationships between themes. The preliminary

steps of data analysis began after the transcription process. The researcher conducted open coding for each transcript, which was the researcher's first attempt of making sense of the data (Ortiz, 2003). From this initial coding process schemes evolved by utilizing the memoing journal previously created by the researcher. The memoing assisted the researcher in keeping thoughts and feelings separate from the data.

With use of the original coding scheme and memos (see Appendix G), the researcher reviewed the transcripts to better understand the multiple codes the data presented. Categorical coding (Gubrium, 2012; Ortiz, 2003) was used to narrow down the initial codes. Axial coding that developed from the categories included family, support systems, self-awareness, happiness and future goals. At this point, different categories were interconnected to better comprehend the data. These codes were input into NVivo, and each transcript was coded and recoded for accuracy.

Once codes were established in NVivo, themes were created around the codes; initial themes included the following: support systems, educational motivation, future aspirations and self-awareness. The researcher then spoke with peers to debrief on the current findings. Data was then revisited to recode based on additional understanding of the findings. This process of multiple coding cycles (see Figure 4) helped to better interpret the data (Saldana, 2013). After multiple coding cycles, descriptive coding took place. This process allowed for the researcher to summarize the topics that were utilized to create themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2013). These themes were then compared and analyzed against the central research questions. This coding process assisted in establishing the foundation for the stories and connection between each theme

and the research questions. These themes were then used to answer the central research questions.

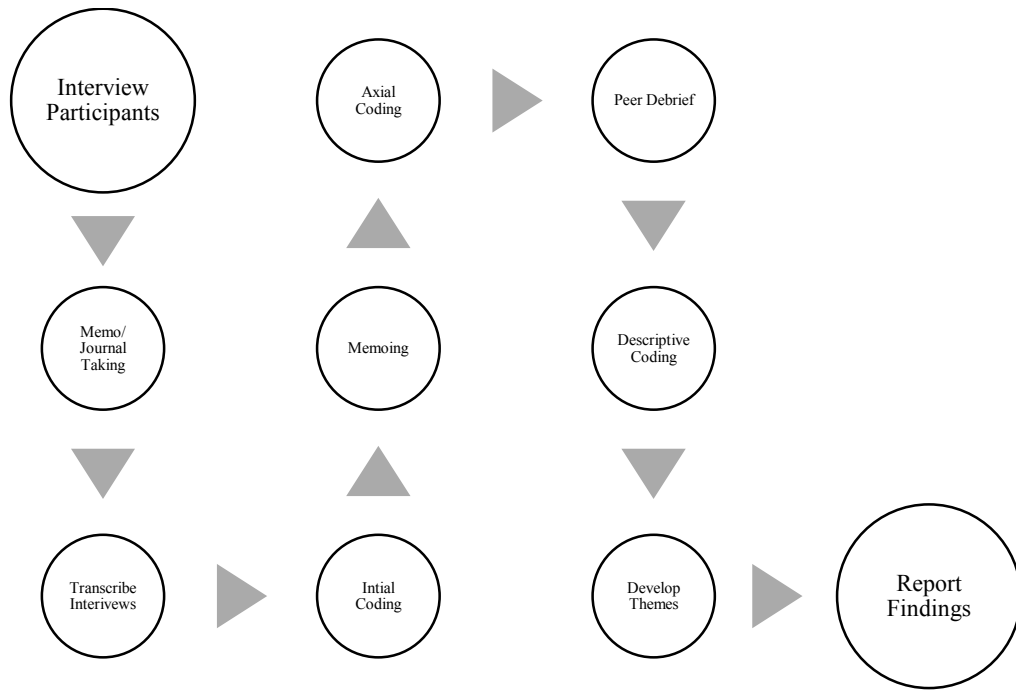


FIGURE 4. Coding process.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness are necessary in qualitative research in order to establish the worth and confidence within a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both credibility and trustworthiness were maintained throughout the study in a number of different ways. The pilot interviews enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the environment to which the participants would participate. Additionally, the pilot interviews allowed for adjustments in advance of the actual study interviews.

Following the interview, the researcher wrote in a journal to document the interview process and areas that needed to be addressed for the actual study. These journal entries aided in the establishment of trustworthiness of the study. All pilot interviews were transcribed by the researcher for the purpose of gaining a broader scope of knowledge of the interview questions.

Through the process of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher was allowed to have a brief dialog with the participant regarding their story to check for authenticity. Assistance was sought from peer-debriefers and from the participants to discover areas which needed further assistance. The member checking process increased the credibility of the study. Prolonged engagement with the participants provided time to think fully about the interviews. The management of bias occurred through memo writing as well as speaking to peers about the findings. Lastly, to improve the integrity of the study, bias was managed through memo writing, debriefing with peers, and participants reviewing their transcripts.

Limitations

There are several limitations involved with this study. Foremost, this study is limited to a single CCC, located in an urban area of Southern California. Although there is no attempt to generalize the experiences of the participants in the study to the larger population of Black females who attend community colleges, the results of the study may be transferred to individuals in similar settings. Secondly, the experiences of these individuals may be different based on their age, family background, career/major choices, social economic status and academic preparedness. Lastly, the majority of the Black women who participated in this study were intercollegiate student athletes; therefore, they

may have had a completely different experience compared to the general Black female student population.

As the researcher, there are many biases which can implicate the study. As a Black female that graduated from the CCC system, it is difficult to separate my experience from the experiences of the participants. Additionally, my work as a counselor in the CCC has a great impact on my perspective within this study, as I want students to be successful. As the researcher, I was aware of my bias and relied heavily on reviewing the literature, member checking and peer debriefing to better interpret the data.

Summary

The current study utilized qualitative methods to interview 15 self-identified Black females who were currently enrolled at Rose City College. All participants had completed at least one semester at RCC prior to the interview. The researcher sought to learn about the personal and academic experiences of Black females within the CCC system. Two pilot interviews were conducted prior to the actual study to determine accuracy and deliverance of the questions. A 22-question interview protocol was developed and used during the study to improve knowledge about the life experiences of these Black females. The interviews were all transcribed, and after each interview, details of the interviews were recorded in a journal to stay consistently aware of biases. Participants were then given mini biographical vignettes of their interview and asked to verify for accuracy. The researcher then discussed findings with members in the community as a form of member checking, while keeping the participants' identity concealed. Data analysis was then conducted by the use of NVivo, and all transcripts were coded and themes were established.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.--Maya Angelou

This chapter will discuss the findings of this study. The purpose of this study is to discover the journey of Black females within the CCC. The researcher employed purposeful sampling to study the lived experiences and personal journey of this subgroup as well as to construct an information rich environment. The sample group included 15 Black female participants ranging in age from 18-50+. The age range of 18-21 is the millennial generation, and findings could have been different if another generation (i.e., Baby Boomers or Generation X) were included in significant numbers. Participants in the study were recruited from a large, urban and single district California community college.

Three central research questions guided this study. (1) How do Black females attending the California community colleges (CCCs) navigate their pathways toward success? (2) How does race, gender and class impact the educational and life experiences of Black female enrolled in CCCs? (3) How do Black females enrolled in CCCs make sense of their roles?

Individual participant profiles are presented to provide a general background knowledge of the 15 Black females interviewed in the study. (See Table 4 for

demographic information.) Following the participant profiles, key findings are presented. There are four major themes concluded from the data: support systems, educational awareness and expectations, self-awareness and foresightedness. This chapter closes with a summary of the principle findings.

Participant Profiles

It is necessary to understand the backgrounds of the participants to make sense of their journey. The conceptual framework lends to the idea of understanding of histories. Collins (1999) seeks to grasp the student story whereas Harper (2012) gains to understand the academic journey. Together each woman's unique academic and personal success story is told. Each narrative leads to themes of the successes of Black women attending a CCC and helps to answer the research questions. Specific information regarding age, years in college, ethnic background and major were presented in Table 4. All names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities. Among the participants ages 18-21, 10 identified solely as Black. Participants that identified solely as Black could have a different perspective compared to those from bi-racial and multi-racial backgrounds.

1. Jessica is a member of the Women's Volleyball team. She was raised in a traditional two-parent household in a suburban area, and RCC is her local community college. She is the middle child of three. Jessica is vehemently aware of her ethnic identity and was often bullied within her private high school regarding her racial background. Because of the bullying, she transferred to a public school.

2. A California native, Cinnamon was accepted to a California State University (CSU) out of high school to play Women's soccer; however, she passed on this

opportunity. Her parents are still married, and she is the oldest of five children, but she lives with her grandparents. Cinnamon recently graduated from RCC with a liberal arts associate's degree but is completing prerequisite courses for the speech-language pathology assistant (SLPA) program. She has plans to continue onto a bachelor's degree program after earning her certificate in SLPA.

3. Seida was born and raised in Washington, D.C. Seida has worked mostly in corporate America and has made numerous attempts at attending college. She is unsure of her academic plans; however, she enjoys learning. Seida travels some distance to attend RCC, bypassing many other community colleges on her commute. In addition to her academic work at RCC, she is also taking ministry courses. She is a mother and is a dedicated member of her church. She personally wants to see change and good for the world, and that is her ultimate aim in life.

4. Brandi was adopted and never knew her birth parents. She lived in foster care and was adopted at age five. She has an older sister from her adoptive mother, and she is unaware of siblings from her birth parents. Brandi did not graduate high school, yet she was instilled from a young age to value a college degree. At RCC, she is currently finishing courses needed to earn an associate's of arts degree and transfer to a CSU. She currently works over 20 hours a week at multiple jobs to make ends meet.

5. Keyanna is a member of the Women's Volleyball team. She went to private high school prior to enrolling at RCC. Her parents are separated and she is the oldest with two younger sisters. She has struggled academically while at RCC, but she is still motivated to be successful. Keyanna's ultimate goal is to become an intercollegiate volleyball coach.

6. Genesis is a member of the Women's Softball team. She attended a local high school where she took advanced placement courses and was often the only Black student in her class. Her parents are divorced; however, they have both re-married, and she now has step and half-siblings. She recently discovered her college major by recognizing that she wants to help others.

7. Meaghan is a member of the Women's Softball team as well as the First Year Experience (FYE) Program at RCC. She has three siblings, and her parents are divorced. Her father lives in another state, and her mother is currently attending college. Meaghan was often bored in high school and was not challenged. Currently, she is majoring in mathematics, which is her favorite subject, because it is the one subject that she felt tested her knowledgebase.

8. Beverly is a member of the Women's Water polo, Swimming and Diving and the FYE program. Beverly's parents have been married for over 30 years, and she has three siblings. Her parents never attended college, and all her siblings attempted college, but never completed. Her goal is to be the first to earn a college degree in her immediate family.

9. Imani self-identifies as Afro Latina and decided to attend RCC because she did not want to see the same people from high school in college. Her parents were never married, and she lives with her mother, brother, grandparents, aunt and uncle. Spanish is the primary language spoken in the home. Imani has difficulty because her Spanish is limited. She has the feeling of being lost at the community college because she is a commuter student. She is heavily involved in her volunteering activities through her church.

10. Melissa lives with her mother and brother. She has many interests, which she believes has led her to being uncertain about her major. Melissa classifies herself as boring and not really interested in the stereotypical college scene. She describes herself as more of a homebody.

11. Clara lives with her grandmother and mother and attended a local district high school. Her parents are divorced, and her father played in the National Football League. She is currently a member of the Women's Volleyball and Women's Basketball teams. She is majoring in business; however, music is her passion, and she wants to become music recording artist. She has many interests, which occupy her time; yet, athletics is a means to obtaining a college education.

12. Faith is a mother of a five-year-old son. She mentioned that her name means "purpose" in Swahili and that she has a purpose in the world. Faith is from a prominently White area where in high school she was the only Black female on campus. She attended her local community college; however, after having her son, she decided to transfer to RCC to avoid known distractions. Faith travels 4 hours roundtrip each day to attend RCC and lives with her three brothers. Ultimately, she wants to operate a non-profit organization specifically for troubled juvenile Black females.

13. Jasmine will be transferring in the fall to University of Nevada, Las Vegas, to pursue her bachelor's degree in Psychology. Jasmine is from the RCC area, and her parents have divorced and are re-married, creating a quite extensive family. She was clinically diagnosed with depression while attending RCC. She is looking to move away from California and wants a chance to start fresh. Her ultimate goal is to assist other people who were never diagnosed for depression.

14. Sheela recently received her AA degree from RCC; however, she is continuing to pursue another associate's degree to increase her chances of transferring to a CSU. Sheela is bi-racial, and her parents are still married, and she has six siblings in total. Her passion is in music and the arts, and she plans to sell her art, perform the songs she writes and or become an art teacher.

15. London is originally from Connecticut. She was adopted at a young age, yet she has a relationship with both her adoptive parents and biological mother. She attended a four-year college prior to attending RCC and felt there was a great deal of pressure to excel. She is not the first in her family to pursue higher education; in fact, both of her adoptive parents have professional degrees. She is a kinesiology major with aspirations of going into sports medicine with an emphasis in Eastern medicine. London plans to pursue this career because there is little research done with the use of Eastern and Western sports medicine.

Findings

In trying to understand the holistic Black female college student, four themes emerged from the data. Each of these themes were justified through the conceptual framework to gain perspective on how Black females understand themselves and their world. These themes include the following: support systems, educational awareness and expectations, self-awareness and foresightedness (see Figure 5). Each of the four themes is presented from the data collected and directly related to the conceptual framework (Collins, 1999; Harper, 2012). These themes encompass all aspects of the participants' daily lives as they developed both academically and personally. The themes also represent a deep and rich understanding of how participants perceive success and the

navigational pathways they must take in reaching that success. Moreover, glimpses into the lives of the participants align directly with Harper's (2012) ADA framework by regarding all of the educational systems that the Black female has encountered as maps along their educational journey, especially in terms of looking at secondary, college and post-college experiences. Collins' (1999) BFT allowed participants to think directly about themselves as a Black female in terms of their education and how their lived experiences have shaped the individual that they strived to become. The following sections in this chapter will provide further commentary on the four themes (support systems, educational awareness and expectations, self-awareness and foresightedness) and exemplars of the themes directly stated from the participants.

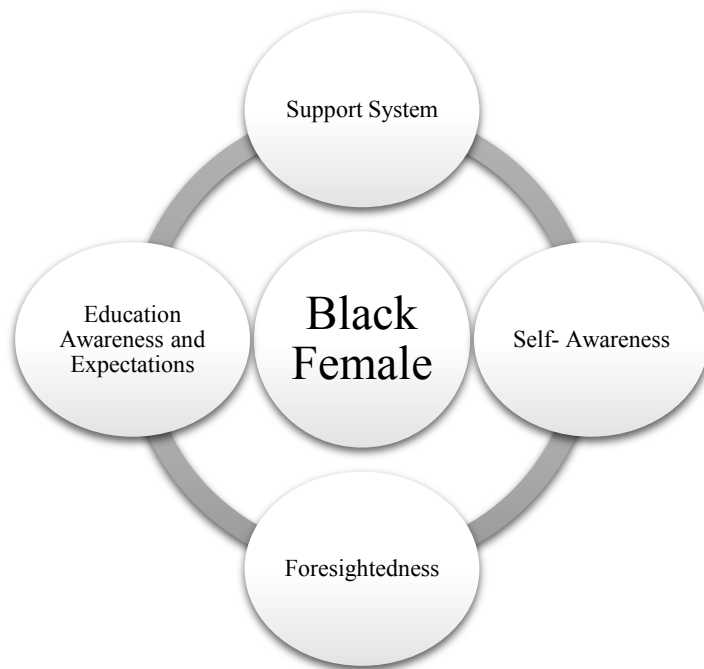


FIGURE 5. Visual representation of major themes.

Support Systems

Within any person's life, there are a number of influential people and environments that help with goal attainment. The participants in this study benefited from having a network of supporters that guided in their academic quest and facilitated their understanding of steps that are necessary for success. Their support systems had an impact on their decision making within the CCC in terms of choices and major selection. Support systems varied from each participant; however, family, teachers, coaches, friends and the educational system all assisted the Black females in understanding their navigational pathway.

According to the participants, their families were unaware of the educational journey that their daughters, sisters and mothers were about to undertake. However, this did not stop many of these families from providing unconditional support in their daughters' efforts to pursue higher education. Beverly's family specifically valued the importance of academics. She explained, "I don't work during school because I don't have the time. My parents want me to focus on school and because school and my sport kind of get in the way." Jessica, though not the first in her family to attend college, was never pressured to go on and continue her education after high school. She asserted during her interview that her family just "[wants me] to be as happy as can be... Just look at the positives and to just chase your dreams and don't stop until you get them. We're all very family-oriented in my family, so family is a big thing." This same family-orientation however does not always have to come from the traditional nuclear family. Genesis points out, "When you join a sport you literally find a new family...They become your friends and your family and...it's like a life away from life." This shared support and

family atmosphere is what assisted many of these Black women in their journey towards success.

Clara, who is majoring in business but also experiments in music production in her spare time, articulates that she “connect[s] through like the gifts of our talents that we can share, collaborating together with our talents.” This unique connection that she has made with fellow musicians is what continues to motivate her towards reaching her educational and personal goals.

Just as connections and support systems are made outside of the classroom setting, support systems also exist inside the classroom as well. Jasmine was originally a theatre arts major; however, her deep relationship that she made with an instructor changed her whole career path. Jasmine emphasized how a Black female Psychology teacher was so influential that she changed her major from theatre arts to psychology. This professor kept her interest and focus in the class, and it was easy to understand her. This is not uncommon for students and professors to have a working relationship. London points out that her mentor, a Black male professor of African American history, is her greatest advocate and her greatest fear. He continues to push London in ways that she feels she would not be able to do on her own. However, just the fact that this professor cares and pushes her is all the motivation that she needs to prove her naysayers wrong.

Faith also has that same motivation coming directly from her mother. Her situation is a little different in that when she was right out of high school she did not listen to the motivational pushes that came from home. Now years later, Faith reflects on those motivational pushes:

Mom has always pushed academics, and academics are still very much enforced. It is now that I have gotten older and now that I have a child, I understand where

my mom is coming from. I understand how important education is, not only education for people, but education for an African-American woman because we are already stereotyped.

With their continued support systems, these women understood the necessity of higher education. Thus, this catalyst prompted and motivated this student group to pursue higher education.

In contrast, some participants only have the CCC to fall back on to continue with their education. Brandi, who did not receive her high school diploma, decided to attend a private arts college and upon attending RCC “found out that none of my credits transferred over because it’s not an accredited school. At least it’s not regionally accredited.” Though she felt this was a setback for her, Brandi did recognize that, had the proper support been available in terms of navigating the educational system, she might have been better prepared. Imani, Meaghan and Cinnamon also articulated that they had appropriate support in high school and that they may have been better prepared for the four-year college level.

Educational Awareness and Expectations

Within education, there are many navigational tools one needs to be aware of to be successful, and there are many school expectations too. For the Black women interviewed, they too became aware of what was expected of them within education and what they expected from gaining an education. Furthermore, they also became aware of what family and academia expects. Many of these women reflect back on their experiences to gain awareness of the pitfalls, which have led to their current situation. Genesis, though not the first in her family to attend college, failed to communicate the

fact that she needed assistance in understanding college protocol. Instead, she suffered in silence, which resulted in her not attaining her goal in a timely manner.

Faith specifically reflects on her experience in high school and what was expected of her as a disabled student. She recalled being told “Oh, she has an IEP or ... they would say it’s okay because she is a very nice student and she is funny.” She continued with the following:

So as far as teachers [sic], that did matter to them. It was *I’ll pass you*. I always got a pass because I was known, so high school wasn’t hard for me because at the end of the day, I knew I was going to pass the class because my teacher [would pass me].

Being passed was not what she wanted while in school because now she is aware of how the decisions of others impacted her collegiate career. Faith reflects on this experience of being passed, and she thinks she could have had the skills to be successful in college if she had been aware of this practice. London had similar experiences, where she feels that she was not prepared for college in terms of studying. She felt that high school was just a forum that pushed students through without the development of skills.

Expectations of the CCC. In contrast, the thought of attending a CCC for some was not a choice that was made lightly and that the idea of attending the CCC is generally seen as a forethought compared to four-year institutions. Melissa explains the following:

I think society has a lot to do with that. Just this whole idea that the university is here, Cal States are here, and community college is down here. And that you should achieve...try to strive for up here [CSU/UC] because community college is kind of like you got out of high school, your GPA wasn’t high enough, so you get into something you can get into. I think that’s kind of something that society tells you. This is probably the best thing I’ve ever done. Beside...I think if I would have went to a university, I think I would have dropped out the first year definitely.

Melissa's story is like many other Black females navigating the CCC. Through media influences, the thought of a community college is not seen as equivalent as four-year institution. Additionally, stories such as Beverly provide an understanding of how some families view higher education:

When [my parents] talk to us now, and even it's in the news and they constantly make us watch the news, you can't get a job unless you have at least a bachelor's... Academics was brought up in conversation, but ... you need to keep your grades up in order to play a sport.

With many of the student athletes in this study, sports was used as a vehicle to obtain their college degrees. As student athletes, they balance between their athletic, academic and personal lives. This balancing act for many can be difficult, and often some aspect of the individual suffers, generally their academic status.

Meaghan understood from a young age what was expected of her academically based on environmental factors. Meaghan said, "Mom has always been in college. It feels like she has been in college or going to school for a while, so my goals were always to go to college. I never had a second thought about not going." She understood that attending college was more than just the degree, but it was a way of life. She continued with the idea that education starts by "getting that bachelor's degree...there's so many different things you can do with it, and like I said, even if I don't want to be a teacher, there's other things I can do with the math degree that can help me reach my goals that I want." For Meaghan, having a college degree allows her options to do as she felt, and for her this was refreshing.

Mindset of education. Many of the participants had high hopes in terms of their educational pathway. This positive mindset assisted them in their pursuit of higher education. The mindset of education was a driving force for these women towards reaching their goals. Each motivating factor that was addressed assisted in the achieving

success. These successes also propelled the participants towards reaching their future goal. Many of the participants were told from a young age that they were ill-equipped to be academically successful. These statements were made not only from educational professionals but from family and friends as well.

These damaging statements made strong impacts on the participants' lives. Seida, Brandi and London remember being told that they were incompetent by family, friends and teachers and thus needed to study more. Their support systems established a deficit mindset towards the expected outcomes for these women. However, without the proper recourses or skills, they failed at meeting the expectations of their family. Likewise, some teachers inhibited expression of gaining knowledge by silencing women within the classroom.

Self-Awareness

As the women answered the questions of the interview, they reflected on themselves in all their roles as Black female college students. Each conveyed how they understood their roles primarily through how they were perceived and recognized through friends and peers. These interactions that were recalled originated from how participants thought and felt they should behave based on their identities. Many of these women first recognized the friends and peers that they did interact with, such as Genesis who stated that "a lot of my friends came from softball," and from these relationships within athletics a lot of diverse groups became present. Genesis continued with her new found friendships on the softball team by stating, "A lot of African-American girls at my school didn't like it."

Secondary school. Brandi also went through similar situations while attending secondary school. She stated, “In elementary it was hard. All through high school it was hard. And it wasn’t even because of the teachers or any other race of students; it was the other Black females that made it so difficult in school.” London had similar feeling and stated, “It’s hard enough being a Black female, but then you have to compete, fight and be rude with your own kind. It’s just disgusting.”

Melissa spoke about her experience in secondary school and her relationships with Black students. She explained that her dialog was different with Black students compared to other ethnic groups:

Even Black students...I didn’t talk the same as them. I didn’t know most of their slang and stuff like that. I tried to, but I said *dude* and stuff like that. I remember in elementary school once I said *dude* or *bro* or something super White. My friends were like, “Wow. You’re so whitewashed.” I was like, “Oh. Okay. I guess I’m not saying that word again.”

Melissa often felt ostracized and unable to connect with her peers through dialect. Imani also had a parallel experience while attending secondary school. She explained that in middle school she attended a predominately Hispanic serving school. She said, “I felt like I kind of had to change... I changed depending on who I was around because I saw a complete flip when I got to high school. I found that I got along really well with blacks and I just changed.” Much of Imani’s code-switching between the Black and Hispanic students was due to her bi-racial ethnic identity.

Beverly explained that she did not feel the same pressures that the other women felt in secondary school. She attributes this to the fact that her skin tone was lighter and afforded her a different environment and outlook. Beverly shared, “I never really had an issue because I’ve always been light-skinned, so I’ve fit in with people pretty well.”

However, she did speak upon how others perceived her as “being too serious.” Her friends stressed that she did not have fun and that she was too focused on her academics. Though she is strongly committed to her educational pursuit, Beverly has struggled with her peers because of her personality. Seida recalled having painful experiences at a younger age and stated that “kids were mean... they would pick on me because of the way I was dressed and the fact that I was tall.” Seida grew up in a Muslim household and dressed very differently than her classmates. Nevertheless, these feelings and thoughts have carried over to participants’ adulthood and have affected how they pursue friendships.

Though many of the women have had similar challenges with friends and peers, they do try and make the best out of their situation. Brandi stated, “I have friends that go to school, but none of them are at school with me to basically put them two to two together so I can’t really say that. I make acquaintances in classes.” However, this is generally where relationships ended with many of the women.

History, culture and role models. In addition to friends and peers defining who they were, some participants understood themselves from learning their history and where their culture was founded. For Seida, she made the discovery of how important it is to learn about the history of your own people. She affirmed that she is “learning about ‘our’ people. Each race should know about themselves and who you are. You need to know what has taken place and why/where you are right now.” Faith reaffirmed Seida’s response by stating, “It is just interesting to learn your roots.” By knowing her history she felt that she better understood herself.

Clara utilized celebrities as her role models for future success, and she also pointed out other role models who break the traditional stereotypes of what a Black woman is supposed to be:

Being a Black woman shaped me to want to have a voice for the Black female artists because now the only Black female artist that is making a real voice that I'm kind of on the fence with is Nicki Minaj, but she is not the only...her type of image is cool and I like her.... [but] ...she uses her seductiveness and more I can do this with a man and have him on his knees and stuff. Lauryn Hill is more soulful about it. She sings about her emotions and how it is to be a Black female and going through different situations.

For Clara, she wants to empower other Black women to do what they need to do and not be the image that is perpetuated through the media. She believes the image of Black women that is consistently given by the media does not reflect the person that she is and wants to become.

Acknowledgment of being a Black female. Acknowledgment of being a Black female was important to a number of the individuals in the study. Many of the participants stated that they were often the only Black female in the courses during both their secondary and post-secondary education. Melissa thought about her experience as a Black female in all aspects of her life and felt that "I had to represent. Most of the time I was the only black girl in my class, or the only black person in my classes. So I always felt like, "Okay...I don't want to do poorly, and I don't want to be like the typical black person." I always felt like I had to represent myself a little bit..." This statement was often the case for many of the women in the study. For Faith and Melissa specifically, they felt that they had something to prove, showing that they were just as capable as anyone else.

Each female in their own way made acknowledgements of themselves as a person and the roles that they carry. They also reflected on how they viewed themselves and

how they may have hindered their own successes. Jasmine stated, “I’m a lot smarter than I thought I was. Not that I didn’t think that I was smart because I was told I was in high school, but my mom lead me to believe that I wasn’t.” London and Sheela stated that they are a lot stronger than what they believed. Once the participants were able to understand who they were, they were empowered to meet their future aspirations.

Perception of others. The perception of others was how the participants internalized how they were perceived in society based on their race, gender and social class. Many of the participants were able to articulate these perceptions based on the interactions they had with friends and peers within the educational system. Each female was able to better comprehend who they were in society by how they were categorized by friends and peers. Friendships also relieved how the Black female was presented to society.

Collins (1999) specifically recognizes that Black history is engrained into the mindset of mainstream society. The histories of Black women are the foundation towards how the participants are viewed in society. Thus, preconceived notions about how Black women are to act are pre-concluded. Clara was poignant in her realization that the media portrays Black women as seductress, ergo not intellectual beings.

As the media depicts Black females in certain ways, these images trickle down towards younger generations. Physical images for some of the women hindered them throughout their secondary education and has made them mindful of themselves in college. Cinnamon reflected on how her hair made her self-conscious towards what others thought about her. Seida thought back to how she dressed differently than her classmates due to religious beliefs. Each experience lead these women to think

differently about themselves and thus how they felt others perceived them. Beverly felt that because she went to a school where most were multiracial that she was able to fit in well. She identified that her “light” skin color assisted in her assimilation with other groups on campus. Collins (1999) denotes that body image is important in how Black females are portrayed in society. Thus, Beverly was able to blend into the dominant culture compared to Cinnamon and Seida who were outcast because of their physical appearance.

Foresightedness

Supporting structures, educational awareness and expectation, and self-awareness, assisted in the realization of future aspirations. Some of the participants were unsure of their direction for the future, where others were aware of their path. Success for all of these Black females meant finishing their education, working in an established career, possibly creating a family of their own and landing a dream job. All their thoughts about the visions for the future were focused on their happiness.

Education. Many of the participants understand how their future is going to aid in the planning later on in life. They also understand the road that they are currently traveling is not necessarily easy. Brandi, Seida, Genesis and Clara all identify directly that the road to education is not simplistic. Brandi was a transfer student from a private arts college and pointed out that many of her courses from her previous college were not transferable. Whereas Seida believed that she was academically ready for college, she said, “the pace in at RCC is so demanding. There is no time to process the information that you have learned.” Because of the arduous nature at RCC, she continually questions her academic ability. Nevertheless, Seida still continues to work

towards meeting her goal. Clara was aware that her past choices have impacted where she is currently within her educational career. Clara embodies the idea of resiliency and states, “Even if I’m failing I could still talk to them and they would be cool with me and we could work on like plans on my like catching up if I needed to or something like that which is...a lot of professors don’t.”

Faith’s story is the journey of resiliency and fortitude. She speaks directly to her journey towards her foreseeable future. She speaks about how at 18 she left home, was in an abusive relationship and almost lost her child to Social Services. Because of these experiences she wants to work directly with women to assist them through troubled times. She felt strongly that “women understand women. Only women can uplift another woman.” Faith’s story specifically is one in which she looks towards the future and the next generation of women and how she can assist others from similar backgrounds.

Careers. For many individuals, when they think about the future, it equals success. This was the same for the women in this study. They all had a perceived future that they set out to obtain. Though many of these women were unsure about the direct path, they were all in agreement with one aspect and that was happiness. For these women, success equaled being happy. Seida, having come from the corporate world back into higher education, had a different perspective on how Black women are perceived in the professional world. She expressed how much more work you needed to do in order to prove yourself and prove you are worthy to be in your position. The motivation to continue towards creating a better environment for future generations was a driving force for many of these women.

Families. Beverly also looked to her future aspirations of starting a family as her motivation. She stated that broken families are the consistent model for her. She fears “not having a family - my big goal is to have a family and to have a set career.” The thoughts of her future and starting that family are what keep her grounded on what she needs to do academically and personally to achieve her goal. For Beverly, like many, the institution of strong family was important and a driving force towards being successful.

Melissa also reflected on her family and what she felt was essential to be successful. She said, “I’d love to make some of my family members happy. I’d love to buy Mom a Porsche. That’s one of my biggest dreams...buy my mom another car.” Her thoughts more so focused on making others happy, and that would result in her happiness as well.

Jasmine’s whole motivating factor for the future is based on happiness. Her diagnosis of depression has pushed her towards reaching that goal: “Just overall wanting to be HAPPY. Which means to be proud of myself.” She also talked about, based on her lived experiences, that she was not sure about family and relationships. She stated, “Not really sure if I want kids. Really don’t see myself getting married because I have never seen a positive successful relationship.” However, she is hopeful that she can learn from her parents’ misfortune in marriage.

Dream jobs. Lastly, the end goal for Keyanna is her dream job. She is wholeheartedly focused on what she needs to do to achieve this. And though she is aware of what she needs to do to attain this goal, she feels that her personal life has impacted on her motivation to achieve by stating:

I’m not happy here at home at all, and I know that once I transfer I will probably be content with my life and being somewhere else and doing well in school and also

playing volleyball and from then on I think I will view myself as being successful because in all honesty right now I feel like I have accomplished some things.

Keyanna, like some other participants, indicated the feeling of not being accomplished as there are still a great number of experiences they need to encounter, such as earning a degree or getting married and starting a family. As each participant reflected and thought about what they want out of their futures, past and current events determined their mindset. Moreover, decisions towards reaching their goals may be altered based on feelings and opportunities.

Motivation for future aspirations. Motivation towards future aspirations were the thoughts, hopes and feelings these women had as they continued in their daily lives. They described different aspects of what they wanted out of life, not only for themselves but for those that have supported their journey. The future aspirations of these females was simply to be happy and to have that happiness in the world. Though the participants were able to see their purposeful futures, the motivation to continue was induced by what they hoped to pursue in the future. Motivation for future aspirations were the factors in which the ladies defined their future. These motivators pushed these Black females towards meeting their goals. Additionally, many were external as Jasmine stated she just wanted to be happy. This happiness they believed would lead way to their own personal success.

Lastly, motivators promoted a positive mindset for these women to attain their goal. Though goals were primarily individualistic towards happiness, many were also invested in happiness for others. Melissa, Beverly and Sheela ultimately just wanted to make their families proud. As Melissa had stated, she often had to represent within the classroom setting. This idea of always being on-stage ultimately can affect the image the

Black female has of herself. She may often feel the pressure of doing well and thus letting people down if she does not preform up towards expectations. Likewise, when expectations are not met, assumptions and tempers may ignite within the group.

Summary

The data was organized into four major themes: support systems, educational awareness and expectations, self-awareness, and foresightedness. Each of these themes aided in answering the three research questions. (1) How do Black females attending the California community colleges (CCCs) navigate their pathways toward success? (2) How does race, gender and class impact the educational and life experiences of Black female enrolled in CCCs? (3) How do Black females enrolled in CCCs make sense of their personal roles (i.e., student, daughter, friend, etc.)? The last chapter will discuss the findings as well as implications of the study to provide support and bring awareness to this often ghosted population.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Believe me; the reward is not so great without the struggle.--Wilma Rudolph

This concluding chapter will provide a summary of the study, summary of the findings, discussion of the findings, presentation of the implications and reflection on the drawn conclusions. The summary of the study will include the purpose, problem and methodology utilized. Summary of the findings will cover major themes and how the data was gathered. In the discussion of the findings, highlights of how the three central research questions were answered and their relation to the current literature will be addressed. Additionally, presentation of the implications will cover best practices and recommendations in terms of policy and practice. Lastly, drawing from the study, a reflective conclusion will be made and suggestions for future research studies are considered.

Summary of Study

Over two million students attend the California community colleges, and roughly 80% of CCC students transfer to a California State University or the University of California system to complete bachelorette course work (CCCCO, 2015). However, little emphasis is on the individuals within the CCC. Within recent years, new state legislature, such as Proposition 30, has provided additional funding to the CCC. More attention has been given to the CCC and the work that is being conducted. The Student

Success Act (SB 1456) was established in 2012 with the focus of having students attending the CCC system to declare a clear goal and thus continue on a directed pathway. Though this is the goal of many students, acknowledgement of resources, navigation of the educational field, limited support systems and fear of the unknown are some reasons why Black females attend the CCC.

With over 50% of the CCC student population identifying as belonging to a minority racial group and over 50% identifying as female, research is necessary to understand these populations. Accordingly, this study aimed at specifically examining the personal journeys of Black females attending community college. The purpose of this study was to look at the unique lived experiences of Black women who were currently attending the CCC. The importance of this topic was to gain a thorough look at this population in this educational system. Additionally, the data gathered contribute to the current knowledge base already known about this population. This study ultimately sought to provide awareness to an often forgotten population as well as create discussions with how to advise, empower and assist these Black women in their educational and personal successes.

The unveiling of the lived experiences of Black women in the CCC can better be understood by the recent history of Blacks in higher education. Contributing educational court cases, such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Title IX (1972), and most recently *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2013) all provide descriptions of the struggles which Black women specifically face within education.

This study was guided by three research questions, which explored the Black female in all aspects of their current lives. The research questions were the following.

(1) How do Black females attending the California community colleges (CCCs) navigate their pathways toward success? (2) How does race, gender and class impact the educational and life experiences of Black female enrolled in CCCs? (3) How do Black females enrolled in CCCs make sense of their roles?

Ethnographic interviewing, a qualitative method, was utilized to conduct a 22-question interview with 15 Black females who were in current attendance at Rose City College. Qualitative research allows for a depth of information to be captured based on the lived experience of the research subjects. This method allowed for a robust discussion for these Black females to share their distinctive stories. The qualitative method also brings insight into the lived experiences of the participant. All the participants in the study were over the age of 18, and each of their goals varied. The researcher sought to discover their educational pathways in the CCC and how their gender, race and class have affected their understanding of their roles that they have as Black females. Completed transcribed interviews were provided to the participants for accuracy and credibility through member checking. The data was analyzed by the use of NVivo, which assists in the coding and theming of the interviews.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study will provide insight to the three central research questions and the four themes, which were deduced. Support systems, educational awareness and expectations, self-awareness and foresightedness all assist in answering the central research questions.

The first research question aimed to explore the navigational pathways of Black females within the CCC. This question explored the diverse journeys of each participant

in their quest towards higher education. The question considered the participants' previous academic path, which led them to the community college system. The second research question directly probed at life as a Black female. This question aimed to address the need to understand how Black females differed in their experiences; consequently, a fresh lens was provided to examine this population. While this question allowed for the participant to look directly at themselves, it also provided an understanding of how others perceived them. The last research question was how each Black female made sense of her roles. This question attempted to learn more about how each role of being a daughter, friend, student and many others made an impact on the participants' lives while also viewing the Black female holistically.

Discussion of Findings

The conceptual framework of Harper's ADA (2007) and Collins's BFT (1999) assisted in discussing the findings of this study. All three research questions have assisted in understanding that there is a range of experiences which determine a Black female attending the community college to excel and prepare for their future. The following section is organized by the research questions (see Figure 6) followed by a discussion of the four major themes (see Figure 7) which were uncovered in chapter four. Though major themes could be found threaded into each research question, they have been separated for a richer understanding as they stand alone.

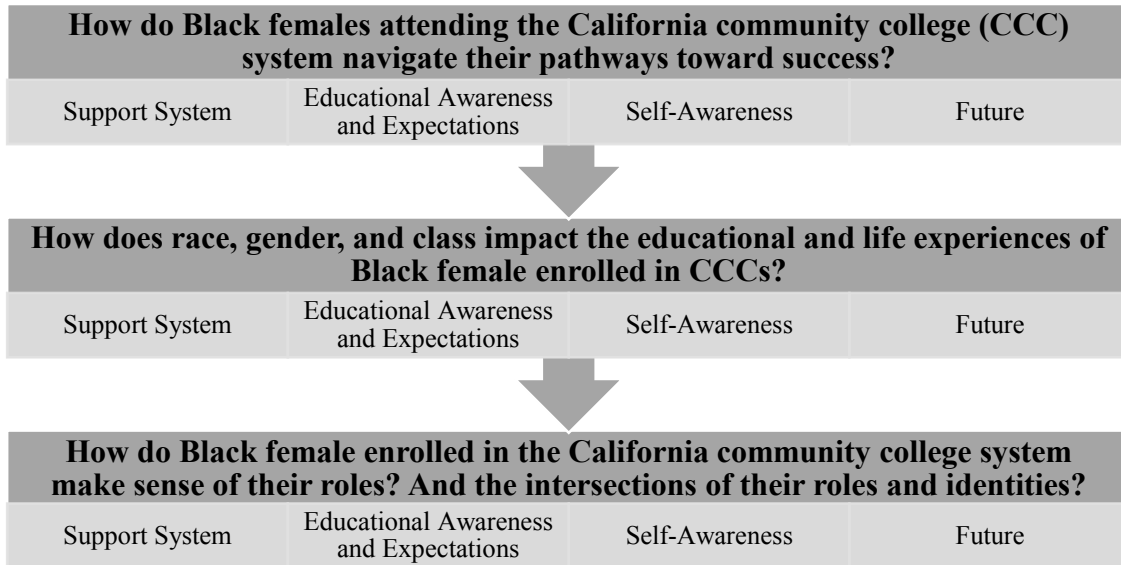


FIGURE 6. Research questions and conceptual framework.

Research Question #1: How do Black females attending the California community colleges (CCC) navigate their pathways toward success?

The CCC is where a large number of students from diverse backgrounds attend. The Black population as a whole typically enroll and attend less prestigious institutions. Howard-Hamilton (2004) argues that Black female students struggle academically and personally throughout their education. Therefore, the fact that Black female students struggle academically and do not pursue prestigious institutions ultimately affects the social opportunities available to this population (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Coker, 2003). Much of this is due to the fact that they are unsure of how to navigate the educational pipeline, which could afford them the opportunity to attend and attain from varying institutions.

The manner in which Black female students attend the CCC is all together their own. In contrast, building upon the African proverb of “it takes a village to raise a

child,” the collectivistic lifestyle is a common thread within African culture and consequently has transitioned into African American culture as well (Parham, 2002). Such a lifestyle promotes the family, and family figures to be dominant within the Black female’s life. These family systems are key towards the support of the Black female as she makes her academic and personal journey.

The support systems are necessary for the Black female to flourish academically and personally, yet many lacked assistance and knowledge in how to maneuver through the fundamental processes of attending college. Furthermore, this put them at a disadvantage towards matriculating at four-year institutions. Because of such challenges, all the participants made the decision to continue their education with the support of their family, mentors and peers. These support systems were motivating forces in many of these women’s lives, and this coupled with their future goals allows them to endure all the academic and personal rigors. Harper (2007, 2012) looks specifically at the journey in which students attending higher education undergo to reach their true passions. Likewise, Collins (1999) aims to comprehend how the complete Black female operates within the academic setting; however, their personal growth as they navigate their pathway is key towards understanding their journey. Combined together, the academic and personal experiences are how the Black female interrupts and handles their challenges and their successes in education.

The women in this study were very aware of the individuals that they are and were becoming. Yet, feelings of misplacement and being lost were common. A consideration of this would be their overall engagement on campus. Jasmine, Melissa and London admitted that they like to stay to themselves and do not have very many

friends. However, Seida, though often alone at school, feels that she would do a lot better. Seida went on to talk about how she is friendly to her peers; however, no one gravitates to her. Brandi acknowledges that “the class[es] go by smoother if I do have someone that I kinda connect with, but I never really attempt to have the friendship progress outside of class.”

The navigational pathway for Black women in the CCC larger is based on their support systems; equally as important are their expectations and awareness of the educational system, being self-aware and having the foresight of their future goals. The Black female heavily relies on her support systems as the navigational compass towards interpreting the educational pipeline.

Research Question #2: How do race, gender and class impact the educational and life experiences of Black females enrolled in CCCs?

The Black female college student is one of conflict. As discussed by hooks (1981), mainstream society does not allow for the Black female to develop holistically, so they must decide on which aspect of themselves they want to embrace, their gender or ethnic ideal self. Black females are taught from their families at a young age to become assertive as the societal message is to devalue and belittle Blackness (Ward, 1996; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Black women in higher education have made strides in attempting to adjust and transition into the college setting. The struggle continues when the Black female also is a college student; therefore, the discernment of trying to clasp all aspects of self becomes important. Likewise, these women must base their lives on what others think of them as the continually maneuver through the minutia that is society.

Though many of the participants did not directly state that they were entering a career due to their gender or race, each female participant in the study became aware of

how many other Black females have entered similar fields to the ones they are pursuing. Social class for participants became apparent as they all sought to become financially stable and have a better life for themselves and their families. Stability in their lives, both financially and personally, was how they determined their success. In addition, their personal success has the potential to assist others to reach the same level of achievement. Many of the women spoke of empowering others and had the vision of taking the steps necessary as Black women to be the foundation.

Self-awareness, foresightedness and educational expectations and awareness are a large competent of how race, gender and class impact the Black female. The overall cognitive knowledge revolving around how Black women are viewed and treated in society aids in what they want to see in their futures. The women in this study, though still establishing an understanding of their identity, were aware of how other groups have viewed them and what is expected of them in terms of academic and professional achievement. This has helped many of them to want to pursue careers in which they change the image of how the Black female is viewed, thus shaping how they foresee their future.

Research Question #3: How do Black females enrolled in CCCs make sense of their roles? And the intersections of their roles and identities?

The Black female in American society is unique because she is associated with two oppressed groups—Black and female (Coker, 2003; Collins, 1999). Due to the complexity of their being, this population is often misunderstood and ultimately forgotten (Parham, 2002). These interwoven aspects are the Black female psyche, which Collins (1999) specifically addresses in her BFT model. The Black female must be conscious of her image and thus empowered by her individual self. Additionally, Ward (1996) found

that Black mothers assisted their daughters through verbal and nonverbal cues to be respected and to assert their Blackness (Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). This journey for many of the students was a testing path because they were still working on who they were and what that meant to them. However, motivation toward their future and self-awareness became major themes for this question. As such, answers to this question may vary as the student develops into their true self.

In all, being able to balance the roles of being a Black, female college student is a difficult one. Brandi, after withdrawing from her arts college, was informed by her mother that the CCC would be a great deal cheaper than a California State University or University of California. She recognized that “No one just goes out of their way to say anything, but if it comes down to who do I have in my corner, that if I were to start getting discouraged, they would encourage me if I brought it up to them.” Thus, it was up to her to find out how she was going to balance her finances for everyday living and attending college.

The Black female is a complicated creature. She has more roles that she is generally aware of than others, and thus may partake in an internal battle of self to make sense of who she is and who she wants to become. She understands her roles in a number of different facets: support systems, educational expectation and awareness and foresight. Each of these themes set to establish the Black female in becoming self-aware.

Major Themes

The four major themes (support systems, educational expectations and awareness, self-awareness and foresightedness) from the findings are discussed in this section as they

relate to the conceptual framework. Figure 7 provides a configuration of how themes and the conceptual framework have been transparent throughout the study.

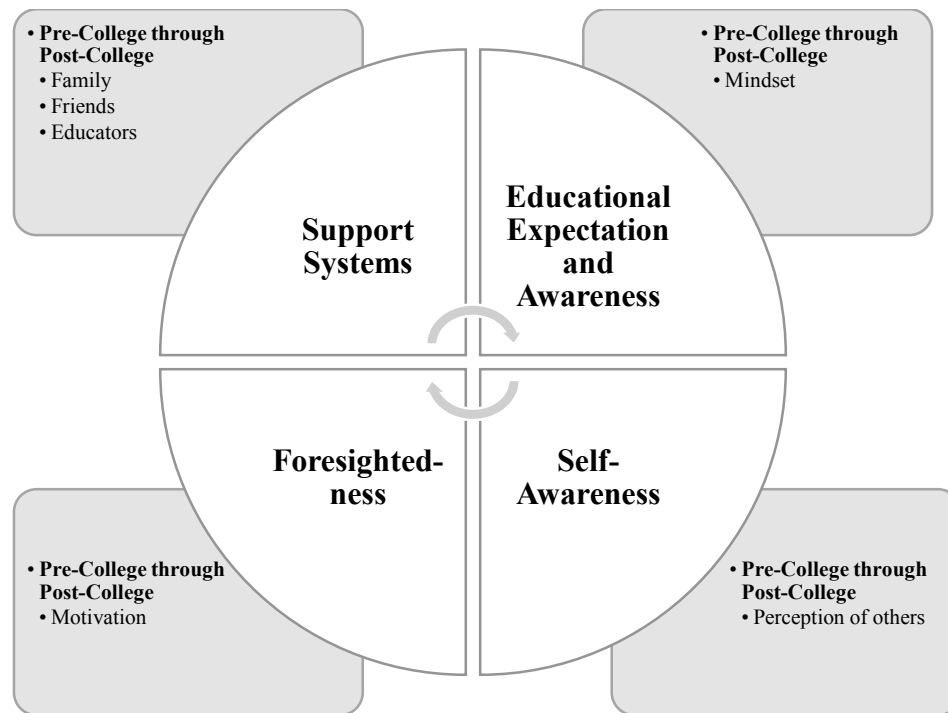


FIGURE 7. Major themes and conceptual framework.

Support Systems. Support systems were the different individuals who provided emotional, financial, navigational and educational support. These support systems came from not only family, but friends and educational professionals. Though many of the support systems were seen as support towards maneuvering the educational system, some were deterrents for these women in their journey. Fleming (1984) confirmed that Black students feel connected when there are individuals that have common backgrounds. To this end, having a strong support system not only assists the student in their academic prowess but in their overall development. The participants indicated that their support systems influenced their successes. The conceptual framework model for guiding this

study (Collins, 1999; Harper, 2012) recognized the importance of support systems for the betterment of Black students. Each theory reviewed how family and support structures provided Black students with the tools necessary towards being successful. Furthermore, promoting open dialog among all parties and creating a stronghold for success of future generations is equally influential.

There was a strong recognition from all the women in the study towards the acknowledgement of how higher education is beneficial towards their future success. Obtaining that bachelor's degree or higher is the ultimate goal for them to be successful in life. Support, however, does not always have to be a person. The institution itself is a support system towards success. The CCC for Genesis, Faith and London was the best place for them as they were not mentally prepared for the rigors of higher education. Genesis specifically verbalized how she felt the CCC was the best place for her. "I feel like community college was more of a help. I feel that there's a lot more people who are willing to help you." Genesis recognized that she was not academically ready for the four-year level and thus continued at CCC. She also felt that a major goal of academic and athletic staff was to assist the student with graduating and transferring.

Educational Awareness and Expectations. The educational awareness and expectations were defined by how each woman understood her educational expectations as a Black female in school. Additionally, participants' awareness of how to navigate the educational system was examined. Some women felt that they had an expectation because of their race, gender and or social class.

Thirteen of the participants were financial aid recipients; however, many were unaware of the types of aid that they received. Sheela specifically stated that without

financial aid she would not be able to afford college. Additionally, her major of art is financially demanding and has often made her change her feelings towards pursuing a career in the field. Financial literacy was one aspect of college that the participants were unaware of, yet stable finances were essential to achieving their goals.

Clara admitted to the fact that she thought that college was going to be like high school and “a place to hang out with your friends.” Though establishing friendships is important to the development of college students, there are other facets which are necessary to focus on to earn a degree. Harper (2007, 2012) suggested that socialization and college readiness were key factors towards college achievement. Yet, the lack of awareness towards the demands of college were prominent for many women in the study because they were ill-prepared for their future as college students by not knowing how to study properly, being unaware of campus resources, or not knowing how to ask for assistance.

The idea of independence, though strong in American culture, does not assist individuals who are used to a collectivist mindset of helping. Students are often confused by the idea of working independently but being able to ask for assistance when needed. These conflicting theories often cause students, specifically Black females, to muddle through the college environment alone. As Seida and Jasmine stated, they often did not know that they could ask for help.

Harper (2012) in his study supports the idea of having engagement within the classroom while also promoting a strength based approach towards educating students. However, friends of Meaghan, Melissa, Genesis, Brandi and Imani lead them to believe that there was something wrong with them for being smart. Each of these women were in

honors and AP courses; however, they were the only Black females in the class. Thus, when meeting with friends, they were later ostracized for being different. Brandi specified that it “got to a point where I stopped talking. I stopped volunteering and it just got bad.” Not only did she suffer from not being able to express herself, but so did her classmates from not being able to hear her different perspective.

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness of identity can be categorized as being aware of one’s own individual struggles and triumphs. Understanding of how one’s gender, race and class impact their college experience is imperative; subsequently, the facilitation of each role is what leads to college success. Each participant spoke candidly about their life and the events that shaped who they are personally and educationally. Seida, London, Jasmine and Imani all believed that it was important to understand their lineage and history to better understand their self-identity. Courses such as African American history were directly associated with their personal development. These women were thus able to welcome the meaning of *sankofa* by using the past in order to understand their futures. They were also able to gain an understanding of who they are as Black women, thus enabling them towards a course of successful thinking.

Melissa acknowledged how she felt comfortable being with people of likeness by saying:

I think it's just the dynamic where you can talk about things, and you know they get it. Like sometimes with White people, you can say something, and they're like, “Ha ha ha ha.” And they’ll laugh but they're not probably really sure what you mean. But you can talk about race things with Black people, and they get it...I can be ghetto self at times with them. You know, White people always just refrain from using certain words or something... [guess that’s] why I only have close-knit Black friends.

Having a commonality between with other groups helps to engage a student on campus and assist in their personal development. For each participant, they recognized during their college career how essential having likeminded friendships was towards their college success. Moreover, these friends and peers are what motivated them and enhanced the college going culture.

Keyanna felt that she was well aware of who she is and wants to be. Though she feels inhibited in reaching her full potential by living at home, Keyanna feels that she must be an independent person to be successful. London, who is living alone, currently realizes that having that social support would be helpful. London recognized that when you are living alone there is no one to blame but yourself for your mistakes and that you are responsible for taking the right course in your future. Life experiences ultimately alter the pendulum of independence towards achieving one's goals. Tinto (1993) would argue that the student must explore on their own to understand their pathway, whereas engagement with others is important towards self-development (Harper, 2010; Kuh, 2009).

Foresightedness. Foresightedness is the perception of future goals and achievements. For these women, this was how they envisioned their future and the pathways in which they were going to achieve their set tasks. Furthermore, this was also a means for them to focus and create a plan to accomplish their goals. Harper (2007, 2012) recognizes that goals must be established for the student to achieve. In the case of these 15 Black females, they foresaw their future ambitions. Brandi eloquently expressed that “there is a career that I really wake up and go to sleep dreaming about and I know that I have to accomplish my goal to get there.” This dream career is what has continued

to propel her towards reaching for more. Many of the women in this study also needed to imagine their future so that they could move the dream towards reality.

Foresightedness likewise allows for these Black females to take the necessary steps towards reaching their goals. This was not only to meet the educational demands but personal demands as well. Harper (2012) in his study investigated how Black males perceived their post-college successes. Likewise, this study asked similar questions to provoke the forthcoming thinking of Black females. This forward thinking is often not seen in the Black community, and Collins (1999) finds that this can be empowerment for the Black college student towards reaching their goals.

Faith, Jasmine, Clara and London alluded and explicated that they wanted for Black women to get along. The separation that is often felt within their own population was disheartening for these women. Thus, they felt that it was their duty to establish and partner to create a support system for Black women by Black women. They felt that if they were able to empower others, then they too would be empowered towards their goal. Collins (1999) focuses on the awareness that takes place in Black women and thus being able to empower others towards reaching their potential. Enlightening is this revelation for a cycle of support which could change how Black women are seen throughout society.

The hopes and dreams of each woman were their perceived future educational, financial and personal endeavors. For many, their perceptions of the future were to gain happiness. Harper (2012) goes one step further in his study by looking at the post-college successes of his participants. However, the CCC for many of the women is just a stepping stone towards their next educational arena.

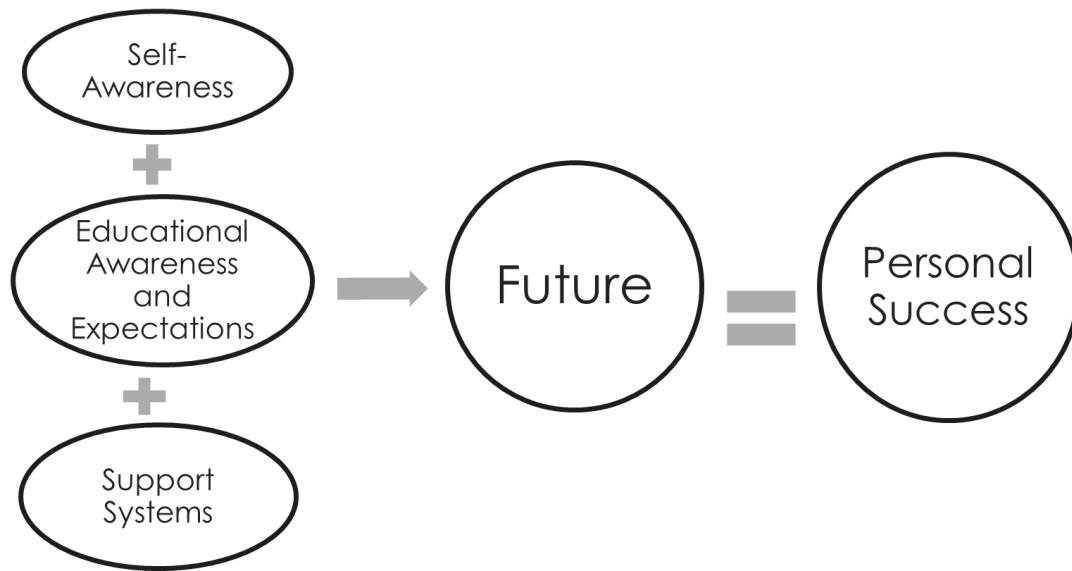


FIGURE 8. Themes interpreted.

Themes Interpreted

The four major themes which were uncovered from the findings explain the story of how the participants moved towards their own personal success. Figure 8 represents how the support systems, educational awareness and expectations, and self-awareness leads to how the Black female goes to establish her future. The ideology of their future is what then leads them to their personal success. Each of the women had a clear conception of their future goals. This foresightedness can be defined as their personal success. Thus, the success of these Black females could increase retention, persistence, graduation and transfer rates for this student group.

Presentation of the Implications

The specific implications of this study are vast, and recommendations were provided for a number of constituents such as secondary schools, community colleges, four-year universities, families/support systems and the Black female students. These

recommendations are not exhaustive, and additional research and continued longitudinal studies are necessary to understand this unique and changing student population. These implications are guided by the conceptual framework as to strengthen and enhance the educational journey of Black females.

Some implications towards the study are based on my personal journey as a Black female who graduated from the CCC system. My direct involvement in programs like Umoja provided a deeper understanding of not only myself but Black history. Accordingly, my own personal journey mimics that of those who participated in this study. The pre-college through post-college experience is one that through documentation describes the rich history of many Black students. The interpretation of the Black female college experience will allow for policies and practices that will not only support Black females in college but provide them with the developmental skills to be successful in their post college lives.

Recommendations for Policy

The California state legislature's passing of the Student Success Act (SB 1456) has provided a vehicle for students to understand their pathway towards academic success. This act is directly in response to the large number of underrepresented populations not matriculating through the college system within a timely manner. Thus, knowledge may be gained early on about their academics and career plans to better prepare students for their next steps towards degree completion. However, a clear directive from the state and federal levels is necessary to better assist campus constituents on course offerings and degrees. A recommendation is for two-year and four-year

institutions to collaboratively work together for the purpose of a seamless course that will transfer within the state.

Recognizing that SB 1456 has allowed for greater access and understanding of roles throughout the campus community has provided awareness to the California community college system as a whole. However, it is necessary that all individuals understand their roles in assisting students reaching their academic and personal successes. Thus, training campus wide is necessary so that all faculty and staff are aware of state legislation. Additionally, campus wide diversity sensitivity training should be necessary on a five-year basis. To this end, faculty and staff are current with different issues regarding race, gender, class, sexuality and ability. This training would be mandatory for all newly hired faculty in an effort to have all campus members aware of campus policy, practice and culture. The recommendation for five years is based on that many colleges use a five-year cycle for their plans (Hinton, 2012), allowing for current information to be distributed campus wide.

Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations for the Black female student population attending the CCC are not limited toward this arena. Many recommendations for this study are based from SB 1456 as well as the Educational Master Plan (EMP) by the California Community College Chancellor's Office (2012). Though many processes are currently being addressed, there are still areas of improvement to close the achievement gap of the Black student population. Likewise, these recommendations tie directly back to Harper (2012) and Collins (1999) to empower Black female college students (see Appendix H). Hence, these recommendations will assist in the personal growth and development of students

from all backgrounds. These recommendations are meant to assist not only the higher education community, but also the support system, secondary educational systems and individual in the overall betterment of society.

Recommendations for the Individual

There are many areas in which the Black female student could practice their own self-care and awareness as they pursue higher education. These areas include the following: embrace being a Black female; seek resources, information and assistance at every opportunity; make a pledge to yourself to complete your goal; and empower and engage in conversations with other Black females. Many of the participants in the study were in the process of learning more about themselves and the individuals they seek to become. The Black female must become aware of herself and empower others as Collins (1999) states.

Recommendations for the Family/Support System

The Black women in the study indicated how important having a strong family and support system was to their current and future attainments. The family system as a whole is the greatest support system for the Black female attending higher education. The Black female is aware of their multiple support systems; however, they often felt that they have to be independent in their effort towards achieving success. The following are recommendations for the practice of the family and support systems with the lives of Black females attending higher education.

1. The conceptual framework recognized the need for a strong support system; therefore, providing Black females with an environment that is nurturing and supportive to their development is critical. This optimal setting would allow for open and honest

communication between both parties; furthermore, it would allow for an interdependent relationship. Use strength-based language, which could help promote the student as they develop academically and professionally. Using such language could help address challenges and provide support for the Black female.

2. Be aware of the demands that the Black female student endures on a daily basis, academically and personally. When necessary, obtain resources regarding education, health and wellness, spirituality and development to better assist the Black female (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Collins specifically addresses the need for understanding the holistic Black female as she develops. Providing support and understanding of self can greatly impact the Black female as she matures. Educational and cultural experiences (i.e., field trips to history museums and college tours) can assist in the Black female to gain global and personal perception on their idea of Blackness.

Recommendations for the K-12 Educational System

Female, Black and Black female populations are not mutually exclusive; thus, each of the educational systems within K-12 is recommended to work together to build a strong social support for Black females in order to empower them towards meeting their true potential.

3. Promotion of a college going culture on campus. Invite two-year and four-year campuses to the secondary school or invite secondary school students to attend a workshop at the higher education institutions. Many high schools already promote the college going culture; however, introducing college earlier will enable students to prepare and develop the necessary skills needed in college. The EMP (2013) aims to publicize

that college is a viable option for K-12 students; therefore, allowing for a transparency of the demands of higher education early on in a student's academic career is important.

4. Provide workshops to parents, guardians and support systems on how they can better assist in the advancement of their Black females (Huebner & Corbett, 2007; Jones, 2001). Additionally, provide resources and openings for them to be involved.

Workshops will provide families with educational expectations as they pursue higher education.

5. School counselors should be aware of resources for Black students. Likewise, counselors should initiate conversations about higher education and of taking rigors classes such as advanced placement or college preparation courses (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010).

Recommendations for the Community College System

The community college system as a whole has a large and diverse student population; to this end, recognition of the needs of these populations is necessary. Hence, there is a need for professors, staff, counselors and administrators to have adequate knowledge based on their student populations. Professors should have professional development to strengthen their skills and awareness of Black student issues, specifically in regards to the varying areas of the Black student such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Administrators should provide courses which enhance the overall educational experiences for Black females and the campus community at large.

Counselors should be open to the needs of this population and unique populations.

Understanding the specific needs of females, Blacks and Black females attending the

CCC is also critical. Advise mentoring and support groups which empower Black women. The following are specific recommendations for the community college system.

6. Offer professional development workshops to educate faculty, staff and administrators on effective ways of interacting with Black females, which could help to lessen the effects of negative perceptions. Creating a strategic planning committee may also be established to combat issues of diversity within the campus setting and region wide. Programs that focus and foster the transition between high school and college could assist in the overall success of Black females (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

7. Provide and regularly offer multicultural courses so the student can continue to learn more about themselves and their history. Additionally, establish and develop programs that integrate life skills (i.e., finances, career, personal health, etc.) that will support the other roles of the Black female.

8. Recruit and hire faculty, staff and administrators that have experience working with diverse student backgrounds. This will provide an environment in which other Black females may see themselves in similar professional roles. This process could establish a campus atmosphere that is welcoming and promotes student success and development, allowing for students to feel confident and motivated towards reaching their goals.

9. Afford access to career assessments for all students to assist in their planning towards meeting their future goal. This recommendation also assists with meeting the demands of SB 1456 towards helping students decide on a goal prior to their third college semester. Thus, this recommendation has the potential to assist in retention and persistence of Black females in the CCC.

Recommendations for the Higher Education System

Much research is conducted at the four-year college levels to gain perspective on Black students in higher education. From this research, a number of programs and services have been implemented at the four-year level to meet the needs of Black college students (Coker, 2003); however, services that meet the holistic needs of the Black female are still dismal (Coker, 2003; Howard-Hamilton, 2004). To this end, recommendations for the four year institutions are presented.

10. Conduct research and gain an understanding of the two-year system specifically related to Black women. From this information, implement bridge programs between two-year and four-year institutions.

11. Establish programs specifically to empower Black college students. Programs such as Umoja allow for the Black student to develop personally and academically (Umoja, 2015). The development of such a program allows for Black students to have a supportive system necessary for them to be successful.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Though additional research is necessary to understand the full educational journey of Black women in education, this study can serve as a foundation towards a larger study. There are limited studies of community college students, so there are many areas of growth. There are a myriad of possible topics for further research within the scope of Black females at the California community college level. The breadth of the knowledge base, which could be capitalized upon with this population alone, is phenomenal because of the multiple facets and aspects of these women's lives.

The following recommendations for further studies would provide a vast and in-depth understanding of this population.

1. Studying multiple CCCs of similar size will provide a knowledge regarding the Black female experience across the state. This process will allow for increased knowledge about the similarities and differences among Black females. Such a study will enhance the breadth of knowledge that is currently available about this population and their needs while attending the CCC system.
2. Interviewing different age groups will help to understand if differences and or similarities occur generationally. This insight will grasp at unanswered questions of this study and investigate how generationally the expectations, viewpoints and educational goals may be altered.
3. The education of each parental unit would aid in how Black females learn how to navigate the educational system. Whether knowledge of this information is passed down or if the student must obtain this knowledge on their own is important. Many Black families were unaware of how to assist their students achieve academically (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Thus, the knowledge gained from such a study would later assist in creating resources and how to better empower Black families towards education.
4. Many of the individuals for this study identified as student athletes. Recognizing the Black female student athlete and her navigational pathway could differ compared to that of a general student. The development of identity, support systems and motivation towards success may be justified based on their navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Thus, investigating how athletics impacts the educational and personal pathways will assist in understanding their lived experiences.

5. Support systems played a major role in the Black females' lives; however, the depth that different support systems impacted their lives varied. Additionally, understanding of varying support systems (i.e., family, friends, teachers, church members, etc.) could pry out how to better aid Black females in and out of the classroom setting.
6. Many of the participants in the study had differing secondary educational backgrounds. The greatest difference being between private and public secondary education. Knowledge of how public versus private schooling assists with the interpretations of college preparedness would be beneficial. Since academic prowess begins during the secondary schooling experience or younger, the way in which students fair in different educational arenas could be the link to understanding the benefits and disadvantages of both systems. Likewise, as the educational system is ever changing, viewing how home schooling, charter school, middle colleges and online secondary education impact the educational and personal preparedness towards obtaining a college degree must be examined.
7. Lastly, the experiences of the Black female and her educational pathway could better be understood after graduating from the system. Post-CCC experiences would strengthen and explain how Black females were successful in their route, and this would contribute to understanding how Black females meet the prescribed graduation and transfer timeline in which the state seeks to achieve (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013).

The knowledge and research that is then conducted on this group could potentially be utilized to research other populations and create programs and the implementation of resources and support to better assist all students towards being academically and personally successful.

Black Female Educational Achievement Model

Though this study was entrenched with the models of Harper (2007) and Collins (1999) a new developing model evolved from their efforts. The Black female Educational Achievement model (BEAM) is rooted in the foundational work completed from Harper's (2007) Anti-Deficit Achievement Model (ADA) and Collins' (1999) Black Feminist Thought (BFT). The structure of ADA and the heart of BFT were combined to create BEAM (see Figure 9). This model intertwines the educational pathways that Black students maneuver through from their pre-college through post-college (Harper, 2007) while also integrating the personal history, identity development and empowerment of other Black females (Collins, 1999). The BEAM is within its infancy stage and thus more research is necessary to develop a fully refined working model.

The components of this model focus on the evolution of the Black female self-awareness as she progresses through the educational system. Identity is developed through the cycle of their support systems and their educational expectations and awareness. These two themes, which were apparent through the findings, are constant throughout the Black females' educational journey. As the Black female begins to understand and embrace her identity, she focuses on her future and her ultimate success. This foresight allows her to continue to utilize her foundation of support systems and educational expectations and awareness to strengthen her identity and future advances.

Though this is how the model emerged from this study, individuals may comprehend their educational evolution by beginning at different cycles. A Black female may have a clear conception of her future, thus then relying on her educational expectations and awareness and support system to better appreciate her identity. This

model is cyclical and can happen multiple times throughout the Black females' educational journey into their personal lives.

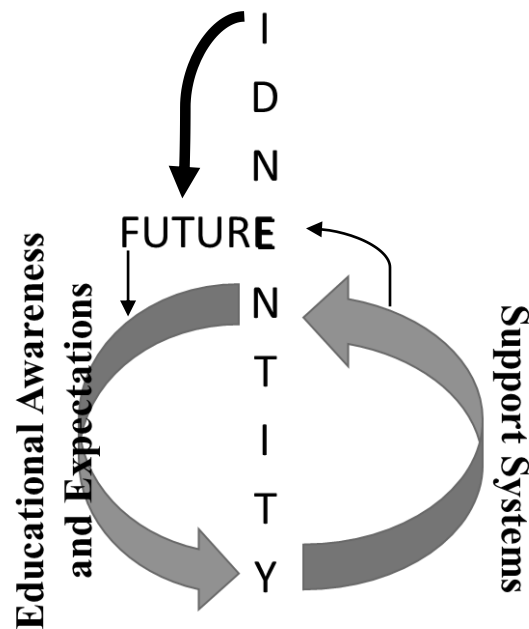


FIGURE 9. Black female educational achievement model.

Conclusions

This study sought to bring awareness to an often unseen population: Black females in the California community college system. The participants prior to interviewing did not understand why someone was interested in their story. The idea that they did not feel that their stories were important is disheartening as they have internalized their invisible-selves. They have come to believe that they are not important and that their journeys do not matter. The purpose of the study was to ultimately bring

light to an often forgotten population and to recognize them and their successes. Their unique stories are just the beginning steps towards understanding the journey of Black females as they move through the educational system.

Overall, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of these women and their journey at the community college level. However, a deeper understanding of the development of Black students attending the CCC was uncovered. Minority populations within the community college system are among the largest student groups; yet, they are the population which are struggling academically and personally. The Black female is of two oppressed groups and is thus requested from society to make a choice in their identity. The study asked specific questions related to their journey, including how their race, gender and class have impacted their educational and lived experiences as well as how they make sense of their roles and identities as Black females in higher education. These questions were asked to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of this student group. Four major themes of support systems, educational awareness and expectation, self-awareness and foresightedness add to the body of literature on the educational journey of Black females in the CCC. There are a number of implications to better understand the specific needs of this population. Yet, 12 recommendations were made to a number of key stakeholders and 7 recommendations were made for further research.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT
APPROVAL

APPENDIX A

November 10, 2014

To: California State University, Long Beach Institutional Review Board

From:

Director

Institutional Effectiveness and Enrollment Management

Student: Chelena Fisher

This letter is to inform you that Rose City College is aware of the research study *I'm Successful Too: Black Females Journey towards Success in the California Community College System at Pasadena City College*, that Chelena Fisher, candidate for a doctorate in Educational Leadership at California State University, Long Beach will be conducting for her dissertation. Rose City College has agreed to allow Ms. Fisher to conduct her research. In her research, Ms. Fisher will contact students to participate in her qualitative study. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness will help facilitate this research and provide meeting space and other logistic support as appropriate.

If you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Director, Institutional Effectiveness and Enrollment Management

Rose City College

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

APPENDIX B

Email Invitation Interview

Dear RCC Student,

I am a doctoral student in CSU Long Beach's Educational Leadership program and am writing to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting to understand the lived experiences of Black females in the California community college system. This study will benefit community colleges by providing a knowledge base in order to assist Black females in the community college reach their personal, academic and professional goals. You have been identified as a Black female college student whom has enrolled in Rose City College (RCC) and therefore are eligible to participate in my dissertation study.

What is this study?

The purpose of this research is to understand the lived experiences of Black females enrolled in California community college system.

What is required to participate?

If you decide to participate in this study, there is no cost to you. Interested individuals will be randomly selected and I will invite them to participate in an individual interview on campus. I will ask you questions about your experiences as a student. Your identity will be protected in this process. We will request your permission to audio-record the interview – this is optional.

What is the benefit for me?

As a participant in the study, you can help educators to understand how the courses you are taking have influenced your college experience and how you are developing into a successful college student. For participating in this study you will be given a \$10 RCC bookstore gift card.

If I would like to participate, what is the next step?

If you would like to participate in this research study, email me at imsuccessfultoo@gmail.com before January 27, 2014. Please provide us with your email contact information – the email you check most regularly. We will contact you with information about the interview.

Questions?

If you have specific questions about the nature of this project before you decide to participate, please contact me at imsuccessfultoo@gmail.com or my faculty supervisor,

Dr. Angela Locks at angela.locks@csulb.edu.

Thanks for your time.
Chelena Fisher, M.S.

California State University, Long Beach
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent form Interview

Title of study: What about Me? **I'm Successful Too: The Journey towards Success of Black females in the California Community College System**

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are over 18 years of age, have self-identified that you are a Black female and are enrolled at Rose City College.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for conducting this research is to understand the lived experiences of Black females enrolled in California community college system. This study will benefit community colleges by providing a knowledge base in order to assist Black females in the community college reach their personal, academic and professional goals.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study and grant your consent to participate, the following things will happen:

1. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used throughout the interview by yourself, and by the researcher to protect your identity.
2. Once the interview begins, the researcher will ask questions about your perceptions of college, your classes, and your strategies for academic success. The interview will be semi-structured and will take one hour.
3. At the end of the interview, the researcher will ask if you would be willing to be contacted to receive a copy of the interview transcript to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. If yes, the researcher will confirm that your contact information is accurate so that you may receive a copy of the interview transcript at a later date. If no, you will not be contacted and nothing will be sent to you.
4. You will be notified of the confidentiality of the information shared during the interview. You will be asked not to use any real names (either in reference to yourself or to others, such as school personnel) during the course of the interview.
5. You will be asked by the researcher for your permission to audio-record the interview. You may decline to be audio-recorded. If so, the researcher will take handwritten notes.

You will be interviewed according to your availability. You will participate in only one interview, scheduled to last one hour or less. The interview will take place at a location mutually agreeable to you and the researcher at the RCC campus.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

Some potential risks associated with your participation in this study include:

1. Reflecting on or speaking of uncomfortable subject matter during the interview.
2. A possible breach of confidentiality, e.g., your identity may be inadvertently revealed.

To minimize the risks listed above, several steps will be taken:

1. You have the option not to answer any questions and to pause the interview or to end it at any time. In case of emotional distress you will be informed of on-campus resources, such as Counseling and Psychological Services. You will also be provided with the name of the faculty supervisor of the study if you wish to follow up after the interview.
2. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. The interview will be conducted in a discreet location known only to you and the researcher. Finally all notes and digital audio-recordings will be stored in a locked file drawer in the researcher's home office.

Potential Benefits to Subjects and/or to Society

Participants will be thanked for their participation. As an incentive, there is \$10 RCC bookstore gift card for participating in the interview.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

The interview will be audio-recorded (with your permission), and you will have the right to review the final transcription of the recording. Once audio files have been transcribed they will be destroyed. Your identifying information, notes, and digital recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer or in a locked file drawer in the researchers' home office. The information, notes, and recordings will only be used for the purpose of this research project.

Participation and Withdrawal

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participation or non-participation will not affect your status as a student, your grades, or any other academic consideration or any other personal consideration or right you usually expect. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which in the opinion of the researcher warrant doing so. If the researcher determines you

have not met the eligibility requirements as originally stated, the researcher may withdraw you from this research.

Identification of Investigators

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Chelena Fisher at imsuccessfulto@gmail.com or Dr. Angela Locks at angela.locks@csulb.edu or (562) 985-2443.

Rights of Research Subjects

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of University Research, CSU Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840; Telephone: (562) 985-5314 or email to ORSP-Compliance@csulb.edu.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

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

Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Please sign whether or not you choose to be audio recorded for the purposes of this study. Participation in this study will not be based on your interview being audio recorded.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded

_____ I wish to NOT be audio recorded

APPENDIX D
QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

The following information is confidential and will not be linked to you. The data gathered here will be used to compile a general picture of the participants in this study.

ABOUT YOU

1. **Age:** _____

2. **Gender:** male female decline to state

3. **Race/Ethnicity** (mark all that apply): Black White Hispanic
 Asian/Pacific Islander Native American/Indian Other decline
to state

4. **Major:**

5. **How long have you been a college student?**

6. **How long have you been attending this Rose City College?**

7. **What is your household income status:**

below \$20,000 \$20,001-49,000 \$50,000-75,000 \$75,001-100,000
above \$100,000 unknown

FAMILY EDUCATION

8. **Primary language spoken at home:** _____

9. **Mothers' highest level of education :** some high school high school
 some college college degree graduate degree professional
 unknown decline to state

10. **Fathers' highest level of education:** some high school high school
 some college college degree graduate degree professional degree
 unknown decline to state

11. Parent's marital status: married divorced widowed single separated unknown

12. Do you have brothers and/or sisters? Yes No decline to state
If YES, please list their highest levels of education:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

EARLY EDUCATION

13. Are you the first in your family to pursue college? Yes No

14. What high school did you attend grades 9-12?: _____

15. What high school did you graduate from?: _____

HIGHER EDUCATION

16. Do you receive financial aid? Yes No

17. Please check all the types of financial aid that you receive:

Pell Grant BOGW Scholarship Student Loan

18. Have you attended college at other campuses? Yes No

19. What clubs and/or organizations are you a member of on your college campus?

- Yes No _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Pre-interview Checklist:

- Introduce myself to participant and explain the purpose of this study.
- Explain forms and get informed consent signature.
- Explain structure of the interview.
- Is it ok to audiotape the interview?
- Any questions?

Introduction Questions

1. Tell me about yourself

- **Tell me about your home life.**
 - Discuss family
 - Adult/ sibling/ extended family influences
 - Overall life goals
 - Financial background
- What were the conversations you had at home about education? What did you hear about education?
 - Where did they come from?
 - Do you/did you have siblings that attended college? Extended family?
 -

Pre College Experiences

Please take a moment to recall your secondary school (elementary, middle, high school) experience. Think about the classes you took and the interactions you had with teachers and friends.

- 2. How did you feel about being a Black female student in school?
 - What differences did you notice compared to other students? (i.e. males, other ethnic backgrounds).
 - What was said about gaining an education? – Specifically related to college? What did you hear about gaining an education throughout—specifically for college?

- Where did they come from?
- 3. Why did you enroll in college?
 - What moves you to continue to go to college?
- 4. In what ways were you or were you not academically ready for college?
 - Why/ why not?
 - What courses did you take and enjoy?- why?
- 5. Describe your social support outside of school.
 - Tell me about your friends that you made- what was their ethnicity, gender, etc.
 - Tell me about your community activities- church, community center, etc.
- 6. Discuss your extracurricular activities.
 - What kind of activities did you participate in?
 - Why did you participate in these activities?
 - During these activities whom did you align yourself with?
 - Friends, teachers, mentors, etc.
 - what were their gender, ethnicity, etc.

College Experiences

Now think back to when you were applying to colleges.

- 7. Why did you enroll in a community college?
 - (a) Tell me about your college options.
 - (b) Was this your first choice?, What were your other options?
 - (c) What were your first thoughts and/or feelings about attending a community college?
 - Probe: Excited, ashamed, embarrassed, hopeful? Why?
- 8. Tell me about your college experience thus far.**
- 9. What did it feel like when you first attended college?
- 10. Describe your experience in (course) class.
 - What do you enjoy the most about it? Why?
 - What do you enjoy the least about it? Why?
- 11. Tell about your major and why you selected this field of study.
 - Why did you select this major?
- 12. Describe your participation in activities outside of the classroom.
- 13. Describe your friends/peers inside and outside of the classroom.
 - Where they of the same gender, ethnicity, SES, etc?
- 14. Tell me about your social support outside of the classroom.
 - Same as prior to college? What has changed?

Post College Aspirations

- 15. Tell me about your future career and personal aspirations.**
 - Financially
 - Family

- Educationally
 - Socially
16. What have you learned about being a college student, from this class?
 17. What have you learned about yourself as a person thus far?
 18. How do you feel your experience as a Black female will/has shaped your major/career choices?
 19. If you could share some advice with them, what would you say about what it takes to be a successful college student?
 20. What skills, abilities and resources will assist you in your future educational endeavor?

Conclusion

21. What does success mean to you?
 - Have you reached that?
 - Who in your life is currently there to help you reach success?
 - Who do you need to help you to reach success?
 - What will it take for you to do so?
 22. Is there anything you would like to add that I didn't ask? Any final thoughts or comments?
- May I contact you in about two weeks to give you a copy of the transcript of today's interview? Please let me know if you DON'T want me to contact you.

APPENDIX F
TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Appendix F

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Chelena Fisher related to her research study titled *I'm Successful Too: The Journey of Black Females in the California Community College System*. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Chelena Fisher.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to Chelena Fisher in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX G
SAMPLE MEMOS AND CODING SCHEMES

Appendix G

Memo Sample

Financial support or understanding of finances?

Parent Engagement... Time if working... What comes first?

Comparative research to explore subgroup

Educational level of family... Etc.

Culture Helps and hurts... Pressure and stressed... Help and hinder

Fear of failure... Drive... Intrinsically motivated

Connection to culture. Or me culture all together?

Recommendations should connect with congruence... Linear with finding/

The story of these females is so important because it's their journey and not only their journey but their family's journey it's their experience its where they have been and where they're going. This lived history allows for a deeper understanding of who these females are impossibly the females that we will soon see.

Have trouble understanding or identifying blast women

Age difference may play into understanding gender and ethnic background.

My understanding of my **own** gender and ethnic background.

Having a sense of family and the strong connection to family.

What is happiness? – **AM I happy?**

Its family history and an understanding of self?

Knowledge of family education level.

Separation of gender and race not seen as the same thing.

Seeing gender specific occupations

Acknowledgement or ignoring inequalities based on race and or gender

Understanding of one's identity.

Courses in which some individuals like such as social sciences

Influences of teachers coaches and mentors—**who were influential people in my life**

Feelings of success and happiness and what that means.—**what does success mean to me? (happy?)**

Thoughts for future study separation based on age groups. Separation based on self-identification. Separation based on birth region. Separation based on parental marital status and financial status

Understanding of what a bachelor's degree was actually do in terms of career and success. And is a bachelor's degree the only thing that these individuals are looking to obtain or is there more

My explanation in my story and understanding these women stories.

Education being painful

Not understanding how to study correctly and family not knowing how to show you the correct way.

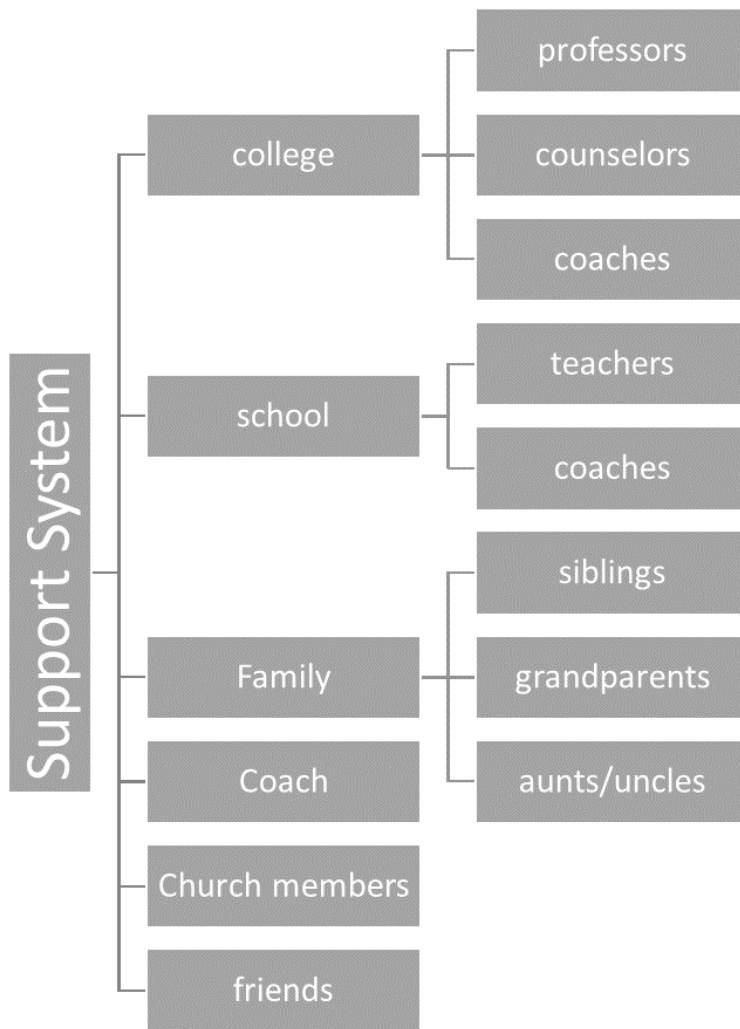
Being too smart or not smart enough.—happy medium

Own people fighting against each other to specifically females

Thoughts on grit and how we do things more so because it's not typical

Paradox of the black female's journey in the community college system is a struggle with in their journey however it is the struggle their struggle that allows for the story to be told.

Sample Coding Scheme



APPENDIX H
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNMENT

Appendix H

Recommendations		Conceptual Framework Alignment	
Individual			
1	Embrace being a Black female; seek resources, information and assistance at every opportunity; make a pledge to yourself to complete your goal; and empower and engage in conversations with other Black females	BFT, ADA	
Families			
2	Provide Black females with an environment that is nurturing and supportive to their development. This optimal setting would allow for open and honest communication between both parties; furthermore, allowing for an interdependent relationship. Use strength-based language which could help promote the student as they develop academically and professionally. Using such language could help address challenges and provide support for the Black female.	BFT, ADA	
3	Be aware of the demands that the Black female student endures on a daily basis; academically and personally. When necessary, obtain resources regarding education, health and wellness, spirituality and development to better assist the Black female. Provide educational and cultural experiences in order to gain global and personal perspective on Blackness (i.e. history museums, college tours).	ADA	
K-12 Educational System			
4	Promotion of a college going culture on campus. Invite two year and four year campuses to the secondary school or attend a workshop at the higher education institutions.	BFT, ADA	

5	Provide workshops to parents, guardians and support systems on how they can better assist in the advancement of their Black females. Additionally, provide resources and openings for them to be involved.	BFT, ADA
6	School counselors should be aware of resources for Black students.	ADA
Community College System		
7	Offer professional development workshops to educate faculty, staff, and administrators on effective ways of interacting with Black female, which could help to lessen the effects of negative perceptions. Create a strategic planning committee may also be established to combat issues of diversity within the campus setting and region wide.	BFT, ADA
8	Provide and regularly offer multicultural courses so the student can continue to learn more about themselves and their history. Additionally, establish and develop programs that integrate life skills (i.e. finances, career, personal health, etc.) that will support the other roles of the Black female.	BFT, ADA
9	Recruit and hire faculty, staff and administrators that have experience working with diverse student backgrounds. This will provide an environment which other Black females may see themselves in similar professional roles. This process could establish a campus atmosphere that is welcoming and promotes student success and development; allowing for students to feel confident and motivated towards reaching their goals.	BFT, ADA
10	Afford access to career assessments for all students to assist in their planning towards meeting their future goal. This recommendation also	BFT, ADA

	assist with meeting the demands of SB 1456 towards helping students decide on a goal prior to their third college semester. Thus, potential assisting in retention and persistence of Black females in the CCC.	
Higher Education System		
11	Conduct research and gain an understanding of the two year system specifically related to Black women. From this information, implement bridge programs between two year and four year institutions.	BFT, ADA
12	Establish programs specifically to empower Black college students. Programs such as <u>Umoya</u> allow for the Black student to develop personally and academically. The development of such a program allows for Black students a supportive system necessary for them to be successful.	BFT, ADA

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