Social experiences of African-American female students on a predominantly white campus

Guy Alexander Sims

University of Northern Iowa

Copyright ©2003 Guy Alexander Sims

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Sims, Guy Alexander, "Social experiences of African-American female students on a predominantly white campus" (2003). Dissertations and Theses @ UNI. 515.
https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd/515

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses @ UNI by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI®

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE STUDENTS
ON A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CAMPUS

A Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

/[Signature]
Dr. Michael Waggoner, Chair

/[Signature]
Dr. Carolyn Bair, Committee Member

/[Signature]
Dr. Phyllis Baker, Committee Member

/[Signature]
Dr. Victoria DeFrancisco, Committee Member

/[Signature]
Dr. Dale Jackson, Committee Member

Guy Alexander Sims
University of Northern Iowa
May 2003
SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE STUDENTS
ON A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CAMPUS

An Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Michael Waggoner, Committee Chair

Dr. John W. Somervill
Dean of the Graduate College

Guy Alexander Sims
University of Northern Iowa
May 2003
ABSTRACT

This study examined the social experiences of African American female students at a predominantly white institution finding that in several areas of student life African American female students persisted to graduation without necessarily establishing informal social interactions within the university community. This is contrary to Vincent Tinto’s posit that students who fail to make a connection with the campus community are more likely to withdraw from the institution. This study introduces the term *irrelation* as a descriptor of a social construct I have applied to African American female college students on the campus of a large, public, mid-western university. Irrelation is a term used to describe the concept in which an individual or group functions within a social setting without a high level of relationship or connection with other members of that community.

This study includes a 1-2 hour, semi-structured interview with each participant. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The participants created pseudonyms in order to maintain a high level of confidentiality. A semi-structured interview consisting of exploratory statements was utilized. This study is to provide direction for the University of Northern Iowa that will assist in the development of programs designed to enhance the life of African American female students on campus. While the results may not necessarily be generalized to all campuses, they may raise questions and present implications for other institutions. The results of this study can be of direct use to departments such as Admissions, Residence, Student Activities, and Counseling as well as educational researchers, faculty, and other student affairs practitioners. Additionally, the results will also serve to increase the body of knowledge in the area of Women’s Studies, African American Studies, and Student Development. This study may benefit the African American female students through the evaluation of current programs and
services and with the development of new and relevant directives designed to foster an environment that is conducive to their social well being. The findings and perspectives interpreting the findings will further the knowledge relating to race, gender, and education.
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the spirit of my father, Rev. Dr. Edward Sims, Jr. I now understand him better and revere his life and the many complicated facets of his being. My mind and heart is filled with his words of wisdom, his examples, and his hopes for me for the future. I understand not only why this experience was important to him but also why it is important to me. It is with great honor, respect, and reverence that I follow in his footsteps. *Penda na Imani.*

G.A.S.
It is with all manner of thanks and gratitude that I take this time to thank my wife, Lisa, for all of her support and encouragement as I end this particular journey. She continues to be my motivator and cheerleader as we move from this phase of our life to an even better future.

To my children, Alyssia and Sterling, I thank them for going to bed on time so that I could work on all of my academic projects. They are the beacons of light that kept me focused on my goals.

I thank the spirits of my parents, Edward and Deanna Sims, who, when it seemed that I felt the end was never to materialize, they spoke to my soul, kept me focused, and moving me in the right direction. Their lives are the foundations for all I have become.

My committee members were more than just academic shepherds but individuals genuinely interested in my ideas and success. Their criticisms, challenges, questions, and applause kept me afloat as I navigated through the rough seas of processing and writing this document.

I truly appreciate the time and honesty afforded me by the participants of this study. It is through their words and sentiments that I begin to understand a little more about the world they live in.

Last but not least, I am grateful to all of my Union and divisional colleagues, my classmates, members of the UNI community, and friends who continued to encourage me to see my dream come true. To all of you, I respectfully and humbly thank you.

G.A.S.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parameters</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview and Purpose of Student Development</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Student Development Theories</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Persistence</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Climate</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American College Students</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Greek Organizations and African American Sororities</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Female College Students</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ...............................................................45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction .................................................................................45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Framework .......................................................................48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design .............................................................................51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Site ................................................................................52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Participants .....................................................................53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Descriptions ............................................................54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection ..............................................................................55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis ................................................................................59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEW INTERPRETATIONS ....................................61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction ...................................................................................61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Category 1: The impact of African American Greek Life ........................................................................62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Category 2: Interactions with Other Student Groups ........67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Category 3: Interactions in the Residence Halls .............72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Category 4: Involvement in Campus Programs .................78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary .........................................................................................81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....................................................83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrelation as a Social Construct ......................................................83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrelation Versus Marginality and Isolation ..................................84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrelation Versus Mattering ..........................................................86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Sororities .........................................................88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Group Relations .................................................................89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

There are a number of prominent concepts related to understanding the social experience of students of color on predominantly White campuses. The concepts of marginality, isolation, and mattering, to be discussed later in this document, provide a similar approach to addressing the social needs of students of color. It is my interpretation that these concepts require that the minority students to adopt the posture of a victim, be perceived as victims, or exist in a victim status. There must also exist some level of disassociation from a larger group by no fault or choice of their own. Since the 1970s, the number of students of color in higher education rose significantly, particularly African Americans, and the aforementioned constructs are reflective of the campus climate experienced. I would not dismiss the reality and seriousness of the feelings and perceptions of students of color with respect to those terms but would present a different thought for those concerned college student development. During the research process, emergent categories formed patterns of interrelations, which formed the core of the theory presented in this paper. I contend that on the predominantly White campus African-American females’ progress through school having an “irrelationship,” a term applied in this study as a way to describe the concept in which there exists a state of having no relationship (Porter, 1998) with their institution. This statement is a departure from the positions taken by student development theorists such as Tinto (1986), Pascarella and Terenzini (1979), and Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995), who believe
that students who are disenchanted with their collegiate environment and experience are more likely to depart from the institution. The participants of this study shared experiences of dismay and disconnection in four major areas, residence life, campus involvement, African American Greek life, and their interaction with others student groups; however, they continued to persist toward and to graduation. Reflected in this study are the social outlet havens they have created which exist apart from the campus community. This alternate way of looking at the social experiences of African American female college students can provide different paradigms to address issues of inclusion, participation, and other constructs related to student development and this is what I have come to identify as irrelationship.

Overview

Part of the college experience for students is the challenge of finding a place in the social terrain of the university. Students enter the university setting at various developmental stages, possessing varying levels of social experiences, having preconceived notions of the college social scene, as well as creating and reacting to their own perceptions of social reality. As students navigate their way through this terrain, they are challenged to find those they can trust, find their own relaxation outlets, develop a web of communication with the different areas of the campus community, and based on what is learned, utilize options that support both their academic and social success. As the Associate Director of the Maucker Union, the campus union at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), I have the unique opportunity to talk with students of all backgrounds regarding their concerns about student life at the university. Over the past
six years, I have had numerous in-depth conversations with African American students regarding their social experiences on campus. Threaded throughout the various conversations with African American females were feelings and stories related to isolation, lack of connection with the university, loneliness concerns with dating, and other social interactions. These are a few of the many issues faced by African American females on predominantly White campuses. I chose to focus on African American females specifically because as an African American male who attended a historically Black college in the East and was reared in a major Eastern city, I was extremely curious to understand why this particular segment of the university population would continue to persist although there was a clear expression that they did not have positive reflections of their time at UNI. I did not choose to look at the African American male on a predominantly White campus as I have a better knowledge and understanding as a result of contemporary literature and personal information. As I reflect on the conversations of the African American females, I am curious to understand more about their social experiences. To begin this journey, I posed the following questions to myself: (a) What social experiences are unique for African American females? (b) What assists African American female students in persisting to the completion of their degree? These questions formed the foundation for my inquiry.

In 2000, the Student Activities Office co-sponsored a retreat focusing on women and race, revealing that life for many African American female students on campus could be a lonely one. Participants expressed feelings that they were at "the bottom of the social ladder," that they were a mystery to their fellow students, they were isolated, and
existed in a small world of limited friendships. When asked by non-African American women why they remained at UNI if things were so bad, the first response from one of the African American young women was, "you wouldn't understand!" This comment was then followed by another African American young woman, "I came to get a degree and can't nothing stop me from getting it!"

The response offered by the first African American young woman struck me as an important avenue to investigate. I am challenged to face the issues that I wouldn't understand as a male, as an administrator, as well as a person who did not attend a predominately White institution as an undergraduate. After listening to their stories and observations, more questions regarding their life on campus arose. What is unique to the African American female college student’s experience? How do African American female college students perceive their place in the campus environment? What gives them the strength and determination to persist in the face of issues that may directly affect their progress at the university? Many new students anticipate more from the college environment than is subsequently realized and perhaps their concerns may be grounded in perception rather than reality (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985). It is also suggested that African American students experience a greater range of problems than do White students in their efforts to adapt socially, psychologically, and academically to the university (Livingston & Stewart, 1987). So I question, what are the coping strategies used by African American female students to assist them as they progress from semester to semester? I would argue that all students have a need to find a place in the campus community that speaks to them individually, culturally, emotionally, and academically.
Kuh and Love (2000) state that this *place* offers a sense of belonging and a level of satisfaction that further enhances their chances for degree completion:

One way students manage cultural distance is to join enclaves or affinity groups that have values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions similar to those of the students’ cultures of origin, or those the student finds appealing. Enclave membership is critical for fitting in, for developing a sense of belonging to one or multiple groups and perceiving that there are people there with similar values, assumptions, perspectives, beliefs, and meaning-making systems. Students with close friends who are doing well academically and like college life are more likely to persist. (p. 207)

If this is so, what are the social networks that support and maintain a level of quality of life that encourages the African American female college student to persist?

**Problem Statement**

In order to understand the problem to be addressed in this study, it is important to acknowledge concepts associated with the concerns of African American students on predominantly White campuses. Studies by Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1979, 1983) showed that voluntary withdrawal is much more a reflection of what occurs on campus after entry than it is of what has taken place before entry. Three prominent constructs, marginality, mattering, and isolation provide a framework for an understanding of how African Americans interact within their campus environment. The concepts will be explained then synthesized to formulate a problem statement.

Marginality is the perception that one does not fit in, is not significant, and is not needed (Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1998). The average college freshman may have feelings of marginalization at first, but with time, opportunity, and experience, they become comfortable with their new environment. For non-minority students, there is
rarely the experience of being the only one in class or being treated differently based on their race. In this case, marginality may be a temporary situation. Marginality can also refer to a permanent condition. As with bicultural individuals, marginality is a way of life. The individual identifies with two cultures simultaneously (Schlossberg, 1989).

Like bicultural individuals, African American students attending predominantly White institutions are especially susceptible to feelings of marginality. African American students find themselves experiencing feelings of marginality on two levels. On one level, many African American students search within the African American community on campus and the surrounding community for sources of comfort and a sense of belonging. The other level finds African American students searching for a sense of belonging within the non-minority campus environment (Cooper, 1997). African American students find themselves alone in many classrooms. They are generally excluded from the informal repartee among White students, and complain of being ignored by professors when students are called on in class (Berry, 1983). Further, African American students reported that their marginality on predominantly White campuses was related to peer relationships. It was also found that many African American students do not feel welcome at predominantly White campuses (Malaney & Shively, 1995).

The concept of *marginality* was described as early as 1928 by the sociologist Robert Park as part of the description of a new type of personality, namely a “cultural hybrid” or the marginal man. Park (1928) states:
The marginal man lived and shared intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused. (p. 892)

Although Park’s observations regard Jewish people of the medieval ghetto, the concept can be applied to any person or group existing in two distinct cultures. The desire of marginalized persons is to feel that they matter to some part of the greater society. The marginalization construct is synonymous with mattering yet they do exist as polar opposites. While the constructs are often used interchangeably, it is important to understand their differences.

Mattering represents a compelling social obligation and a powerful source of social integration: we are bonded to society not only by virtue of our dependence on others but by their dependence on us (Rosenberg & McCollough, 1981). The concept of “mattering” is the idea that students, in general, desire the feeling that others depend upon them, are interested in them, are concerned with their fate, and experience them as an ego-extension that exercises a powerful influence on their actions. There are four dimensions of mattering. The first dimension, attention, is the most elementary form. Attention is the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person. The second dimension, importance is the belief that we are the object of someone’s concern and that the person cares about what we want, think, and do. Focusing on the dependence of others on us is the third dimension. The last dimension is ego-extension. Ego-extension allows us to feel that others will be proud of our accomplishments (Cooper, 1997). Students in general have the need to feel important and desire a “fit”
between themselves and their environment. This “fit” assists in both their satisfactions with the campus environment and aids in retention efforts. Chickering, in *Education and Identity* (1969), pointed out that relationships with close friends and peer groups, or subcultures, are the primary forces influencing student development in college. The cornerstone of this relationship is that students feel they have *significant others* who matter to them, and in turn, to whom they matter. Morris Rosenberg (1981) stated at the 1979 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association:

> The familiar term “significant other,” introduced by Harry Stack Sullivan, succinctly reflects the idea that some people matter to us greatly whereas others do not, and that the views attributed to those significant others make more of a difference than the view of those who count little. Research has amply documented the wisdom of this observation. What is generally overlooked, however, is the obverse—the degree to which we feel we matter to others. Do we believe that we count in other’s lives, loom large in their thoughts, make a difference to them? Are we an object of another’s concern, interest or attention? (p. 3)

In most campus settings, individuals make the determination that they matter by evaluating that (a) there is someone who is an object of their attention, (b) that there is someone of importance to them, and (c) that there is someone who is socially dependent on them. Students thrive and develop positively when they feel that who they are and the triumphs/challenges they face matter significantly to others. A student who has the sense that they ‘matter’ has the social foundation to develop the motivation to further their cognitive skills and interpersonal competence, which are important to a successful academic and social career. Mattering and the feeling of inclusion are very important to the African American experience on predominantly White campuses. Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) hold that as African American students become more involved
they are less likely to leave school. While marginality and mattering relate similarly to students who may not have made a connection with the campus community, another widely used construct, isolation, warrants inspection.

Isolation is the absence of sufficient interactions whereby integration may not be achieved, meaning that students are simply not involved to any great extent with the campus community (Malaney & Shivley, 1995). Students who have either isolated themselves from other members of the campus community or feel that they are isolated have a much higher incidence of departing from the institution. This absence of contact with others proves to be most important to the individual. It is during the first year that students need to establish supportive contacts and begin the process of fitting in (Tinto, 1993). Allen (1985, 1988) has shown that African American students on White campuses are often not prepared for the actual social experiences they encounter and therefore face more isolation, as well as general dissatisfaction, relative to their White counterparts. It is clear that the previous constructs are worthy of careful inspection when addressing the concerns of African American students on predominantly White campuses. This statement rings true in this respect, being the other can result in a lifetime struggle to understand the denial of a voice or visibility for minorities in American society and its institutions (Madrid, 1988).

Marginality, mattering, isolation, and other synonymous terms attempt to reveal the clues and reasons for why African American students at predominantly White institutions are not fully engaged in the mainstream of the campus. The works of the theorists and researchers mentioned above clearly underscore the relative importance of
social integration for the persistence of African American students. They suggest that the social involvement aspects of the African American student's collegiate experience are equal to, and perhaps even more important than, academic integration as an influence on ultimate degree completion (Pascarella, 1985).

If college students in general face such developmental challenges, what outcomes can be expected for those who come to college with a different set of characteristics that they must somehow reconcile within existing educational environments? It is evident that all students need to feel that they 'matter' on their campus. While all students may experience varying forms of marginality over the course of their time in college, students of color, in particular, can feel marginalized more often than they feel they matter. Unfortunately, there has been a distinct lack of studies related to minority college student development and marginality.

Of the various theories or models of college student development, few clearly characterized the culture-specific aspects of development. Many early theories presume that all students experienced developmental phenomena similarly. A few theories discussed cultural factors, except those concerning cross-race-developmental research conceptualized only to validate existing theory (Wright, 1987). During the 1960s and 1970s there was extensive research on students of color that was concerned largely with comparing minorities to White students across social dimensions. It was rare for researchers to concern themselves with defining factors that promoted the psychological, psychosocial, and intellectual development of students of color.
During the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s, a body of research focused upon issues related to students of color on predominantly White campuses. Authors such as Suen (1983) focused on the alienation and attrition of African American college students, indicating that African American students dropped out from predominantly White colleges at a rate of 49.5%, as compared to an average of 36.15% for White students. Results from Suen’s study suggested that African American students felt more alienated within a predominantly White campus than did their White counterparts and that social estrangement was higher for African American students. From the years 1971 to 1980, Pascarella (1985) investigated the racial differences in the factors associated with bachelor degree completion concluding that African American men may simply have more of a difficult time than other students in finding a niche in the institution. Consequently, they may be more likely to withdraw from such institutions or from higher education all together. Guloyan (1986) sought to examine the attitudes of university life among White and non-White freshmen finding that minority students have more socialization problems than non-minorities and that African American students experience more social isolation. Gunnings (1982) affirmed that there is a causal relationship between stress and illness and presented implications for students of color since minority students on predominantly White campuses occupy a relatively more stressful position in the campus social structure and thus perceive their environment quite differently than their White counterparts. Mallinckrodt (1988) examined the relationship between persistence and perceptions of social support from members of the campus community and from family members, for both Black and White freshmen students, and
suggested potential screening items to identify students at a risk for dropping out.

Additional research concentrated on the relationship between race and student progression finding that race has a strong bivariate relationship to students’ performance in college, with White students consistently outperforming African American students in terms of attrition rates and overall progression rates (Gosman et al., 1983).

By the end of the 20th century, researchers began looking at more complex issues related to students of color on predominantly White campuses. D’Augelli and Hershberger (1993) studied social networks and campus climate issues faced by African American students at a predominantly White college, indicating that the climate of the predominantly White campus was sufficiently problematic to interfere with academic pursuits. They also utilized a multivariate process to assess the influence of perceived social support on differential graduation rates of African-American and White students. Jackson (1998) addressed the issue that race and gender can influence a woman’s self-perception and whether she can maintain a self-concept in which race and gender are connected affects how she sees herself. African American women at predominantly White institutions feel they must choose race over their gender, which strongly suggest that these schools are doing an inadequate job of supporting these women. Jackson concluded that while predominantly White institutions are trying to meet the needs of students of color, it is important to consider the diversity needs within the group.

While the research on the social experience of minority students has been of value in developing a framework for student support and developmental assistance, disappointingly, the research on African American students has, at a very significant
level, centered either on African American students as a group or on African American males. Just as institutions need to consider the within-group concerns of minorities, researchers should focus their efforts at investigating issues related to the sub-segments of minority groups. One can only concur with Hamilton’s (1996) summarization that there is a severe dearth of literature that focuses specifically on educational motivation among African American female college students. Many current studies of achievement needs of females that focus on gender patterns of educational and occupational choices concentrate on the Caucasian, middle-class population. Fleming (1983) found there is an impression that they (Black females) experience higher levels of emotional pain, social isolation, or aroused fears about their competence than their White counterparts at predominantly White colleges. Beyond studies that focus on the academic progress of female African American College students, there have been even fewer studies that looked solely at the social experience of female African American College students. Harrison and Stonner (1976) found that Black females on predominantly White campuses rated themselves lower on the concept of physical self than Black females at predominantly Black Colleges. This suggests that situational factors may influence the perceptions of attractiveness among Black females. Hill (1972) recognized that a lack of success in the fierce competition for male companionship could leave the Black female questioning her worth. The limited research on the social issues related to African American female college students creates a void in the body of literature addressing student development. After listening to the concerns of the African American female
students, I am compelled to investigate and understand their perspectives on the social challenges present on a predominantly White campus.

**Purpose**

My major purpose is to examine the social experiences of African American female students at a predominantly White institution and attempt to understand the factors that assist in and detract from their social development. There are many issues that worked to formulate my research question. What are the social experiences of African American female college students on a predominantly White campus? What are their experiences as possibly the only African American female in their area of residence or classroom? If there are feelings of isolation, how are they recognized and addressed? When additional support is required to whom do they turn? What factors motivate their persistence to completion? These inquiries provided for me the cognitive framework necessary for the direction of this study.

I seek to find the answers to these and other themes through the use of the qualitative method technique of the in-depth interview. As a method of looking at life-as-a-whole and as a way of carrying out an in-depth study of individual lives, the in-depth interview stands alone. The data gathered through the in-depth technique can help me define an individual’s place in the social order of things and the process used to achieve that fit. There are several uses for personal narratives, among them are (a) opportunities for deepened relations with others, (b) springboards for ethical action, (c) new insights, (d) compassionate judgement, (e) the creation of shared knowledge and meaning that can inform professional practice, (f) an extended vision of responsibility as a professional, (g)
understanding moral identity, and (h) illustrating possibilities for human action and feeling (Atkinson, 1998). For this particular study, the use of in-depth study will provide a deep and insightful look at the social experiences of African American female college students.

Significance of the Study

The information gathered from the study will provide direction for the university that will assist in the development of programs designed to enhance the lives of African American female students on campus. The results of this study can be of direct use to departments such as Admissions, Residence, Student Activities, Counseling, as well as educational researchers, faculty, and other student affairs practitioners. It is hoped that the information from this study will benefit African American female students through the evaluation of current programs and services and the development of new and relevant directives designed to foster an environment that is conducive to their social well-being. I find this project to be one way to meet my charge of seeking ways to assist students in their development and their ultimate success as college students, especially since this will be one of the few studies specifically addressing the social experience of African American female college students.

Definition of Terms

For consistency of interpretation, the following terms are defined:

Social Interaction: Refers to the intra- and interpersonal relationships between students and others in the institution (Love, 1993, p. 30).
Persistence: The end product of a successful match between a student and his/her academic and social environment in a higher education setting (St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000, p. 32).

Coping Strategies: A wide-ranging form of adaptive behavior used to deal with all stressful situations (Bean & Eaton, 2000, p. 51).

Marginality: Marginality is the perception that one does not fit in, is not significant, and is not needed (Gossett et al., 1998, p. 23).

Mattering: The idea that students, in general, desire the feeling that others depend upon them, are interested in them, are concerned with their fate, and experience them as an ego-extension which exercises a powerful influence on their actions (Schlossberg, 1989, p 8).

Campus Climate: The current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members (Bauer, 1998, p. 2).

‘Chilly’ Climate: An environment created by overt and covert behaviors of faculty, administrators, and students, and a range of institutional policies, practices, and cultural artifacts that discriminate against or discount women (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999, p. 163).

Member Checking: The method of obtaining confirmation that the report has captured the data as constructed by the informants, or to correct, amend, or extend it, that is, to establish credibility of the case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236).
Parameters

There are several parameters to this study:

1. Only African American female on-campus resident students of the University of Northern Iowa will be invited to participate in the study. Off-campus living offers a significant difference in both lifestyle and the campus social experience.

2. Only registered students classified by the University as junior and senior status will be invited to participate. Students classified as freshman and sophomore will not be invited to participate as they lack the adequate on-campus experience appropriate for the study.

3. This study will not compare African American female junior/senior students’ perceptions of their social experience to other groups of students.

4. The focus of the study will center on issues of race rather than gender. Though equally important, race may be an impact variable for African American female students at significantly higher level of instances.

5. Interviews with students will be on an individual basis. I do not wish to have participants influenced by commentary or sentiment of others. There will be a sharing of the results with each participant for both clarification and educational purposes.

6. Transfer students will not be invited to participate, as they may possess a different collegiate experience.
Research Question

The question to be investigated in this study is what are the social experiences of African American female college students on a predominantly White, Mid-western campus? This research question has been developed based on experiences with students on campus, conversations with professional colleagues, and information gathered through related literature. It is my intent to provide an in-depth and comprehensive look at the social experience of African American female students on a predominantly White campus. The results of this question may generate a broad range of possibilities that may assist members of a variety of academic and social communities in their understanding and support of African American female students at such institutions.

It should be understood that while the primary question guides the study, there were several topics originally generated which were influential in the construction of the literature review and methodology. The topics worked to the shape the lens for which the primary question would focus. Persistence, integration into the campus environment, supportive environment, and coping strategies were topics generated from conversations with African American students, conversations with colleagues and peers, and through a review of literature. These topics generated several issues for consideration. What factor(s) works to assist African American female students persist to graduation? How do African American females construct and define the campus environment? What resources do the African American female students seek out for support and assistance? What are the methods of coping strategies for the African American female students? It
was the investigation into these topics that helped develop the path of inquiry for the literature review.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides an intellectual framework supporting the selection of the methodology and direction of the study. The design of the literature review of this study is based on an inverted pyramid model, beginning with the broad topic of student development and student development theories then narrowing to include the topics of student persistence, student departure, campus climate, and coping strategies. As the literature review becomes more acute, the topics related to African American college students and, most specifically, African American college females are presented. The linear progression of the literature review provides both a historical and contemporary look at issues related to the topic of study.

Overview and Purpose of Student Development

The roots of student development began with a position paper entitled *The Student Personnel Point of View in 1937* by the American Council on Education. This document was the first national guideline for the philosophical base for the student personnel profession. Although the paper articulated the importance of the whole student and the individual student, it did not come into full acceptance until the 1960s (O’Banion, 1989). The precursor to student development during the early 1960s was humanistic psychology, which focused on the positive development of the human being. This major new force had a great deal of impact on education and particularly the student personnel function. It was also during this time that the encounter group process had emerged as a creative and
powerful new educational force to be used by student personnel for challenging students
to achieve full development (O’Banion, 1989).

By 1969, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges
commissioned a position paper on student development programs. This paper, *Student
Personnel Work: An Emerging Model*, first appeared in Junior College Journal and later
appeared in the first book written on student personnel in the community college, *Student
Development Programs in the Community Junior College* (O’Banion, 2000).

The Council of Student Personnel Associations (COSPA) developed a document
in 1975 that addressed the purpose of student development services in postsecondary
education. This publication, *Student Development Services in Postsecondary Education*,
noted that the purpose of student development services in postsecondary education was to
provide affective and cognitive expertise in the processes involved in education (Nuss,
1996). Marylu McEwen (1996), writing on the subject of the theoretical bases of student
development describes student development theory in this manner:

Student development theory serves as a framework through which interpretations
and understandings are constructed. It is used to describe human behavior, to
explain, to predict, and to generate new knowledge and research. It also permits
professionals to influence outcomes and assess practice. (p. 150)

In the last 20 years, there has been a proliferation of theories describing the
growth and development of college students, ranging from learning theories to racial
identity theories to theories focusing on moral and character development. These theories
assist student affairs professionals in becoming more proactive in their work with
students as well as provide a framework for understanding students’ concerns, attitudes,
and thought processes (Nuss, 1996). The literature has come to be organized in general classifications of student development theory.

**Major Student Development Theories**

Student development theories are often grouped into clusters of related theories. The three most common classifications are psychosocial, cognitive-structural, and typological. While all of the theories provide frameworks for understanding differences in students’ collegiate experiences, each is guided by different assumptions about learning and development. Each also focuses on a different aspect of this process and often on different student outcomes (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). This section will begin with a review of psychosocial theories of student development.

Psychosocial theory explores the personal and interpersonal aspects of college students’ lives by focusing on specific issues that students address at different times in their development. These theories address the types of adjustment issues that traditional-age college students who are living away from home for the first time often face: academic success, making new friends, and finding a comfortable career path. Vivienne C. Cass (1979) began writing on the subject of Sexual Identity Development for Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals. Cass worked under the assumption that the homosexual self-image was uniquely perceived and was given meaning by each individual holding such an image. Cass’s psycho-social model (stage-based) was a development from her initial interest in Homosexual Identity.

Arthur Chickering’s (1969) theory of identity development was an attempt to provide a conceptual framework for his findings in addition to other research that had

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
been conducted on college students. In his Seven Vectors of Identity Development, Chickering theorizes that individuals move through seven vectors of identity development at different rates. The vectors are designed to build upon each other, working to lead to greater complexity, stability, and integration as the issues to each vector are addressed. Vectors can intersect with each other, and individuals can find themselves reexamining issues associated with vectors they had previously worked through.

William E. Cross, Jr. (1978) began his investigation into the development of Black Racial Identity during the turbulent social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. During that time period, there was a national movement of identity from the term Negro to Black. The term Nigrescence is defined as a re-socializing experience whereas the healthy individual’s identity is transformed from one of non-Afrocentrism to Afrocentrism to multiculturalism. This transformation is more cyclical than linear, as changes occur over the lifetime in the African American individual’s psyche (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

In an effort to understand the relationship between the development and progress of racism in the United States, Janet Helms (1990) studied and identified three types of racism as it applies to White identity. The types of racism are identified as (a) individual, (b) institutional, and (c) cultural. Helms points out that each of these types of racism is ingrained into the cultural fabric of the United States. Helms promotes that individuals must accept his or her own “Whiteness”, define their view of self, and not depend upon the perceived superiority of one racial group over another. The assessment used to
investigate White Racial Identity can be found at the conclusion of *Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development*, authored by Helms.

Jean S. Phinney's theory of Ethnic Identity Development of Adolescents identified three stages of ethnic identity formation among tenth graders from three ethnic groups (Asian American, African American, and Hispanic American). The three stages are Diffusion-Foreclosure, Moratorium, and Identity Achievement. One of the purposes was to determine the importance of ethnicity in comparison to other widely studied identity domains. Phinney developed this psychosocial model as a reaction to the lack of studies among adolescent research as it applied to ethnic identity.

The common tie among these and other psychosocial theories is that human development continues throughout the life span and that a basic underlying psychosocial structure guides this development (Rodgers, 1989). Psychosocial developmental theories can help student affairs practitioners understand the issues students face during their college years and how they internalize their experiences.

Cognitive-Structural theories place the emphasis on how students perceive and interpret their experiences. Research using these theories has shown that the ways in which students think about their careers, problematic issues in their major fields of study, social interactions, and moral issues, differ in complexity, breadth, and adequacy depending on their level of development. Following are prominent cognitive-structural theorists and their theories.

Using the assumptions and methodology of Piaget's investigation of the moral development of children, Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) hypothesized that moral difficulties
motivate development through a fixed sequence of increasingly flexible kinds of moral reasoning. Kohlberg identified three additional stages of moral development beyond the ones established by Piaget. This model seeks to illuminate the changes in the way people think but not what they think. This theory model is considered a later cognitive structural theory because, as with theorists such as Piaget (1952), King and Kitchner (1994), and Baxter-Magolda (1992), this model seeks to examine moral development of cognitive growth.

Author of *In a Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan (1993) popularized the term, *voice* as both a description and metaphor of what women have muted in their urge to preserve a connectedness even at the cost of a self-expression. Gilligan’s theory of Women’s Moral Development illuminates the changes in the way women think rather than how they think. Through her studies, Gilligan discovered a form of moral reasoning that she believed to be different from the reasoning described by Lawrence Kohlberg.

Karen King and Patricia Kitchener’s Reflective Judgement Model seeks to illuminate the changes in the way people think but not what they think, as well as examining both the intellectual and moral development of cognitive growth. More specifically, this theory focuses upon gender differences in the cognitive domain. The centerpiece of King and Kitchener’s model is the observation that peoples’ assumptions about what is and how something can be known provide a lens that shapes how individuals frame a problem and how they justify their beliefs about it in the face of uncertainty.

William G. Perry, Jr.’s (1968) Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development refers to “forms” of intellectual and ethical development. “Forms” are the structures that
shape how people view their experiences. Perry engaged in a longitudinal research project examining how students interpret and make meaning of the teaching and learning process. The research formulated what he described as the typical course of development of students' patterns of thought and unfolding views of the world. Overall, cognitive-structural theories provide a map for understanding undergraduate students' intellectual voyages during college.

Typological theories focus on personality differences, typically describing ways in which students approach the world. These approaches are assumed to remain stable even as students show increasing maturity in other aspects of their lives. Listed below are prominent typological theorists and their theories.

While John Holland's (1966) theory of Vocational Personalities and Environments is classified as a typology theory, there are strong elements of person-environment theory. As a typology theory it examines the individual differences in how people view and relate to the world and looks closely at individual difference and how those differences influence their development in other areas. As a person-environment theory, it examines the student and the college environment as well as the interaction of the student with the environment.

David Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning examines the individual differences in how people view and relate to the world. This theory looks closely at individual difference and how those differences influence their development in other areas. Kolb describes learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the "transformation of experience." Kolb chose the expression, experiential learning, as a
way to link his ideas to their theoretical roots of Dewey (1958), Lewin (1951), and Piaget (1952).

Isabel Briggs Myers (1980) and Katherine Briggs developed the Myers-Briggs Adaptation of Jung's Theory of Personality Type: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Myers and Briggs were certain that with an understanding of personality types individuals could be advised on better matches of personality with jobs. Myers and Briggs developed an instrument that measured attitudes and behaviors associated with the different psychological types. The MBTI focuses on how people use perception and judgement. This model classifies individuals according to their preferences on scales derived from Carl Jung's (1971) theory of psychological types.

As non-evaluative appraisals, typology theories stress that individual differences are good and healthy for the community. The assumption at the core is that each individual, representing any type, brings unique, positive contributions to each situation (Evans et al., 1998). Unlike the psychosocial and cognitive-structural theories, they are not truly developmental in that they do not consist of stages through which individuals can progress. The value to those involved with student development is in the ability to provide information necessary to explain interpersonal interaction, as well as being a great tool in making work assignments.

Student development theory can be extremely useful in assisting professionals to understand what they are hearing from students by providing a framework for understanding students' concerns, attitudes, and thought processes. Theories help professionals' process information and respond effectively, thereby enhancing their
effectiveness for supporting students. The next section will look at issues related to students' persistence in the college environment.

**Student Persistence**

The issue of student persistence is a major concern of student affairs professionals. Certain aspects of the students' interpersonal environment greatly influence their motivation to continue or to withdraw college. People want and need each other, and successes and failures are largely matters of group definition (Dollar, 1970). Researchers have concluded in numerous studies that the higher the students' levels of social and academic integration the more likely the student is to persist at the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). In this section I present both a historical and contemporary review of literature related to the topic of student persistence in college.

As early as the 1950s, student persistence was recognized as a significant social and educational concern. Researchers during the mid to late 1950s argued that students who withdrew from college were found to have consistently lower scores on various measures of academic aptitude and abilities than of those who persisted. Studies during this time also found evidence that those same students had poorer achievement both in previous high school work, as well as in college. Iffert (1957) focused attention on the relationship between a student's withdrawal from college and numerous noncognitive variables such as social background, attitudes and values. Family background, student interest, and student aspirations were also looked at as important variables for student persistence (Slocum, 1956). By the end of the 1950s, it was also concluded that independent and responsible students were more likely to remain enrolled and that
dependent-irresponsible students were more likely to withdraw from college (Grace, 1957).

During the 1970s, a movement arose to look at “personal reasons” for student withdrawal rather than the traditional variables of the 1950s. Relevant literature supported the conclusion that just as many college students failed to persist for non-academic reasons as for academic ones, and that little was known about these non-academic variables (Dollar, 1970).

Lanning (1977) argued that attempts to find relationships between traditional variables and college persistence have only produced contradictory results. In 1973, Johansson and Rossman found no differences between persisters and non-persisters on SAT scores and high school rank but significant differences between the groups on first term G.P.A. and cumulative G.P.A. This contradicted the results of Rossman and Kirk (1970) who found that voluntary withdrawals had higher verbal ability and were more intellectually oriented than persisters but cumulative G.P.A.’s were the same. Lanning (1977) concluded that with minimal possibility of predicting student withdrawal based on traditional variables, there appeared to be a need to uncover “personal reasons.”

Following the 1970s, researchers began looking at students more holistically, considering their personal characteristics and synthesizing them with the collegiate environment as part of the indicators for persistence and withdrawal. The directions taken by researchers addressed a myriad of issues and concerns. Some of the research focused on the role faculty has with student retention. It was found that one important positive influence on a student’s level of social and academic integration is the extent of
their contact with faculty beyond the classroom (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). How a student "fit" into the college environment, inclusive of social connections, academic and social expectation, achievement, and their commitment to the institution, also became an area of study for many researchers (Gosman et al., 1983; House, 1992; Stoeker, Pascarella, & Wolfe, 1988). Additional research found that the academic self-concept of college students was a better predictor of persistence than their expectancies for success in college (House, 1992).

**Vincent Tinto's Interactional Theory of Student**

Considered the cornerstone for student persistence theory, Tinto's model of the persistence-withdrawal process serves as foundation for much of the existing literature that provides insight into the persistence-withdrawal process in postsecondary education (Stoecker, Pascarella, & Wolfe, 1988).

Interactional theories see student leaving as reflecting the dynamic reciprocal interaction between environments and individuals. The two cannot be separated and are intimately intertwined in the manner in which each comes to shape the interpretations that differing individuals give to their experiences. In the final analysis, what matters is the individual's understanding of the situation - an interpretation of events that is necessarily a dynamic outcome of how the individual interacts with other persons and with the broader setting of which he or she is a part (Tinto, 1986).

Tinto postulates that a student enters college with a number of expectations. If these expectations are unmet, there is early disenchantment with the social and academic communities. Such disenchantment hinders academic and social integration, which, in
turn, influences subsequent institutional and goal commitments and ultimately student departure (Braxton et al., 1995). Whether a student decides to stay or leave is the result of the process Tinto references as the Rites of Passage. Tinto uses the works of Arnold Van Gennep as the foundation for understanding the process of student departure. Van Gennep (1960) argued that three distinct phases or stages marked the process of transmission between succeeding groups, each with its own specialized ceremonies and rituals. The reason Tinto refers to the work of Van Gennep is that it provides a way of thinking about the longitudinal process of student persistence in college and by extending the time-dependent process of student departure. The first stage of the college career, separation, requires students to disassociate themselves from membership in past communities. This includes separating themselves from their original place of residence and the community of their high school. The second stage is the transition to college stage. In this stage, students are in the process of separating themselves from the past and acquiring new norms and patterns of behavior. These new norms are created by the institution, the campus community, and the varying norms and values brought to the institution by different students, faculty, and staff members. The final state is the incorporation in college, or becoming integrated to the new environment. Since social interactions are the primary vehicle through which such integrative associations arise, individuals have to establish contact with other members of the institution. If a student fails to do so, an absence of integration develops and a sense of isolation may lead to departure from the institution (Tinto, 1988).
It is crucial that students participate in collaborative groups, enabling them to develop small, supportive communities of peers, bonding them to the broader social communities of the college while also engaging them more fully in the academic life of the institution. Students are strongly influenced when they participate in an environment where sources of learning come from a variety of perspectives beyond the classroom. Additionally, Tinto suggests that student academic performance and persistence is greater in collaborative learning settings than in more traditional learning settings and that promoting student involvement and achievement is better attained in collaborative settings (Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993). One of the more dynamic ambient factors in the decision to persist is the climate of the campus. This climate has a profound effect on how a student perceives their current and future relationship with the institution. The next section will review issues and concerns related to the topic of campus climate.

Campus Climate

Climate, in relation to the college campus, refers to perceptions of comfort, acceptance, and ownership that students hold. While the climate of the campus is unique to each institution one commonality is that students who find congruence between their peers, campus programs, their academic experience, and the staff and faculty are more likely to persist to graduation. The climate of the campus plays an important role in the quality of life for students.

Campus culture and campus climates are two terms often used interchangeably in discussions of student retention and persistence. Culture seeks to examine the
organization from a holistic point of view whereas climate focuses on specific sections or parts. The researchers Peterson and Spencer (1990) outlined three major features of climate: (a) It examines common participant attitudes, perceptions, or observations that can be compared among groups or over time; (b) It focuses on current patterns of beliefs and behaviors; and (c) it is malleable in character (Bauer, 1998). The campus climate is a critical element to the academic and social development of the contemporary college student. Many researchers agree that what happens outside the classroom is as important as what happens inside the classroom. The activities, events, and other social outlets are not only extra-curricular but operate in a co-curricular fashion. These events are both complimentary and important to the learning process (Hall & Sandler, 1984). The importance of understanding the climate of a campus is significant for several reasons.

Researchers have reported its impact on student progress and achievement, on student satisfaction with their university, and on retention. Other components of campus climate, e.g., symbolic representations on campus and interpersonal communication with members of the campus community, determine (a) students’ feelings about whether they matter or are marginal members of the academic community, and (b) their degree of physical and psychological involvement. Campus climate is critical for minority students (Woodward & Sims, 2000). The creation of a campus climate that fosters a sense of community for students can be achieved by establishing a positive and personal learning environment. Students who feel welcomed and respected have greater chances for retention (Gossett et al., 1998).
During their college years, students experience constant challenges and demands for adjustment and change. Along with academic pressures, students are seeking independence and autonomy from their parents and responsibility for themselves, acceptance from their peers in a world of mixed values, and more intimate relationships.

Most students attend college away from their family, friends, and landmarks that are familiar to them, thus they may experience stress related to their development and the academic rigors of college life. The skill students develop and utilize to help them to cope with the changes in their new environment also plays a dynamic role in their persistence. The next section will review literature related to coping strategy issues for college students.

**Coping Strategies**

When the campus climate is incongruent with the values or expectations of a student it becomes necessary for that student to operate current or develop new coping strategies. Bean and Eaton (2000) state that students who cope well with the difficulties of college are those who successfully reduce stress with positive outcomes. Such students are more likely to gain the attitudinal perspectives of successful academic and social integration. As a result, they are less likely to leave college before graduating.

There are generally five demands that many students face as they adjust to college life. There is an academic adjustment to college level educational requirements, institutional adjustments (the commitment to college pursuits), personal-emotional adjustments which address the need to independently manage one’s own emotional, physical well-being, and social adjustment to peers, faculty and other interpersonal...
relationships. This last demand seems to be central to the success for many African American students in predominantly White university settings (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). It has also been found that the quality of relationship with peers, faculty, and staff tends to be almost as important as their academic success (Watson & Kuh, 1996). There is a body of literature that suggests that students of color, African Americans specifically, have developed or have the need to develop forms of coping strategies for their ‘survival’ on predominantly White campuses. There are a myriad of ways the coping strategies can be manifested. African American students may employ a willingness to learn Anglocentric stimuli while maintaining simultaneously, a willingness to learn stimuli uniquely relevant to African American people. This personally developed coping strategy supports the theme of duality as presented by W.E.B. DuBois (Douglas, 1999). Also important, African Americans tend to place a great deal of importance on social bonding and group cohesiveness. This communal value orientation refers to the sense that one’s identity is tied to that of the group. An even more direct approach to coping with the challenges of being an African American on a predominantly White campus is presented. African American students who have positive attitudes toward working with (cooperating) rather than against (competing) or away from their peer group may desire the opportunity for others to learn about them as individuals (Thompson & Fretz, 1991). Constantine, Donnelly, and Myers (2002) found that African Americans with higher public collective self-esteem (the belief that others feel positively about their cultural group) reported greater use of spiritual-centered Africultural coping styles to deal with stressful situations. They also found that a higher importance to
identity collective self-esteem (the belief that their cultural group is an important part of their self-concept) was related to greater use of collective coping strategies. When comparing the coping strategies of African American students to other minority groups, it is suggested that African American students are more able to buffer against racism. Given their history of oppression in this country, racism may be more normative for African Americans who are less surprised when confronted by it. Moreover, African Americans may have lower expectations of the campus climate that may enable them to accommodate themselves to the predominantly White environment. This coping mechanism may be a direct result of the cumulative experiences and probably helpful in assisting them through crisis experienced on a predominantly White campus (LeSure, 1994). These are but a few of the variety of ways that African American students at predominantly White campuses employ coping strategies. It is now important to look at the African American college student and an abbreviated look at their experiences in the American higher education system.

African-American College Students

Over the past 35 years, significant changes have taken place in the post-secondary attendance patterns of African-American College students in the United States. In 1964, approximately 60% of all African-American students attended historically Black colleges and universities. With changing legislation, social reform, and an increase in the usage of the GI Bill benefits, the proportion of African American students at those same institutions dropped to 25%. As a result of more African-American students applying to
and attending predominantly White institutions, there came an increase in concerns for this new segment of the campus community (Allen, 1985).

By 1991, the number of students of color rose to approximately 20.6% of the college attending population. Of this, African Americans represented 9.3% (Evangelauf, 1993). For many African-American students, social issues affect persistence more so than academic issues. Fleming (1984) reported that the comparison of White and Black student profiles tells us that Black students have special concerns in predominantly White college settings that White students do not share. For the most part, the environment at White colleges supports the development of White students and assists the integration of intellectual and interpersonal energies that is the task of late adolescence. Unlike many Black students, White students generally adjust well to the academic institution and have little complaints about alienation or unfairness in the classroom. Even when White students are disenchanted with academics, it is for reasons that are less devastating to cognitive functioning than seem to be the case for Black students (Gossett et al., 1996). Other researchers have found that minority freshmen put greater emphasis on the social component of the university. They go on to say that non-Whites are more guarded and cautious in the White environment (Guloyan, 1986). Institutions continue to work to make all students feel they are valued and important to the college. In recent years, almost all predominantly White institutions have instituted recruiting goals to increase the African American student ratio. In addition to the increase in diversity, the concept of making people feel like they matter is fundamental to a conducive learning environment (Gossett et al., 1996). Many subscribe to the theoretical frameworks of
Tinto, Pascarella and Terenzini and their research and writings on student persistence in higher education and the impact of college on students. In this, there often appears to be a failure to recognize the differences in the perception of social support between African-American students and White students. By not recognizing the difference in perceptions, specific concerns of African American students can be greatly overlooked, increasing the chances for student withdrawal (Mallinckrodt, 1988). An important aspect of the African American collegiate experience is the historically Black fraternities and sororities. In this next section a review of literature related to African American Greek organizations and sororities will be addressed.

**African American Greek Organizations and African American Sororities**

Researchers have concluded that involvement in campus activities is conducive to both the retention and the development of students (Eimers, 2001; Harris, 1998; Peltier, Laden, & Matranga, 1999; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Participation in student activities and organizations has been of particular interest to student services professionals who consider this type of involvement as an integral part of development. Participation in student organizations and similar out-of-class student activities is related to increased skill development and other dimensions of personal growth. There is also a connection between the quality of student participation and increased satisfaction with college experience (Abrahamowicz, 1988). Some of the more dynamic, visible, and controversial student organizations on campus are the social fraternities and sororities, also known as Greek organizations.
Since the founding of Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary in 1776, Greek organizations have attracted students of all backgrounds into their own world of social involvement, academic achievement, and community service. The Greek experience can generate opportunities for participants to develop mature interpersonal relationships, learn leadership skills and develop capacities for cooperative effort through teamwork; further, they stimulate a lively interchange of ideas, promote values congruent with a democratic society and a learning community, and facilitate the development of a sense of autonomy and personal identity (Winston & Saunders, 1987). Bryan and Schwartz (1983) outlined five potential benefits for affiliation in Greek organizations.

Greek organizations:

- **Provide small-group living for students, an opportunity for their members to know each other well, a chance to identify with something of worth, and a sense of belonging.**
- **Provide assistance during the transition period as a student comes to campus.**
- **Set standards following ideals and principles and set guidelines for behavior.**
- **Help members learn to respect other people and the rights of others to develop self-discipline and self-reliant behavior.**
- **Instill good citizenship, personal integrity, and respect for individual freedoms (p. 152)**

These five benefits of Greek organization affiliation serve as the primary reasons for the continued growth and success of such organizations.

In essence, the membership in Greek letter organizations can have a variety of positive effects. Fraternity and sorority members are less likely to drop out of college, are more likely to be satisfied with their institution and social lives, and are more likely to be involved in activities on campus (Schuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992). Greek
organizations have been, and will continue to be, an important tool in building campus community and in the retention of students.

One hundred and thirty years after the beginning of the Greek fraternity and sorority system, the first African American fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated was established at Cornell University in 1906. At that time, the situation for African American students was reflective of the challenges presented by the greater society. African American students were isolated and segregated from the general population, resulting in a low African American student retention rate. Six African American students from the 1904-05 class at Cornell University failed to re-enroll for the 1905-06 academic year. Alarmed, a group of students decided to create a study and support group for the remaining African American students at Cornell, later to be established as the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated (Ross, 2000). Today, there are nine national historically African American fraternities and sororities with a combined undergraduate, graduate, and alumni membership of more than 750,000. While both predominantly White and predominantly African American fraternities and sororities may appear similar in nature, there are numerous differences among the organizations. African American organizations have a much larger percentage of alumni who remain active with their campus-based chapters than is the case with White organizations. Also, on predominantly White campuses, African American Greek organizations provide the major social structure for most African Americans on campus, both members and nonmembers alike, whereas White Greeks generally only provide social activities for their own members, guests, and members of other White Greek
organizations (Whipple, Baier, & Grady, 1991). It is important that university officials recognize and understand the organizational and cultural differences between the groups. The final section of the literature review is narrowed to focus the African American female college student, their experiences, and their perceptions of their collegiate experience on predominantly White campuses.

**African American Female College Students**

In 1986, African American students were 8.6% of the total undergraduate enrollment in higher education institutions. African American women constituted 59.6% of the undergraduate enrollment that same year (Moses, 2001). During the 1980s, researchers began looking at the lack of African American males in higher education. Studies have shown that only 25% African American males went on from high school to pursue higher education. Resulting from this research were a number of programs designed to actively recruit, counsel, retain, and graduate higher numbers of African American males. There have been few studies that looked at the experience of female African American college students. Johnson-Newman and Exum's (1998) studies that addressed ego development, concluding that the double burden of racism and sexism are difficult for most African American women. African American women on predominantly White college campuses have been found to include feelings of loneliness and isolation, fears relating to competence, concerns about dating, and feelings of inadequacy about appearance (Copeland, 1977; Exum, 1988; Fleming, 1984; Hayes, 1993). The authors support the suggestion that unless encouraged to do otherwise, many African American female adolescents may choose inappropriate psychological resistance...
strategies such as self-denigration due to the internalization of negative self images, and
excessive autonomy and/or individualism at the expense of connectedness to the
collective.

The issue of racial and womanist identity development is another area not fully
researched in respect to African American women. Helms (1990) hypothesized that the
development of healthy identity in women involves movement from external standards of
gender identity to internal standards. The attitudes developed from her model were used
to predict undergraduate women’s self-esteem and perceptions of sex bias in the college
environment. With regard to women as a minority status, it is argued that African
American women have more in common with African American men (Ossana, Helms, &
Leonard, 1992). While they (African American women) may have commonalities with
African American males, they can also identify with White women on other issues, and
on certain issues with neither group (Collins, 1989). Gender roles are complex for
African American women because they often adopt traditional and nontraditional roles
simultaneously. Often times, African American women choose to address issues of race,
as they may be more salient than gender issues (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997).

There are few studies that address the counseling needs of African American
students and virtually none relating to African American female students. Experiences
that affect their psycho-social development such as racial epitaphs in the residence halls,
campus restrooms, or on classroom desks, as well as the feeling of isolation and
invisibility on campus requires a counseling structure, understanding, and methodologies
designed to address such issues. African American females present unique concerns as
they face an array of issues on the predominantly White campuses and therefore may not be responsive to traditional counseling approaches used with White students (Mitchell, 1991).

Hamilton (1996) provides one of the few studies specifically on the topic of African American female college students and their motivation toward educational achievement. It is suggested that additional research should include comparative studies of motivation and achievement of college students based on gender and race believing that such studies would provide contemporary information to substantiate a projected need for effective changes in the higher education system. In a related study, Holland and Eisenhart (1990) found that African American females concentrated less on finding a man (mate) while in college and concentrated more on their goal of graduation. Although after graduation, two thirds of their sample either abandoned their careers or subordinated themselves to those of their spouses. This raises questions about their self-esteem development and maintenance, career and future expectations, and personal satisfaction among other related issues.

Since the 1970s there have been numerous studies addressing the social conditions of students of color (focusing mostly on African American students). Fleming (1983) found that:

Despite the development of African American females' assertiveness in White colleges, there is an impression that they suffer from emotional pain, social isolation, a lack of opportunity for heterosexual relationships, and a non-supportive institution. These harsh conditions seem to elicit assertive responses from Black college women. Although these qualities are potentially positive ones, the circumstances that produce them are not. (p. 51)
Research further shows that minority females experience more stress than other groups of students (Guloyan, 1986). African-American female students on predominantly White campuses are rarely integrated into the life and culture of their institutions, nor are there clear paths for them to effect change. Once African-American women get to campus they are members of a community that tends to treat them differently than it does males (both African-American & White), and White females. Isolation, invisibility, hostility, indifference, and lack of understanding of their experiences are all too often part of the climate that African-American women may face on campus (Moses, 2001). There is a definite need for research that focuses on this group of college students.

African American female college students attending predominantly White colleges and universities bring with them a unique set of circumstances that may have a profound effect on their adjustment to the college environment. In this chapter I reviewed issues that culminated into body of knowledge that provided a common understanding of issues that affected the social experiences of African American college females on a predominantly White campus. These issues provided the cognitive development and foundation for the methodology of this study. It was determined that a qualitative study was not only appropriate but also necessary to delve into the essence of the participants’ experiences.
In the process of developing the methodology for this study, there was careful consideration of the values for both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Both methods have the capability of producing useful data, as Babbie (1998) stated in reference to qualitative methods, "If you want to know about something, why not just go where it's happening and watch it happen, experience it, perhaps even participate in it?" (p. 280). One of the major reasons for doing qualitative research is to become more experienced with the phenomenon of interest. Qualitative research has special value for investigating complex and sensitive issues. It enables researchers to describe the phenomena of interest in great detail, in the original language of the research participants. Qualitative researchers ask themselves questions about the meaning of what is happening in some field of human action. They are concerned with making sense of what seems to lack coherence and with putting it into a form that will permit others to enter a "mutual tuning-in relationship" (Schutz, 1976, p. 177). It is not enough to ask "how much" and "how frequent" of the participants. The questions of "how does this effect" and "what does this mean" are most appropriate in gaining an understanding of the phenomena of the study. It is questions such as the latter that endorse the value of qualitative research for this study.

The roots of qualitative research began in the field of anthropology and sociology through the use of the collection of data in the field as a way to understand individual and cultural behaviors. The first cultural anthropologist to spend long periods of time observing the culture and traditions of a non-western village and to describe how he
obtained his data and fieldwork experience was Bronislaw Malinowski (1960). His data collection, maintenance, and translation format laid the foundation for interpretive anthropology (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). In *A scientific theory of culture and other essays*, Malinowski insisted that “a theory of culture had to be grounded in particular human experiences, based on observations and inductively sought.” During the 1920s, a collection of social researchers, labeled the Chicago School, contributed greatly to the development of the research method referred to as qualitative. The group promoted the methodology of the study of a single case, inclusive of individuals, groups, or communities, as well as the firsthand data gathering for research.

In 1932, qualitative research was introduced to the field of education. Walter Waller, author of the *Sociology of Teaching*, presented in-depth interviews, life histories, participant observations, case records, diaries, letters, and other personal documents to describe the social world of teachers and students. Prior to Waller, quantitative research was the dominant research methodology for educators, as at that time the scientific method was identified with quantification. Waller contended that “children and teachers are not disembodied intelligences, not instructing machines and learning machines, but whole human beings tied together in a complex maze of social interconnections (Waller, 1932). The strength of Waller’s description of school life is the cornerstone of contemporary educational research. It brought about legitimacy to life stories, experiences, and personal documents.

There are numerous styles and methods for qualitative study. Elliot Eisner has succinctly outlined six features that contribute to the overall character of qualitative study. The first is that qualitative studies are field-focused and non-manipulative. Data are collected at the source and the research tends to study situations and objects in tact. The second feature is that qualitative studies relate to the self as an instrument. The
researcher is the means of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Although personal insight is an important component as a source of meaning it does not necessarily provide a license for freedom regarding interpretation. Qualitative research must also provide evidence and reason as part of the interpretation. Interpretive character is the third feature. Interpretation holds a minimum of two meanings for qualitative inquiry. The researcher tries to give an account for what they have given an account. This is derived from both the information gathered in the field, as well as the body of information the researcher previously possessed. Additionally, interpretation also applies the experiences of those being studied. It is the synthesis of interpretation that brings meaning to the study. The fourth feature is the use of expressive language. The use of language and the presence of voice are necessary in the furthering of human understanding. The fifth feature of qualitative studies is the attention to particulars. Particulars are used to arrive at general statements via the use of sampling procedures and inferential statistics. The usefulness of particulars, whether school or with people is located in descriptions and interpretations that go beyond the information given about them. The result of the transformed data is a description of relationships. The sixth feature pertains to the criteria for judging their success. Qualitative research becomes credible because of three elements: coherence, insight, and instrumental utility. Together these six features combine to create a body of work that is designed to provide a living snapshot of an event, lifestyle, or behavior (Eisner, 1991).

Qualitative research allows for the discovery of "what is going on." This is the core process for grounded theory, a means to explain a given social situation by identifying the processes operating in it (Baker, Wuest, & Noerager, 1992). The next section will present in depth the history and purposeful use of grounded theory as the research framework of this study.
Research Framework

Grounded theory is an inductive methodology developed by clinical sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the late 1950s as a way for discovering states and processes that occur in social systems. Through this method, the researcher identifies variables and their relations within a social context in such a way as to enable theory to emerge from the data, while minimizing the input of preconceived elements on his or her part (Martinez-Pons, 1997). Also referred to as the constant comparative method, grounded theory resembles inductive reasoning, where the researcher will develop theoretical propositions or explanations out of the data, in a process which is commonly seen as moving from the particular to the general (Mason, 1996). Grounded theory may be the most widely employed interpretive strategy in the social sciences today. It gives the researcher a specific set of steps to follow that are closely aligned with the canons of “good science”. Basic strategies include theoretical sampling, systematic coding, and guidelines for achieving density, variation, and integration (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The rich descriptions derived from the methods of grounded theory will provide an insight into the stories and themes generated by the study participants.

The use of the application of grounded theory for this study is guided by nine tenets as outlined by Dey (1999).

1. The first tenet of grounded theory is to generate or discover a theory. This is based on the analysis of data collected, developing theory as it emerges from the data. This will require a careful examination of existing theory and synthesize that information with the themes generated from the study.
2. The researcher has to set aside theoretical ideas to allow a "substantive" theory to emerge. While I am not going in totally blind, my goal is to not allow preconceived notions and experiences to direct the study. I have had the opportunity over the past six years to work with many of the participants of the study in a variety of capacities. I believe that this prior relationship will serve as a positive force in establishing both trust and credibility with the participants. This trust will serve as one of the guiding forces for the emerging theory as a result of the collected and analyzed data.

3. Theory focuses on how individuals interact in relation to the phenomenon under study. The phenomenon for this study is the social experiences experienced by the African American female students at the University of Northern Iowa. It is the challenge of this study to seek out the participants' perception of their relationship to the UNI campus and develop the associated theory from the emerged data themes.

4. Theory asserts a plausible relation between concepts and sets of concepts. The literature review provides a structural chain of thought for the nature of the study. Based on the findings, I will revisit the literature search to synthesize the data with existing research and attempt to draw a relationship.

5. Theory is derived from data acquired through fieldwork interviews and documents. I will use the strategy of triangulation, the combination of methodologies, as a means to bring clarity and understanding to the study (Glaser, 1983). This will include, but is not limited to, interviews, member checking and other methods of establishing trustworthiness, the use of relevant documents, and previous experience. The use of these data resources will assist in the credible presentation of the study.
6. Data analysis is systematic and begins as soon as data becomes available. The process of coding will begin as soon as the interviews begin. Upon the completion of the interviews there will be an examination of potential patterns to see what findings actually emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This will afford the opportunity to build thematic categories based on the participant’s responses.

7. Further data collection is based on emerging concepts. New information may require additional supporting data and research. This may be in the form of revisiting the literature review, creating a new literature review based on information offered by the participants, or researching documents relating to the responses of the participants.

8. Data collection can stop when they no longer produce significant conceptual variations also called "theoretical saturation." Once this point is reached further data collection no longer is productive. Repeated data collection according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) "only adds bulk to the coded data and nothing to the theory." Once theoretical saturation has occurred the researcher can begin determining the relationships between categories. The goal is not to collect data ad infinitum but to collect a solid body of information from which relevant theory can emerge.

9. The resulting theory can be reported in a narrative framework or as a set of propositions. The stories presented by the participants should be the backbone of the study. It is important that their voices and experiences are not only heard but also understood (p. 1).
Each of the above tenets provided me with a methodological blueprint from which the research design was conceived. The next section outlines the purpose and elements of the research design of the study.

**Research Design**

One of the approaches of qualitative research is termed 'naturalistic' as it is derived from ecological approaches in biology. In terms of sociological or educational research, the naturalistic researcher spends significant time in schools, families, neighborhoods, and other locations learning about the concerns of the individuals or groups. While technology has afforded luxuries in data collection (i.e., videotaping and other recording devices), many naturalistic researchers continue to utilize the simple pad and pencil method as the primary method for data collection. Most importantly, mechanically recorded materials are reviewed in their entirety by the researcher with the researcher’s insight being the key instrument for analysis (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). With a major focus on context, naturalistic researchers go to the particular setting, as there is a need to understand the environment and the subjects in both a historical and contemporary perspective.

Thompson (1999) illustrated in his study of African-American students at a predominantly White university that the naturalistic approach to qualitative study was most effective for gathering data. This particular approach allowed the views and insights of his participants to emerge clearly through the interviews. Thompson’s design illustrated that focus group interviews, personal interviews, and a naturally grounded survey instrument would enhance the data collection process. For this particular study, the In-depth Interview design will be utilized as the primary method of data collection. An in-depth interview seeks out the story a person chooses to tell about
the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another (Atkinson, 1998).

Understanding an individual's life and the role it plays in the larger society is best understood through the use of the in-depth interview. The information gathered from the interview is direct, unfiltered, and 'real,' from which that we gain context and recognize meaning. The interviewer serves as a guide or director in this process. Together with the interviewee, the two are collaborators comprising and constructing a story the teller is satisfied with (Thompson, 1999). Atkinson (1998) argues that the interview makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear. The greatest value of the in-depth interview is that it gives us the vantage point of seeing how one person experiences and understands life over time.

One of the dominant functions of the in-depth interview is that it affirms, validates, and supports our own experience in relation to those around us. The stories assist us in understanding our commonalities as well as our differences. Additionally, it can help explain an individual's understanding of social events and movements and how the interpretation of those events and movements link to their individual development. In essence, the life story provides answers, which normally could not be answered using quantitative methods.

Research Site

The participants for this study were students enrolled at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), one of the three Regent institutions in the state of Iowa. The total student full-time enrollment of UNI as of the fall 2000 was 13,744. Of this total, 12,218 (88%) were undergraduate students. Ninety-two percent of all students are Iowa residents.
The ethnic minority portion of campus enrollment was 557 (4%). Specifically, the enrollment by ethnic group was as follows: African American, 283 (2%); Asian American, 124 (.09%); Native American, 31 (.02%); and Hispanic/Latino, 119 (.08%). International students represented 184 or (1.31%).

Undergraduate women totaled 6462 or 47% of the student population. The enrollment by ethnic group was as follows: African American women, 140 (.02%); Asian American women, 77 (.01%); Native American women, 21 (.003%) and; Hispanic/Latino women, 58 (.008%). The institution is also considered a residential campus, in which a large portion of its students lives on campus or in Greek affiliated homes.

Research Participants

The focus of the study centered on the social experiences of traditional aged (18-23) undergraduate African American female students who have resided in campus housing for their entire academic time as a student. Of the 110 residential African American female students identified by the Registrar’s Office, the number of possible participants based on the prescribed criteria was 17. All of the possible candidates were contacted with seven declining to participate due to a variety of reasons: scheduling conflicts, not responding to the invitation, or responding but not willing to participate. Ten African American female students agreed to participate. Six of the participants were juniors and four were seniors. Each participant created their own pseudonym as a means to protect their identity and to create a level of comfort necessary to achieve the highest level of cooperation and honesty possible.
Participant Descriptions

It was with the following participants that I was able to probe into their social experiences on the University of Northern Iowa campus. Each person brought with them a unique and insightful perspective on their perceptions of campus life. This section contains a snapshot of the participants, their major, their hometown, and a particular characteristic to their background.

Angela is a junior from Georgia. Her major is elementary education and is in her fourth year at UNI. Her mother attended a historically Black college in the south. Her high school was predominantly Black.

Ann is a junior from Davenport, Iowa. Her major is communication/public relations. She attended a very diverse high school.

Dominique is a senior from the Chicago, Illinois area. She attended a predominantly White high school. Her major is biology, specializing in biomedical studies.

Kara is an education major with a middle school focus from Davenport, Iowa. She is in her third year at UNI. She attended a predominantly White high school.

Monique is a history senior from a large multicultural suburb of Chicago, Illinois. Neither parent finished college. Her high school was culturally diverse.

Raynelle is a junior from Waterloo, Iowa. She is a biology major, specializing in biomedical studies.

Sarah is a junior from a small northeastern Iowa town. She is majoring in both communications and theatre. One parent attended college.
Shirley is from Waterloo, Iowa and is majoring in biology/biomedical studies. She is a senior and would like to go to medical school. Her selection for medical schools focuses on institutions outside of Iowa.

Stephanie is a junior from Waterloo, Iowa. She is an elementary education major with a minor in reading.

Tiffany is a senior elementary education major from Davenport, Iowa. She attended a predominantly White high school.

Data Collection

The data collection began with two pilot interviews. I believed this would be necessary as a means to test several conditions related to the mechanics of the interview process. Most important, I wanted to make sure the location of the room provided a sense of comfort as I recognized the dynamics of my position as a male staff member and theirs as female student subjects. The second factor for consideration was the accommodations of the selected interview site. Details such as room temperature, ease of finding and accessing the room, lighting, and the room size, were taken into consideration since it was estimate we would spend up to two hours in the room together. The site selected was a meeting room in the Rod Library. Third, it was also important to familiarize myself with the recording equipment to be utilized during the interview and its compatibility with the technology of the room. Fourth, the pilot interviews afforded me the opportunity to establish a more concrete protocol for the actual interviews. Finally, I was able to gather feedback regarding the process of the interviews and critiques for future interviews. After interviewing the pilot participants, I followed up by
requesting a verbal critique of the elements of the interview process. I used this information to assist in the making the actual interviews as meaningful and viable as possible.

One African American female junior and one African American female senior were selected for the pilot interview. I selected these individuals, as they did not meet the residency requirement of the study. Initially, I had a battery of twenty-five questions focusing on five areas: Perceptions of UNI, feelings of isolation, connection with the university, social integration, and support services. I felt those questions adequately covered a wide spectrum of student-social issues as they related to African American students. Reflecting on the pilot interviews, I found the conversation from the participants was hindered, as their responses resulted in a perception that a single correct response was required. I felt it was important to re-evaluate my current information gathering process and utilize open-ended questions or exploratory statements that find out more about the participant's context of issues addressed. The exploratory statements developed from four sources. The first source was the reflective evaluation of the pilot interviews. Careful consideration for the content, delivery, and reactions to the original questions inspired me to reconstruct the questions to more introspective inquiries. The second source came from a re-examination of the literature review section pertaining to minority and African American students. In looking at their concerns regarding student life, issues of residence living, programming, campus climate, and campus participation were prominent commentary and investigations. These concepts assisted me in the formulation of exploratory statements. The last two sources were both professional and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
personal. In my role as a professional in the Union/Student Activities area, I am often engaged in conversations with students of all backgrounds, faculty, staff, and community members discussing issues related to minority students and their experiences on campus. The conversations and interactions with such individuals also worked to help me synthesize these experiences with the other sources for the exploratory statements already mentioned above. Finally, my personal and collegiate experiences are in contrast with the experiences with the students represented in the study. This contrast inspired me to look at my own experiences and consider issues that I found to be a curiosity. It was a combination of all of these sources that worked to create the exploratory statements used for this study.

For the study, participants completed a 1-2 hour interview. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Each participant was offered the opportunity to select a pseudonym as a way to maintain confidentiality and confidence in the study. A semi-structured in-depth interview method was utilized. I developed a series of exploratory statements (Appendix A) that were broad enough to elicit reflection on their own terms. It was important for the interview to be flexible, allowing for important themes to develop naturally. This allowed the participants to focus on issues or subject matter that they found most important, as well as allowing me to return to subject matter for clarification. In cases where clarity or more depth was necessary, pointed follow up questions were asked. At the conclusion of the collection of the data, I informed the participants that I would be scheduling a follow-up meeting to share the transcribed data with them.
After the tape-recordings were transcribed, the written results were shared with the participants in individual follow-up meetings as a way to provide an opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge what may have been perceived to be inaccurate interpretations. This method, member checking, provided an assessment for overall adequacy in addition to confirming individual data points. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate this method of verifying and clarifying the data from the respondents’ point of view is essential in maintaining a level of credibility in the study. Member checking also afforded participants the chance to recall additional things that were not mentioned initially. The participants offered clarification and confirmation after reviewing their specific transcript. After member checking with the participants, I was able to correct any misinterpretations due to the sound issues on the tape or clarification of contemporary slang terms. For example, one of the participants used the term, “party walking” or “walk the party.” I was not familiar with the term but it was described to me as sort of an upbeat march that fraternity or sorority members displayed during a party. I had witnessed “party walking” but I had never associated it with any particular term. The changes were minor and both the participants and I felt the information was accurate. In addition to member checking, I shared the transcripts with two professional colleagues for their feedback and interpretations of the information collected. I sought from them their perspectives and insights in their interpretations and how they may have either been congruent or incongruent with mine. Their comments assisted me in re-examining the transcripts to insure my understanding of the data was as accurate as possible. This
method, trustworthiness, allowed for further inspection, interpretation of the data, and the validation of the identified emerged themes.

**Data Analysis**

Content Analysis is defined as "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages. The process of content analysis begins as the data is collected. This is generally oral or written statements (Berg, 1995). This research tool is used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. Texts can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theater, informal conversation, or any occurrence of communicative language (Berelson, 1971). In conducting a content analysis on any such text, the text is coded, or broken down, into manageable categories on a variety of levels—word, word sense, phrase, sentence, or theme—and then examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: conceptual analysis or relational analysis. In conceptual analysis, a concept is chosen for examination, and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying its presence. Relational analysis, like conceptual analysis, begins with the act of identifying concepts present in a given text or set of texts. However, relational analysis seeks to go beyond presence by exploring the relationships between the concepts identified (Palmquist, Carley, & Dale, 1997). The nature of this study of makes conceptual analysis
the method of choice. I selected conceptual analysis as my method for reducing the text of the transcripts into thematic categories consisting of phrases and concepts I could focus on that would be indicative of the research question. This began with a careful review of the taped interviews that were transcribed verbatim. A thorough reading of the transcripts and an annotating of possible codable themes began. I took a systematic approach to seeking similarities of words, concepts, and sentiments offered by the participants. I cross-referenced the common concepts presented by the participants then began a broad development of possible themes. After multiple reviews I reached an end for data coding and began the process of drawing conclusions and generalizations where possible. I shared the general themes with the participants individually to see if my interpretation was in alignment with their experiences. The participants and I discussed the themes and came to an agreement that the themes were pretty accurate.

There are several advantages to using content analysis methods. Content analysis looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts, and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction, provides insight into complex models of human thought and language use, and can allow for both quantitative and qualitative operations.

The next section will present the responses of the participants in relation to their social experiences at the University of Northern Iowa.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Introduction

In this section I will revisit the research question and synthesize it with the thematic categories generated from analysis of the interviews with the participants. It became clear that the use of exploratory statements rather than pointed questions were most beneficial in the emergent process of the thematic categories. After analyzing both the transcribed tape recordings and my associated notes, four thematic categories emerged which begin to address the question of the social experiences of African American female students on a predominantly White campus; the impact of African American Greek life; interactions with other student groups; interactions in the residence halls; and involvement in campus programs. These thematic categories were also in alignment with information shared with me over the years through conversations with students. As a way to present themes in the most effective and meaningful method, each of these themes will be presented with the words and sentiments of the participants in a construction that is reflective of their understanding, perception, and experience. Other themes emerged from the data collected but were not added, as they did not fit the scope of the study. It was important to keep the focus on campus situations rather than incidents and experiences off-campus and in the neighboring community. Issues related to treatment in the community, the support of local churches, and the importance of family were issues referenced by several of the respondents. While they may significantly affect the participants overall experience at the university and are worthy of
further investigation, they are omitted from this study as my goal was to investigate
social experiences specifically on campus.

Thematic Category One: The impact of African American Greek life

“I saw my first Step Show and it was just amazing.”

- Sarah -

The first of the four themes generated from the interviews was the subject of African
American Greek life and the African American sorority. Eight of the participants had
strong feelings about the role of the African American Greek community and were
desirous of having an African American sorority on campus from which to select. The
other two participants had not considered joining a sorority at all prior to enrollment nor
had they wanted to join after their arrival at UNI. There was no specific reason for their
disinterest shared. Approximately half of those wanting to join an African American
sorority had expectations about Greek/Sorority life on campus. Sarah shares her
reflection on the limited information she had regarding sororities:

I, unfortunately, was one of the girls in high school, I wouldn’t admit it, but I would
have loved to be in one [sorority] because you hear about it and I was surrounded by
people who thought it was the greatest thing in the world. I knew nothing about
Black frats and Black sororities in my high school because it wasn’t around. And my
dad wasn’t involved in anything like that. So I remember that while I was at Iowa
[University of Iowa], I saw my first Step Show and it was just amazing, you know,
something I hadn’t seen and it was something really fun to see...such a tradition.

While Sarah’s comments reflect the sentiments of those who have had little exposure to
African American fraternities and sororities, Dominique questions her own expectations
regarding those organizations on the UNI campus:
I expected to see more Black Greeks...I don’t know why... this being in Iowa, you know.

It is clear that Dominique expected to see more African American Greek organizations on campus even with the knowledge that the numbers of African Americans on campus would not yield a large population of members.

After arriving at campus, the members of the African American Greek fraternities provided social activities for the African American females but Sarah shares her realization that there is clearly an absence of the African American sorority presence on campus:

When I came to UNI, I still didn’t...I hadn’t heard much about the African American fraternities and sororities. So, the Kappa’s [Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.] have a party and the Sigma’s [Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.] have a party...but you never hear about the girls. All you hear about is the sweethearts, that kind of thing. So my boyfriend’s sister is an AKA [Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.] in DC and he told me about them and their kind of traditions and I was like, aw that would be neat, that would be so interesting and I kind of did a little bit of research to find out what kind of stuff goes on but they don’t really have it here.

Similarly, Raynell pointed out the importance of the role of the Black fraternity as she referenced her observations of members of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated:

It was the hype. Their appearance from the outside. They looked like a group of people who were always having fun, who got along great, and always having fun. They knew a lot of people. They were like, the possibility for finding out more about the Black Greek system and to sororities that are out there but obviously aren’t here.

Dominique reminisced that during her first and second year at UNI, the African American fraternity served as a conduit to the greater African American Greek system:
There was a connection to different people at different schools through them, through the Kappas…and being able to "walk the parties." That's the fun part.

Dominique's comments reflect both a historical and contemporary social truth that on many predominately White college campuses the African American Greek organizations provide the major social structure for members and non-members alike. Often they become the major social programming agency on the campus for African American students.

For others, the African American Greek system is part of a broader connection to family and community. The need for involvement in these organizations is borne out of familial encouragement in addition to the desire for personal social satisfaction. It was made clear that many of the African American females wanted to join African American sororities. Angela expressed this as she talked about considering White sororities for membership:

No. No. Uh-uh. I don't even know what Rush is…no, that's not...maybe it's in my family. Every male in my family...my brother is a Kappa, my dad is a Kappa and half the females are Deltas [Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.] and my grandma is an AKA. So I have to be an AKA. There's no if, ands, or buts about it. I have to be an AKA just because my grandma says so.

Kara offers comments in a similar manner when regarding the consideration of White sororities:

When I was a freshman I knew a bunch of girls who were A-Phi's [Alpha Phi Sorority] and my friend was trying to get me to be an A-Phi because she was one of the heads and she was like "We can informally rush you. You don't really have to go through "Rush" but I didn't think that in my heart that was for me. At that moment, I just didn't feel the connection with that (White) sorority.
Angela further clarifies her feelings on sororities, separating the idea of sororities and the association with White sororities:

Sororities are good...we just don’t have them...that’s bad. I would never consider going to another...at least a White one...maybe I should just say another White sorority. I just want to stick to my Black ones.

Shirley reveals for others, there needs to be a higher level of communication between the African American females and the White sorority females on campus:

I never really considered one of the White sororities. I guess they didn’t show interest in me and like I didn’t show interest in them. I guess you need initiation from both sides.

The University of Northern Iowa campus has eight active White Greek fraternities and four active White Greek sororities. Combined, they have a membership of 532 or 4% of the UNI student population. Currently, there is only one African American female affiliated with one of the traditional [White] sororities. There are two active African American fraternities with a combined membership of seven members and no active chapters of any of the African American sororities. Of the participants in the study, only one is a member of an African American Greek sorority, of which she joined at a different institution. Dominique shares her feelings of being the sole member on campus and the unique challenges she experienced:

Knowing that I always wanted to pledge a sorority without knowing which one...doing a lot of research and seeing the influence that different groups have in the community and with students...that was really neat. And so I did research and found that Sigma Gamma Rho [Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc. or SG-Rho] was the one that best suited me. Sorority life is cool. Just wish there were more of us here. I have to travel two hours to hang out with sorors. Now I’m trying to get the numbers here.
While Dominique has achieved one of her social goals by joining the sorority, it is the lack of an on-campus chapter and other members that remains a frustration. Shirley recognizes that having a chapter on campus would serve a greater purpose:

Maybe if we did have one of those organizations that actually had a chapter, maybe some of us would be closer than we are now. There is a high demand for it.

It seems clear that the demand is high but often times the cost is more than most students are willing to pay. For many of the participants, there exists a sense of long-term frustration. Many of the students have struggled for several semesters, others for years, to bring sororities to campus but with little success. Kara shares why she would not join an African American sorority at another campus although her desire to affiliate is strong:

I wanted to be an AKA for I don’t know how long. It’s really unfortunate that it is so hard to get anything started here. Like, I’m hearing that the Delta’s this and the Delta’s that next year but I’ve been here for four years and I know people who have been working hard to get Delta’s and AKA’s here. If you’re a guy and you want to be a Kappa, you’re in luck. So it’s fortunate here that if you are a Sigma or a Kappa or something like that sure works well for you. But if you have any aspirations to become anything else then it’s kind of sad. People tell me who have crossed over at other places or joined other places...they said to come here but I’m not going to drive way to Western Illinois or Indiana State just to, you know what I mean, do that, just join a chapter. I can’t. It’s not that I don’t want to...I do want to...but I can’t...unless I decide not to be a student.

The desire to have the African American sorority on campus is strong for the majority of the participants. To their dismay, the guidelines for admission and the numbers of interested participants necessary to activate a chapter continue to pose the greatest challenge. And while sorority life is a goal that many would like to achieve, it is
clear that the White Greek sorority does not necessarily fill the void experienced by the African American female.

The majority of the participants provided the perspective that the African American sorority is a viable, needed, and important part of their social and cultural experience. It is the opportunity to experience a historical social system that is associated with a network of other African American females around the region and the world. The next thematic category will address the interactions the African American females have with other student groups on campus.

Thematic Category Two: Interactions with Other Student Groups

"They don’t really pay attention to us.”

-Angela

The interviewees described a variety of scenarios where it was clear that at different times a sense of not being in a relationship with other subgroups of students. Beyond the feeling of isolation, their comments expressed an awareness of their irrelationship with others as a group. This sense of irrelation arises both from racial, gender, and social issues. While there was little mention of intra-group tension among the African American females, other situations involving various groups surfaced. Monique shares her perception of the relationship between African American females and African American males:

The relationship between Black women and Black men are corrupt on this campus. The Black men’s perspective of Black women is still the mindset of myth. They embrace myths about Black women; they don’t know the truth. They act like they don’t know the truth about Black women. That’s why they prefer White women, you know. They think Black women are too aggressive, too manly.
I know a lot of Black men who said we might not act manly but we look manly.
This whole kind of stuff like that is really corrupt. There is still tension between
Black men and Black women.

The strained relationship between African American females and males generates
questions of personal relevance. Angela articulates the existence of the irrelation
between the two groups of students:

There's not a lot of Black males on campus and there's certain kinds of...how can
I say it...like you have the Black athletes, which is a whole different kind of crop
of people, that like the White girls. They don't really pay attention to us. So
that's a big strike against us...or against them, I guess.

Over the past two years, the University has taken the initiative to increase the
numbers of Hispanic students on campus. In the past, Hispanic undergraduate students
represented less than 1% of the student population. Currently, the undergraduate
enrollment of Hispanic students has reached 08%. The Hispanic students have become
another large group with which African American females to interact. While overall
relations between the ethnic groups appear to be good, there are signs that this new group
of students presents the continuing situation for African American females as it relates to
African American men. Kara explains:

Sometimes you know how Black men are attracted to Hispanic women. I see
where that's creating tension [with Black females]. I noticed that mostly this year
cause you know, quite a few Hispanic girls have come up (from Texas and
Chicago) and I see tension between these girls. Basically, you know, they're all
trying to talk to Black guys and that kind of stuff I heard. I think it's more a kind
of they're kind of intimidated by that. As a matter of fact, I talked to Hispanic
girls and they feel like, why hate me, cause your Black guys don't want to talk to
you? So there's a little tension there. It was weird because you know, we never
had a group of girls like that, that came up, that would sit, you know how in the
Union where everybody has their place, where everybody sits. They would come
and sit there, hangout with these guys. I don't think our girls were ready for that.
It just wasn't expected.
Kara’s observations further the sentiments of many of the African American females. The lack of meaningful relationships between African American females and males can prove to be extremely negative for the confidence and self-esteem of the African American female. Tiffany sums up her dissatisfaction with the level of relationship existing between African American males and females:

All of my friends are all single and we haven’t dated, you know, and that can get really depressing.

It was made clear by the participants’ impressions that while they knew and interacted with African American males the depth of the relationship was almost superficial.

A second group referenced by the African American female interviewees was White females. While the participants held expectations of having multiple levels of relationships with African American males, they had little to no expectations regarding relationships with White females. Tiffany and Angela offered sentiments reflecting similar to many of the other participants. Tiffany stated:

For a lot of the White girls I meet I am probably the first Black person they’ve ever met...ever.

Angela expresses the implication that at times race often transcends gender:

We don’t really mix Black and White as females. It’s just we like our own things.

The two participants share a common view: the perception of being an ‘alien’ and having no real relationship with their White counterparts. Monique details her perspective as to why there is little relating between African American females and White females:

I don’t see too many close friendships with them [White females]. You now, it’s a couple of close friendships but for the most part, they stay away from us and if
you live with them, it's just the hi-bye-how-you-doing, real quick, you know, type of relationship. Cause they don't feel that they don't have anything to relate to you with, they don't understand what we're going through. They have a totally different culture, basically, that's it.

The participants make it clear that proximity does not necessarily mean that relationships will be formed. Sarah shares her impressions on living together in the halls:

Most of the White girls hang out and do the House things together, go eat together and workout together, whereas we kind of like to do that with other people [Black friends]. So they probably think we're keeping ourselves away from them, when it's more...we're kind of not into that.

While Sarah's comment presents a lack of communication among African American and White females, other students do find a level of communication between the two groups although it is not free from challenges. Monique shares her experience with developing relationships with White females:

I did develop some relationships with some of the White women in my suite. It did surpass just the superficial type of thing. I think that it got fairly, fairly close but it was always a situation where we have to step or draw the line sometimes, but a lot of things we could relate to as students, as women, as you now, basically, it was interests that we had. Those things we focused on for our friendships. Also, I've had a lot of dialogues with my White friends about race. So they've taught me things and I taught them things in that friendship. I think that was really important cause I thought they [Residence] were talking about having the Black people separate from the White people in the dorm halls. I don't know if I agree with that right now because how it is, we need to share, have a cultural dialogue, so we can have a better understanding of each other and find commonalities that we have and celebrate our differences, too. I think Black women and White women are not comfortable in doing that, and they don't really know how to have a common language where they could come together and they don't know how to address their differences either. We have a lot of work to do with those relationships.

Monique's comment reflect the need for a level of determination and maturity necessary to develop the relationship between African American and White female in the residence.
environment. While her experience is not necessarily the norm of the other participants, it does show that with deliberate communication positive interaction can begin. It is also important to point out that it appeared that Monique took the initiative to develop the relationship to another level and that maintaining that level of relationship requires a lot of work.

With respects to White males, the majority of the interviewees shared a common sentiment. Shirley describes:

"It is very rare to have a conversation with a White guy outside of class. For a Caucasian man to be really down with the sisters, he got to be coming from, you know, like he’s got to be ghetto. He has to come from somewhere he grew up around Black folk or he has a Black friend like a football player but its very rare to see an African American female talking to a Caucasian male because if they’re not in class or working together or something like that. Conversation or something casual or just to sit with them, that’s rare."

Monique further explains experiences and perceptions of the irrelationship with White males. Here Monique attempts to explain the reasoning for the lack of any relationship with White males:

"Black women, sometimes in the back of their minds when they look at a White man, it reminds them of oppression and White supremacy. They’re [White men] like the complete opposite of us. We have to know…look at ourselves everyday and know that we’re Black, you know, because the world is gonna tell you. The world is also going to tell you that you’re a woman. And so, when we look at them that’s kind of what we see. So we recognize ourselves, so we recognize others. And when we look at the White men, we see, it’s just something instilled in our minds, the back of our minds, that they might be oppressors that are, like the whole slave-owner type of mentality. I think there is in some way in the back of our minds, White men embrace a lot of stereotypes and myths about Black women, as well. I think a lot of them think they have nothing in common with Black women. A lot of them are intimidated or scared of Black women for some strange reason. They just don’t know how to communicate with Black women."
Monique offered a number of reasons as to why there is a relationship gap between White males and African American females. Similarly, Angela shares her experience of the lack of any relationship with any White male:

I don’t have any interactions with White males. I guess it goes both ways. I don’t have any interactions. I just have class, you know, saying hello, if we’re sitting by each other but calling [no], going out [no] nothing, eating lunch [no] nothing. I was trying to think of one instance where I did have...I don’t have any. I can’t think of one time that I ate lunch, ate anything, gone out, talked to, like that at least. I don’t have any instances with them, not that I can think of...not at all.

While Angela’s comments center around the social atmosphere on campus, Tiffany focuses her interrelationship with White males in the residence halls:

The guys [White] I live with them. I speak with them in the hall, but we would never study together. You know, they’re not...they wouldn’t approach me and I probably wouldn’t approach them.

While the comments expressed by the participants show that there is a clear lack of any kind of relationship with White males, there lies a question, “why doesn’t it seem to matter?” This section addressed four prominent groups of students the African American females encounter daily. A common thread that ties the communication relationship the African American females with the other groups centers on miscommunication based on a lack of understanding of cultural experiences, varying levels of distrust, and a lack of positive personal interaction. The next thematic section addresses similar issues in the residence hall setting.

Thematic Category Three: Interactions in the Residence Halls

“I’ve definitely seen some displays of racist acts and ignorant acts.”

-Monique-
The residence halls present a setting where interaction is created and often times forced. Unlike in the student union or on campus, the residence halls have a structure for interaction (policies for courtesy, hall meetings, resident assistants, etc.) requiring its own thematic category. Life in the residence halls offered diverse experiences for the participants. Many of the interviewees recognized the significance of students connecting with other students as they try to make sense of residence hall living. Shirley offers her view on how living in the residence halls has impacted her:

Living in the dorm is a great experience. It taught me how to be patient, to be considerate...you know, considerate like when I go into the room to watch tv and, if my roommate was there, I have to make sure that it’s something she would want to watch or find interesting.

Shirley continues with the recognition that her race and cultural experiences, though different from the majority of students, may play an important role in the development of positive relationships between her and her roommate. She empathizes with the anxiety her Caucasian roommate may experience. Shirley observes:

I’m sure most of the shows that I watch, because she was Caucasian, and in fact, she comes from a small town where no Black folks lived, may make her feel uncomfortable. Here she is all of a sudden gets put into a room with a Black person. I mean, that, people should be able to deal with it but from her perspective, I’m thinking, that’s just too much at one time.

Shirley is aware that the comfort levels of others can lead to positive relationships and the development of collegiate friendships. One way Shirley sought to remedy any initial surprises was through early contact with her future roommate. Shirley explains:
What really helped us to become really closer, we wrote letters before we moved in with each other. In fact, we were supposed to meet but that didn’t happen. But that gave us a little background.

Shirley presented a supportive and deliberate personal action designed to foster a living environment that might alleviate fear and miscommunication. In contrast, Stephanie found that being the only African American female in her hall was a difficult situation:

In my freshman year, it was kind of hard. I think I was really the only minority person in my hall, well not in the hall, in the house. It was kind of hard at first because, you know, they [other residents] would invite me to do things and I really felt by myself, like, you know, should I do that with them or should I just, you know, make up an excuse not to go because I didn’t have, you know, because it seemed like everybody knew somebody or got to know somebody, but my first year, I was so into trying to focus. I wasn’t really about trying to get to know people in the halls.

Stephanie was desirous to participate but lacked her own supportive network to make it possible.

Individuals reaching out to others seem to serve as a strong force in providing a comforting and beneficial experience for African-American females. Tiffany shares her experience from her first year:

My first year I was in Campbell Hall on the third floor and that was really a good experience because I lived next to two other Black women that had been here and were getting ready to graduate. So they like took me under their wing and that also helped my freshman experience because I didn’t know about the dorm life and what you should do. We would always get together and watch movies.

The dynamics of upperclass African-American female students reaching out to newer ones exemplifies the bond that fosters the supportive environment many minority students’ desire. Similarly, the role of the Resident Assistant (RA) is a more role to
welcome and assist new students in becoming familiar with the environment through welcoming and supportive activities. Stephanie shares her experience:

It’s kind of hard [living in the halls] but my RA helped me a lot. She was very nice. She would come talk to me or invite me to do things. She knew that I was the only Black person and I may have felt uncomfortable. So she did whatever she could to get me involved.

Shirley’s comments on her interactions with her RA further illuminates the importance of supportive residence staff:

You would have house meetings and that’s the time you meet the other people down the hall. Or you have house contests, just something to get the house together and since you’re freshmen, they want you to make friends so they kind of bring us together in the dorms...have kind of a support system. The RA’s [Resident Assistants] in Bartlett...they really care...like on my birthday, they would have a card or candy in my mailbox...or decorate my door. They did things that tried to show they cared and tried to keep us there.

It is clear that the efforts of the resident assistants work to create an atmosphere that is hospitable and inviting for some. Unfortunately, everyone did not share that experience.

Stephanie’s experience is a stark contrast:

The RA that I had last year, I mean this year, because I just recently moved out of that dorm, like she, I could tell that she was not used to Black people, kind of the way she talked and acted around me. I really didn’t want to have anything to do with her. So she did invite me to things. I just really didn’t pay attention to her.

In this case, it appears that personality and approachability are factors that were important to the African American female student. Without having a level of trust and security, the RA could not achieve her goals of assisting the participant in developing a comfort and connection with her new surroundings.

While university publicity promotes the virtues and advantages of living in the residence halls, the informal lines of communication can also paint a picture of residence
hall life for students, particularly for new African American female students. Monique shares her initial perceptions:

In the residence halls, when I first got here, I heard horror stories first. One of the first stories I heard was from other Black students, saying their roommate, most of them had White roommates, and they were saying how their roommates had never seen a Black person, a live Black person, they only saw them on tv...and that was a totally new concept.

The stories that are shared by other students of color often became reality for many of the African American female students. Monique continues, relating an experience she found difficult to share:

It turns out my first experience in Campbell Hall was fairly good. I just didn’t feel comfortable because I never lived with all White people in my house. I got used to it. I think the year after that I did have to confront a girl who...well it was that someone had...some Black girl named K____, she came down and told me that a White girl had put on the outside of her door ‘Boo, the nigger is here’ and ‘the coon has been shot.’ So I was like, omigoodess. So I went up there, me and my roommate at that time, which I switched to another African American female, we went up there and confronted the young lady and calmly said, why do you have this on your door? And she said, “oh”, she laughed and she said it was just a joke and that one of her White male friends came over and he wrote that and it was a joke. And I told her, being a history major, I had to tell her some of the historical connotations of the word and how disrespectful and degrading and how it shouldn’t be used period. And how disrespectful it was for everyone in the dorm and...she erased it...or I asked her to erase it...she wasn’t going to erase it. And after I realized that, I probably should have taken a picture of it and sent it to the president. Anyway, I did that and I also gave her a copy of a research paper I wrote on the word ‘nigger’ and she apologized and, you know, it seemed like she didn’t totally get it, no but hopefully, it wouldn’t happen again. I talked to the hall coordinator and she said if anything like that happened again, she would have her kicked off campus.

Other students may not have experienced racist remarks so blatantly displayed. They may face subtler forms of racist behavior as in the case of Kara:

I moved into R.O.T. H. in my junior year and I lived in the suite with all...it was nine of us...initially me and one other African American female and one
day...first of all, there was one girl who lived on the edge and her background, she had the type of parents that didn’t like Black people, obviously, and kind of indoctrinated her to have those same feelings. She didn’t speak to me at all. And we lived in the same suite, had the same kitchen, wouldn’t talk to us and eventually I just kept saying ‘hi’. I wanted to give up but I kept pushing. Eventually she chose to say ‘hi’ but that’s all.

The African American females expressed that incidents such as these cover a spectrum, from subtle jokes and comments to acts that are directed at the individuals themselves.

Monique’s experience with racism in the residence halls was not limited to one incident. Here she relates another difficult situation:

Another day, I walked in our suite and I saw two maxipads on the wall and on one of the maxipads, written on them said...it had, in a letter form and it, I don’t remember what the letter said but the other had the names on it...Shaquita and Larrise...some Black names. And I asked her about this and she told me...and this was a killer...she told me that, again, they were just playing and these were, she said, these were just names of prostitutes that she, names that she thinks prostitutes have. And you know I’m enraged of course, but I don’t think I handled this the way I should have but I told her to take these off and again the whole disrespectful thing. I asked her what if we had relatives and family coming in to visit us and they come in and see maxipads. First of all, that’s nasty. That’s disgusting. Just the fact you put maxipads on the wall, that really shows where you are. Then on top of that, you have references to African Americans. That’s totally disrespectful...and for a minute I’m going to have to put down my Christian beliefs and ...I didn’t want to be violent...I might had to go that route.

Many of the African American female students described the need to create ‘safe havens’ for themselves as they felt the need. Dominique shared her strategy for finding comfort:

I guess the Towers was the worst. My sister and I were kind of isolated from the other Black people, the other women on campus. Everybody else lived in Campbell. We also lived in the Quads.. We’d go to Campbell or eat dinner to be around [Black] people every now and then.

The experiences in the residence halls can be summed up in the comments offered by Raynell. Her recollections present a social experience that contains extremely positive
events and personal relations, as well as negative situations that most would most quickly want to forget:

Overall, I would say, I’ve had my ups and downs in the residence halls and I definitely seen some displays of racist acts and ignorant acts in the dorms.

The overall picture of residence hall life as described by the participants varies from positive interactions with staff and other students to vicious expressions of hate. The challenges for interaction, communication, and conflict resolution continue to be issues to be addressed by both the participants and by student affairs staff. The next section focuses on the African American female student and their involvement with campus programs and organizations.

**Thematic Category Four: Involvement in Campus Programs**

“When I met James Earl Jones... It was really tight.”

- Shirley-

In this section the interviewees shared their impressions and expectations regarding campus programming that focused on the interests and reflections of the African American female experience. Several of them were involved in campus-based organizations that had an ethnic connection. When asked to share the names of the organizations they were involved in on campus, at one time or another, all of the participants were involved in the following groups: Black Student Union, Ethnic Student Senate (coordinated through the Center for Multicultural Education), Ethnic Student Promoters and the Jumpstart program (a 5-day orientation program for students of color coordinated through the Admissions Office), Student Support Services (coordinated
through the Center for Academic Achievement), and the Gospel Choir. Only two participants were members of a traditional mainstream organization and another was a member of the African American sorority (Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated).

The following comments from Monique reflect the type of involvement that is reflective to their unique interests:

I've been involved with the Gospel Choir. I've been the treasurer and president of that. That was an awesome experience. The only Christian...the only Black Christian group on campus, period. That's very important that we have that. We traveled around with that and provided a place where students can, you know, express their religious experience together and worship, praise God, that kind of thing.

Having a source for religious expression appeared very important to many of the participants. Most of them attend service at one of the several predominantly African American churches in the neighboring city (Waterloo, IA).

Midway through the spring semester of 2001, a bus trip was sponsored by the UNI Entertainment Committee to attend a convention in Chicago, IL focusing on the products, information, services and entertainment targeted to African American females. One hundred and eight African American female students and their friends attended the event. Shirley comments:

That was great. Just to see all those African American females on campus coming together without all that he-said-she-said. There were so many females that I had not even seen before until that trip on this campus. In fact, I got really close to one of them and we kept talking all the way back. That was a good idea, it was a bonding...a sister kind of thing. It was fun.

Raynell echoed Shirley's sentiments regarding the Chicago trip, emphasizing the experience more so than the program itself:
It was great to be around all them sisters. Not having to explain the slang. Not having to explain the hairstyles or gear. For the one White girl that came, she got to taste the kind of things we like...and I know she liked it because she was all into it. I would love to do that again.

In speaking to many of those who attended the Chicago trip, their sentiments were similar and desire for programs of that nature were extremely strong.

A common sentiment among many of the participants was that the campus programming was fine but the highlight was programming that spoke directly to the needs and interests of students of color and African American females specifically.

Monique explains:

I think [the programming] is fairly good for being a predominantly White campus. Programs could be better. I know they always have the retreats at conferences that they send women of color to every year, just about. There's another conference coming up this weekend that they provided funds for Black women. So, anyway, that's good opportunities for Black women as far as programs that they have here. They have speakers that come in, Maya Angelou came in, Lani Guinier came in a couple of years ago. There's good stuff for Black women a lot of times.

Shirley recognizes that the role of general programming is to reach a broad base of students but yet she is still enthusiastic seeking programming that is specific to her interests as an African American female. She has this to say:

I can say that when they're planning stuff like that, they try to think about everyone. I appreciate the fact that last year when they brought James Earl Jones and Maya Angelou. I was so touched. When I met James Earl Jones, it was so...it was a feeling I can't describe. It was really tight. It [campus programming] could be better. It's heading there slowly, I think.

There are still others who view targeted programming as a "treat" and do not find the general programming as an important part of their social life. Sarah reflects on one such program:
We went to the BET Comics the other night, so when that stuff comes to campus, I'm willing to go and ready to do it. It's just for the most part there's not much to do.

Programming, whether general or specific, is an important aspect to the social experience of African American females on campus.

The themes generated by the comments of the participants provided an insight into a segment of the university community of which has had little voice in the past. I close this chapter with a quote by Dominique, which she offered with a heavy sigh, "It ain't easy being a sister on this campus...that's for sure."

Summary

Through their candor and honesty, the respondents provided a snapshot of their social life on campus. In concluding this chapter the overall findings describe a perception, interaction, and reaction to college life that is severely limited in studies related to African American female student development. The findings relate the sentiments that not only does the African American Greek life system provide a meaningful social outlet, the African American sorority is an important cultural and social component for the African American female. The absence of the African American sorority presence on campus is a disappointment and to seek membership at different campuses is arduous and extremely time consuming. The African American females described a social construct where they interacted with other groups of students as determined necessary, rather than part of a comfortable and social experience. There appeared to be a superficial level of interaction with White females, the perception of a strained relationship with African American males, and the interaction with White males.
is non-existent. Experiences in the residence halls range for positive interactions to negative episodes of ignorance and hatred. There appeared to be a need for more professional and student staff connection with African American females as a way to integrate them into the activities and leadership opportunities offered by the residence system. Finally, most of the respondents appeared to participate in similar activities on campus and expressed similar sentiments for the types of programming that reflected their interests. While they suggested a need for more programming that addressed the interests of African American females, there seemed to be a need to assist them in finding ways to utilize campus resources and program activities of their interest themselves. These findings and implications related to the findings will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Irrelation as a Social Construct

To appropriately summarize the findings of this study, I return to the two pillars of the study. The first is the question, what are the social experiences of African American female students on a predominantly White campus? The second is linking the concept of irrelation to the findings. Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that in discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories from evidence, then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept. In this regard, this study reveals several areas where the participants experienced a social construct called irrelation. I use irrelation rather than isolation, marginalization, or mattering as I understand the descriptions of their experiences to both affect and effect their social lives in a way that is not adequately defined by those specific aforementioned terms. This construct of irrelation permeates through four identified areas of student life that will be discussed further. It will first be important to present an operational definition of the concept of irrelation.

Irrelation is characterized by having neither a positive nor negative relationship with others in daily social interactions or by having relationships that are defined by the environment (a classroom setting) or by gender or racial groupings (the ‘Black’ table in the union). The irrelation between the African American females as a group and other specific groups of students can be analogous to the relationship two strangers may have as they sit together on a city bus. In essence, while they may occupy similar space, there
may not be a need to develop any level of relationship, neither positive nor negative. For
the purposes of this study, irrelation will be defined as the lack of social communication
and interaction between groups.

Student affairs practitioners use a variety of terms to describe the feelings and
perceptions of students of color as they interact on predominantly White campuses.
Descriptors such as marginalization, mattering, and isolation are widely used to
appropriately reflect the sentiment of the social state of students of color on
predominantly White campuses. The amount of personal development associated with
any educational program is directly related to the quality and quantity of student
involvement in that program (Schlossberg, 1989). The comments and expressions of the
participants in this study have encouraged me to seek out a term that better reflects their
experience as a group on their campus. The term, irrelation, is a construct which may
better describe the involvement and institutional connection level experienced by the
African American females in the study. Based on the interpretation of the participants’
impressions of their relationship with several identified groups of students on campus, I
suggest that there exist a level of irrelation or non-relationship between the African
American female students and those other student groups.

Irrelation versus Marginality and Isolation

Irrelation differs from the concepts of marginality and isolation. Fleming (1983)
found there is an impression that they (African American females) experience higher
levels of social isolation than their White counterparts at predominantly White colleges.
It is suggested in this study the participants (African American females) neither felt

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
isolated by others nor do they isolate themselves from others. Marginality and isolation are terms reflective of and require a social action. With respect to marginality and isolation, an individual or group must perceive they do not fit or belong in the environment as a result of other factors beyond their control. This can manifest in ways such as being ignored, taunted, sensing discomfort or anger, or even experiencing direct statements or attacks. Moreover, the group that is marginalized or isolated clearly recognizes that not only are they outside of the mainstream, that is a situation that either they have created for themselves or others have created for them. Irrelation can also be an unconscious parallel existence with others who occupy the same or a similar environment without having any significant interaction. The African American females in this study did not present those sentiments. To the contrary, as expressed by Angela, the irrelationship she recognized with White females on campus may be viewed as separate communities existing in the same space. “It’s just we like our own things” indicates that there is not necessarily a need to fit in with the White females. Her comments express the sentiments that they (African American females) exist and function separately without a sense of loss from having any relationship with White females. Further, the African American females have presented the belief that other groups do not share the same experiences as they do and therefore can understand why relationships do not form. Monique expressed that it was that lack of mutual understanding between groups and the absence of the need for mutual understanding that fostered the irrelation between the groups of African American and White females in the residence halls.
Irrelation Versus Mattering

The concept of mattering, the feeling that others depend upon or are interested, also does not necessarily reflect the sentiments of the African American females of the study (Rosenberg & McCollough, 1981). Irrelation differs from the sense of not mattering in that individuals do not have the sense or question if they are being accepted or needed by the majority group. Their core associations satisfy those feelings and perceptions. The African American females develop and progress on campus without the social support of the African American male, the White female or even the social acknowledgement of the White male. In this case the irrelationship is based on the lack of knowledge those groups have regarding the African American female. Consequently, for the African American female, the relationship with African American males is borne out of the social interactions based on race and social proximity [many participating in the same programs] and the relationship with White females and males is relatively non-existent. These irrelations become part of the status quo and become a reality for many of the African American females.

This statement expresses the notion that they (African American females) do not recognize themselves as a group functioning in isolation but rather functioning in a manner that is appropriate and satisfactory to their specific needs. This irrelation can manifest itself a number of ways such as a lack of participation in the general life of the campus community, the creation of limited social groups, and to seek social outlets off campus. Without the connection between other groups, there is little desire to join groups
such as the newspaper, student government, or White sororities as there is no perceived relationship beyond their subgroup.

Clearly, the participants of this study interacted with other students of all backgrounds as situations required, such as in the classroom, but on a more personal group level, live in an environment all their own. Sarah shared her perspective on how it may be perceived by White females that they (African American females) are unsociable when referencing why she and her friends do not participate in residence hall and other large group activities.

Other terms referring to sub-groups perceived to be outside the mainstream are loneliness and disconnection. Loneliness is the individual existence without companions. Irrelation, in this case, refers to a group behavior and does not necessarily equate to loneliness as the members of the core group interact with each other. Additionally, disconnection refers to the state of not being connected, separated, or detached from others or other groups. Individuals or groups who are disconnected have severed emotional, as well as physical ties with the larger society. Individuals who have an irrelation with the greater society move in and out of communication pools as they determine necessary. The participants did not refer to being lonely or made references to loneliness as part of their social experience on campus. There were often comments about their small circles of friends.

Understanding the concept of irrelation can assist in the development of programs that work to bring people of all backgrounds together, fostering understanding, developing better communication, and bridging gaps in the campus community.
African American Sororities

The role of the Greek organization on the college campus is an important one. It provides opportunities for life-long friendships, leadership opportunities, and a social outlet, all of which work to create an atmosphere where students make a connection with the campus, staff, and other students.

In the state of Iowa the population of African Americans is approximately 4%. Information regarding the African American Greek organizations and their histories are often unexplored or unheard of, not only in the small towns, but even in the larger cities of the state. The majority of the participants did not express that they either hadn’t heard of the organizations prior to attending UNI nor had a vague concept of those organizations in general. Many of the participants received their first impressions of African American Greek organizations from members of the two African American fraternities currently active on campus. Those two groups served as a social vehicle for many of the African American students on campus.

Even with an understanding of African American Greek organizations prior to arriving to campus, some of their expectations regarding those organizations remained unclear. For others whose life experiences did not afford them chances to learn about African American Greek organizations these groups remained a mystery, but once exposed, they found a cultural connection sorely missed.

In attempting to link the concept of irrelation to its impact with the African American sorority, it is important to understand the value of membership. The African American sorority provides for its members the feeling that someone cares what happens
to them, there is an increase of campus and community contacts, an increase in positive social experiences, and fosters loyalty to the college. Additionally, it is also found that those who are active sorority members participate in other clubs and student professional associations and have higher levels of interaction with other students (Pike & Askew, 1990). Schuh et al. (1992) found that sorority members are less likely to drop out of college, are more likely to be satisfied with their institution and their social lives, and are more likely to be involved in activities on campus. These are but a few of the myriad of benefits to membership in the African American sorority. It is apparent that without a strong African American sorority presence on campus, having an irrelationship with the campus community may develop. Many participants of the study related the desire for such organizations, their frustrations over waiting for chapter development, and their weariness of seeking membership at other institutions. It is clear that the sisterhood, service to the campus and community, and connections on a peer-to-peer level with other student groups can serve to develop the connection with the university (Tinto, 1990).

**Inter-Group Relations**

The development of interpersonal relationships is considered essential to the positive development of students' experience in college. Chickering (1969) identified the development of mature interpersonal relationships as an important stage as students' progress to a place of self-actualization. This development of intercultural and interpersonal tolerance and appreciation of differences, as well as the capacity for healthy, lasting intimate relationships substantially impacts the student's overall development and satisfaction with their collegiate experience. Many institutions work
diligently in developing programs and activities designed to promote and foster positive interpersonal relationships among their students. The outcome desired would be the development of a sense of community among the students and other university constituents.

Researchers have noted that social integration is directly related to persistence in college. How the individual perceives their relationships with others is most directly associated with persistence (Rootman, 1972; Spady, 1971). Tinto (1975) contends that social interaction should increase the likelihood that the person will remain in college. Although researchers present data concluding the importance of positive social integration, this study presents information to the contrary, in spite of the level of persistence among African American female students (Appendix D).

As a group, African American females in this study tended to function in a state of irrelation with other groups of student on campus. While not necessarily isolated from others, the relationships African American females had with other groups ranged from non-substantial to non-existent. Issues related to both race and gender intersect which may create an unseen barrier to positive relationship development. Three student groups applicable to inter-group relations will be addressed: African American Males, White females, and White males. The participants most prominently discussed these three groups.

**African American Females and African American Males**

Many of the participants felt they did not share common interests with other groups of students on campus. Possessing a sense of commonality between groups of people often
serves as a foundation for positive relationships. A lack of communication between groups can create an environment that may not be necessarily hostile but uninviting for positive interaction (Asante, 1984). The responses offered by the participants revealed a state of irrelation with their African American male peers. Respondents expressed that they didn’t feel they possessed close friendships with many of their African American males. Participants felt there should have been a stronger relationship with African American males for the sole reason they shared a similar cultural background. Further, when reflecting on their time spent in college, many of them had no romantic relationships with African American males. Some have stated that for all the time they spent in college, they had never gone on a date. While there was no reason that could be identified, several of the respondents expressed the sentiment that they were in competition with White women for the attention of African American males and that they were losing. In 1971, a study focusing on interracial dating indicated that African American women perceived themselves to be rejected by African American men (Downs, 1971). Downs’ findings of over thirty years ago mirror many of the sentiments offered by the respondents in this study.

**African American Females and White Females**

Many of the interactions outside of the classroom with White females tended to be in the context of the residence halls. In those situations, the environment contributed to interactions, both positive and negative. When discussing interactions beyond the residence halls, there was little indication as to personal and/or group relations. Activities such as eating together, going to parties, or “hanging out” with White females...
did not seem part of the dialogue offered by the study participants. Several respondents also offered that while participating in a sorority would be an ideal activity to get involved in, there was no desire to become a member of a White sorority. This is supported by the work of Schmitz and Forbes (1994) a number of factors discourage African American women from joining White sororities. The structure and language of the White sorority, status concerns, dual systems, and covert racism may be among the deterrents for African American young women. Whipple et al. (1991) state that “they differ (White and Black sororities) not just in skin color, but in their fundamental value orientations, family backgrounds, educational objectives, and purpose for existence. This difference is so strong that even with the lack of African American sorority opportunities, both on campus and in the immediate area, the irrelation with the White female does not seem to allow for participation in that particular activity.

African American Females and White Males

It was intriguing to find that most of the participants had not had any interactions with White males. Informal conversations, dating, eating meals, and other normal social interactions appeared to be non-existent with White males. There is little or no interaction beyond the classroom or class related activities with White male students. There is a sense that White males neither understand nor desire to understand the African American female. Further, several of the participants shared they had the sense that, in the eyes of White males, the African American female doesn’t exist.

It is evident that while researchers promote the idea that student persistence is supported in part by positive interactions with student peers, the African American
female, on this campus, continues to move through the collegiate system with a limited circle of confidants, supporters, and comrades. In all of the descriptions provided by the participants, it was clear to see that the African American female students had an irrelationship with the aforementioned student groups. Interactions beyond those prescribed by the nature of the institution were either superficial or non-existent. What becomes worthy of further study is why this irrelation does not appear to be a bother, nuisance, or disturbance to the participants. Their complacent existence in their own world appears to be self-fulfilling and self-supportive. The next section will address experiences in the residence halls.

Residence Hall Living

The participants of the study had completed an average of 3.7 years as residents in the residence hall system. Research shows that residence halls enhance the overall undergraduate experience of college students, particularly in the area of interpersonal contacts (Astin, 1973). This is further supported by Berger (1997) who stated that students with a strong sense of community, such as found in residence halls, are more likely to be fully connected, or more integrated, into the broader campus social system. Tinto (1975, 1993) emphasized the importance of the interaction between campus communities and the individual student. University campuses espouse the importance of the value of community as it supports the positive development of students (Astin, 1985). Colleges today promote the messages that they are more than institutions but a collection of smaller communities. Aitkin (1982) stated that next to academic performance, satisfaction with the residential living experience is one of the best predictors of students’
persistence. This satisfaction is most influenced by positive peer-group contact. Interactions with roommates, housemates, and other residents are the elements that seem to assist in the development of a supportive community.

In reviewing the data regarding life the residence halls, the participants shared a variety of experiences. Several participants had positive experiences with roommates and hall staff, while others were faced with gross racist actions. Regardless of the experience there was no evidence that indicated a high level of interaction between the African American female students and the other residents and hall staff. Residence hall living can be identified as one of the social environments on campus that is formal, directed, and has a similar construction as the classroom. The participants in describing other (White) residents in the hall did not use terms such as “friends” or similar descriptors. This is further supported by comments shared by most of the participants as they reflected on their social relations with White females on campus. As with classroom situations, the residence hall is a place where the African American female interacts and communicates with others outside of their group as it is deemed necessary, not out of a need to develop lasting social relationships.

This irrelationship also extends to the staff of the residence halls. The majority of the residence hall staff is Caucasian and the nature of relationships between the African American females and staff members is similar to the White residents. Resident Assistants (RA’s) and Hall Coordinators are roles that did not necessarily foster a sense of connection with the residence halls for the study participants. In some
instances, participants shared positive interactions with residence hall staff but having a connection with the residence hall was ambiguous.

Tinto (1988) recognized that the failure to establish relationships with other members of the institution, students and staff alike, might lead to the absence of integration into the community of college life. The stories related by the participants describe an atmosphere where irrelation exists and the sense of community is limited.

Secondly, those who experienced negative behaviors from other residents expressed the desire to have swifter and surer action from the University in addressing those incidents. They expressed that racist incidents are neither adequately addressed nor resolved. The response from the hall coordinator to Monique in reference to the 'coon' and 'nigger' incident that if anything like that happened again, she would have her (the perpetrator) kicked off campus" did not appear to be satisfactory. Several of the participants stated this action does not resolve the issue in the moment. In fact, there may be the perception that the perpetrator has gotten away with her actions. It has been found that exposure to a campus experience of prejudice substantially lessened African Americans' commitment to the institution (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). This lessening of commitment can also lead to a sense of irrelation with the residence hall, reducing it to its basic function, a place to sleep and eat. This reduction in the value of the residence hall may be part of the reason why participants were not discouraged from living in the hall and continue to view residence life as 'okay'.

The third point offered by the participants is a consensus that the resident hall staff cares for students overall. On a more personal perspective, many responded that the staff
appeared uncomfortable with them as African American females, not necessarily knowing how to approach or communicate with them. This perception of discomfort may be communicated non-verbally through aversive behavior in circumstances where interactions occur, such as hall meetings or one-on-one meetings (Crim, 1998). This aversion by staff can be one of the factors contributing to the irrelation the participants may have in relation to the residence halls. Overall, this failure to make a connection with their living environment and those who are a part of it continues the pattern as in the previous section. I will now focus on African American female students and their involvement in campus life.

Campus Involvement

Tinto’s salient theory of student persistence makes student integration in the social systems (both formal and informal) of the institution a critical outcome. Explicit in Tinto’s theory is the concept of congruence, which strongly affects the quality of student experiences in both academic and social dimensions (Velasquez, 1998). This congruence refers to the degree to which there is a match or “fit” between the “needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution” (p. 4). This section will address the comments the participants shared regarding on-campus activities. One question asked in this study was “what are you involved in on campus?” The participants had the flexibility to list as many clubs or organizations they have been involved in, from as early as their first year through their current year. Most of the participants were involved in similar activities. These groups included the Black Student Union, the Gospel Choir, the Ethnic Student Senate, the Ethnic Student Promoters, as well as they were affiliated with
programs initiated out of university departments such as the Center for Multicultural Education, the JumpStart, and other Student Support Services programs. All of the aforementioned programs or clubs have the similar design of addressing or supporting the needs and interests of students of color. The participants shared their positive experiences in working and socializing within these organizations. Tinto (1993) recognized that members of an underrepresented student group could construct their niche, which leads to their own levels of integration and persistence. The participants created and maintained relationships with each other as they interacted with in the various organizations. There was little mention of involvement in clubs or organizations whose membership was predominantly White. The question as to their involvement in high school garnered responses indicating that many of the participants were involved in similar activities that are currently offered on campus. It was apparent that there was not a desire to involve themselves in mainstream clubs or organizations. The sentiments of the participants mirrored the conclusions found by Allen (1982). He reported that nearly 62% of students of color reported little or no integration into general student activities on campus. In addition, 45% reported that extracurricular activities on the campus did not adequately reflect their interests. In a further study, Allen (1984) found that 69% of African American students were involved solely in African American organizations on their campus. The participants did not express a sense of discomfort regarding these organizations nor was there any strong desire to be associated with such organizations. With the understanding that getting involved will help students interact positively with other students who share similar interests while providing an opportunity to discover their
academic, personal, and social passions, having an irrelation with the institution in this manner greatly stifles their growth as members of the campus community. This last section will address coping strategies as they relate to the persistence of the African American female.

Coping Strategies

While coping strategies did not necessarily emerge as one of the thematic categories, additional information shared by a majority of the respondents provide a snapshot of the elements that assist in their persistence. Coping strategies can manifest itself in a myriad of ways. For many of our respondents, their experience with the Jumpstart program, the Jumpstart professional staff, and the peer leaders, served to provide a place of comfort, motivation, and models for success. All but one of the participants was a member of the Jumpstart program. Even the one who was not part of the program did have the opportunities for participation and support as a result of her camaraderie with the Jumpstart female members. Since by design, the mission of this program is to provide a high level of personal support for students of color, it is clear to see why this program above many others stood out as one of the tools for coping on campus.

There were two other sources students referenced as motivators as they persisted through school. The first was their immediate and extended family. Approximately half of the participants were first generation college students or will be the first ones to complete a college education. Collectively, most pointed out the positive support and motivation they received from home. These expressions of familial support encouraged
the students to want to continue and see their program to the end. The other source was
the local African American churches. Seen as a “home away from home,” the churches
also provided a level of support and encouragement appreciated by many of the
respondents. The churches did not provide any formal programs designed to assist the
students through college. The informal social interactions provided an opportunity to get
away from campus attend a service that was similar to one they may have experienced
back in their hometowns, and to socialize with others who expressed an interest in their
success. This was almost as much a motivator and support as their families. In all of the
themes, it is clear that the irrelation that the African American female experiences has
lessened opportunities available to all members of the campus community. This raises
many questions as to what can student development practitioners do to assist in a more
positive integration into the mainstream of the campus community. The next section will
address the implications for practice.

Implications

The findings of this study present a number of implications for the university
campus. The anticipated outcome of this study was to better understand the social
experiences of African American females. It should be understood that no one campus
department or organization bears the responsibility to address these issues. It will take a
campus-wide effort to affect a culture change for many groups and individuals of the
campus community. The information gathered from this study provides an introduction
to numerous programs and activities designed to respond to the issues shared by the
participants.
The most significant outcome of the study was the revelation that the African American female students existed and functioned in a state of irrelation. Student development research continues to point out that positive social relations with both peers and faculty are important to the development and persistence of students. The participants of this study present a scenario to the contrary. By functioning in an environment that can almost be described as their own world, the African American females in this study have persisted and many have reached their goal of graduation. While this, on the surface, may not require a quick fix, it is necessary for student affairs professionals to look at ways to foster communication and interaction between groups of students and to develop a sense of campus ownership for the African American females. The following are proposals for interventions on the campus level.

The participants shared that having sororities that reflected their culture was important and desired. The implication for student development practitioners is that the African American female student may feel that the activities that are worthwhile and important to them may not be held with the same level of importance by the institution. The appropriate campus office(s) should work with both the student and the Greek organizations to develop a plan to bring and maintain that type of social activity to campus. While the opportunities for African American sororities are limited on this campus, support and resources should be provided to assist the African American female in establishing a group (or groups) that address their specific personal and cultural needs. Faculty and staff support is necessary to assist in navigating through the campus bureaucracy and to make the important campus contacts that lead to successful
experiences. Additionally, campus faculty or staff who are familiar and/or associated with a fraternity or sorority may assist the African American females in the development of their own campus-based sorority/sororities. As indicated earlier in the study, sororities comprise an integral part of the campus community. These organizations share a responsibility with the University in facilitating the learning process and positive social interactions for all students.

Although many of the participants stated their experience in the residence halls were primarily positive, there is a need to develop an on-going program that sensitizes resident hall staff to the specific concerns of African American females. This includes issues of involvement, inter-personal relationships, and their perspectives as a numerical minority in the residence hall system. Residence hall staff should be more assertive in working to create an environment that is recognizably welcoming and supportive. The development of relationships should be a deliberate action of staff members of the residence hall, encouraging the interaction of African American and non-African American students. The creation of a peer mentor program within the resident halls between older African American female students and new African American female students would assist in issues of communication, problem resolution, and adaptation to the campus community. There should also be programming specifically designed to encourage on-going communication between the African American females, other residents in the halls, and residence hall staff members of all levels.

**Systemic Change**
While programming in individual areas may be a start, it is also important for campuses to consider and make university-wide commitments to addressing issues related to the construct of irrelation. In developing programs specific to topics related to irrelations, there must be a paradigm shift in the focus of minority/majority relations. When addressing issues of marginality or isolation, the focus tends to be on how to bring the minority group over to the majority group or how to integrate the minority group into the majority group. In this different way of addressing these concerns, the focus becomes a more comprehensive approach, purposefully developing and encouraging personal interaction between students. Simply bringing groups of students together may not be enough. Task-oriented, discussion-based, issue-focused, and goal-oriented programs are necessary to the development of needed relationships. Activities such as student retreats, service projects, and other interactive opportunities help to begin the process as students’ work together toward a goal, building understandings and relationships with each other. This is why addressing issues of irrelationship cannot be regulated on one area or department of the campus. There must be a system-wide effort by multiple areas of the university if change is to take place.

The university should be intentional in planning programs that address the needs and interests of African American females, as well as other campus sub-groups. The university should also seek to encourage, mentor, and educate groups of African American females on the process of securing funding and other resources necessary to develop and present activities and programs specific to their interests. Those programs and offices that routinely work with students of color should work to encourage African
American female students to explore and become involved in campus-wide programs, clubs, and organizations. Additionally, programs and workshops designed to foster interaction, communication, and cooperation between African American females and other student groups should be developed, implemented, and maintained. These programs should be designed to increase levels of intercultural understanding, social success and inter-group communication.

These are but a few suggestions for campus-based programs which departments and offices can and should develop. Programs such as Jumpstart provide an excellent base for acclimating new students of color to campus but it will take the entire campus to build a campus community. Overall, there needs to be a campus-wide effort to encourage and maintain an environment that not only values all the members of the community but also promotes communication, interaction, and understanding. In the next section, ideas for further research will be addressed.

Recommendations for Further Research

The results from this study provide suggestions for several options for further research. The following are selected recommendations for areas of broadened research on the topic surrounding African American female college students that may strengthen future studies in this area. Fleming (1983) supports the need for further study of African American college female students stating:

There has been little research on the impact of college upon Black women, even though the impact of college on that group is especially interesting because they have the choice of going to either a predominantly Black or a predominantly White college. (p. 42)
For this particular subject, the possibilities for numerous studies are great and warranted. First and foremost, a replication of this study utilizing more than one comparable university setting would allow for a greater generalization to a broader population. It is recognized that there is a severe dearth of research on topics related to both the academic and social experiences of African American female students. Research related to this population is extremely necessary and overdue.

Studies that pursue the concept of irrelation as it relates to subgroups of students would be an important addition to the body of literature that seeks to describe their social experiences. Since this is a new construct, it would be valuable to develop and receive perspectives on the topic from both members of the faculty and student development professionals. For example, a comparison of the levels of irrelation between African American female athletes and African American female non-athletes would be of value to begin to understand the dynamics of two similar groups who may have distinct experiences on campus. There is a myriad of possibilities for future studies.

A longitudinal study on African American female students and their experiences in the residence halls would provide specific information regarding long-term experiences in the residence halls. To date, there is very little data on this topic. This topic could also be supplemented with a comparison of residence hall living at a historically Black college and its effect on numerous student outcomes, such as persistence, student involvement, and student interaction.

Studies related to the experiences of African American females in African American sororities, comparing predominantly White campuses and historically Black
campuses, would provide information on a number of issues such as self-esteem, campus and community involvement, and persistence. Currently, there is only one book dedicated to information related to one African American sorority and one other that gives a history of the nine historically African American Greek organizations.

Research on the perceptions of relationships between African American female and male college students is needed. A study such as this would provide insight into a topic that has not been addressed adequately in the research.

There is a dire need for research surrounding the levels of campus involvement for African American female students. Finding the reasons for those levels would be of interest in the areas of student persistence, campus connections, and student programming.

Scholarly or developed theoretical study on the nature of the concepts of isolation, mattering, marginality, as well as other synonymous terms would be valid with regard to contemporary African American females and other minority student groups. The aforementioned terms have been in use by student affairs practitioners for several decades, at the very least. In light of my usage of the irrelation, I believe that research to find out if those constructs are still applicable to the student of today is worthy of inspection.

There are a myriad of other topics and combination of topics worthy of study in regards to African American female college students. The current literature does a disservice in the understanding, perspectives, and experiences of this group. Future
researchers should seriously consider this group as their perceptions and insights may provide much needed data for the area of student affairs.

Conclusion

As I conclude this study, I have to begin by stating that this study only grazed the surface to investigating the experiences, perceptions, and expression of the African American college student. Studies related to this population have a myriad of possibilities and combinations that further research are not only possible, it is necessary. As a result of this journey to know more about the African American female college student my perspectives and understanding of the social experiences of African American females on campus has been raised tremendously. As a student affairs officer who routinely works with this group and other students on a daily basis, I realize that with my own experiences and beliefs, there is so much that I could not see or understand on my own. This study has provided some useful information about African American female students' social experiences on campus. The information garnered from this study will further strengthen my commitment to working and supporting all students but more importantly, students whose cultures and experiences are not necessarily part of the mainstream culture. It is my hope that those who read this study will take the time to look at the different subcultures on their campuses and develop ways to furthering the goals and missions of the institutions by creating and maintaining an environment that strives to meet the needs of all students. I caution researchers to not simply lump African American female students' experiences with other students of color as a whole, or even with all African American students. Their stories, perceptions, experiences, and
challenges are unique and demand unique studies. It is through this specific research on related topics that the information will provide knowledge and frameworks that will assist those who are involved in the service of student development.

I also challenge myself to consider irrelation and the strength it provides the individual to preserve in an environment that is not necessarily perceived as their own. While it is a goal of student development professionals to work to assist students in becoming connected with the institution, irrelation as a means of coping or survival may have its validity if the end result is persistence and graduation. While this thinking goes against rudimentary thought in student affairs, I continue to champion that it is worthy of further investigation. As the line says from the Emotions’ song, _Don’t Ask My Neighbors_ (1977), “you don’t know me very well.” I have found that this is true and we should want to and have to know more.
REFERENCES


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


APPENDIX A:

EXPLORATORY STATEMENTS

Below are samples of the exploratory statements used in the interviews. These statements were designed to foster and further the conversation between the researcher and the participant. Please note, not every statement was used with each participant.

1. Tell me about your expectations of college prior to your arrival.
2. Describe your recollection of weekend social activities during your freshman and sophomore years.
3. Describe your first impressions of residence hall living.
4. Characterize the Greek society on campus.
5. Tell me about the types of groups of people you hang out with, outside of class.
6. How did you go about making friends in the residence halls?
APPENDIX B:
INVITATION LETTER TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

«FirstName» «LastName»
«Address1»
«PostalCode»

Dear «FirstName»:

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the social experience of African American female students on a predominantly White campus. The purpose of this study is to examine the social experiences of African American female students at a predominantly White institution and attempt to understand the factors that assist in and detract from their social development. This study will also explore the coping strategies utilized by African-American female students that assists their persistence through their collegiate years. Your participation in this study may help faculty and student affairs administrators better understand the experiences of African American female students, as well as improving the body of knowledge focusing on such experiences.

As a study participant, you will be interviewed, and these interviews will be audio-taped. Data collection from this study will be used for my doctoral dissertation, which will include a written analysis of the experiences shared by participants. If you agree, I would like to speak to you regarding experiences here at the University of Northern Iowa. The interviews should last between 60 and 120 minutes. After I compile the data, I will invite participants to talk with me again for a chance to clarify and confirm their statements.

All information obtained from this study will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons involved in the conduction of the study. At the end of the study all tapes will be destroyed. Pseudonyms, selected by interviewees, will be used for all interview transcripts and documents derived form the interviews. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decided to participate and discover a level of discomfort, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be either returned to you or destroyed.

If you have questions or concerns at anytime regarding the research or procedures, or the rights of research subject, you may:

- contact me at the above address,
- Dr. Michael Waggoner, advisor and chair of my dissertation committee at 273-2605,
or the Office of the Human Subjects Coordinator in the Graduate College at 273-6148.

Please sign and return the enclosed response card indicating your participation by Feb. 15, 2002. In the mean time, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

I thank you in advance your consideration and assistance.

Guy A. Sims
Doctoral Candidate
College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education
APPENDIX C:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

African-American Female Students on a Predominantly White Campus Consent to Act as a Human Subject

Investigator: Guy A. Sims

University of Northern Iowa

The purpose of this research project is to collect data from African American female students at the University of Northern Iowa. The primary goal is to gain an understanding of their social experiences on campus. In order to achieve that goal I will perform tape-recorded interviews.

You may feel uncomfortable discussing your experiences, so please feel free to stop the interview at any time. Your participation in the project is completely voluntary. This project will employ the following techniques to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Any marks of identity will be changed or deleted in both the transcript and during any presentation of the data. This will include any names and locations of people or places that you may mention during the course of the interview. The interview tapes will be stored in my home office. Transcriptions of the tapes will be done only by me or one of my assistants.

Please read and understand the following guidelines for this interview.

1. You do not have to answer any questions at any time for any reason if you choose not to. Your refusal to participate will not involve any penalty for you.
2. You may terminate the interview at any time.
3. This interview will be audio-taped and hand-written notes will be taken.
4. I will answer any questions about the research project, your rights within this project, the interview process, or anything that might be of interest to you. Or, you can call the following offices.

Dr. Michael Waggoner
College of Education
University of Northern Iowa
(319) 273-2605
Michael.Waggoner@uni.edu

Human Subjects Coordinator
University of Northern Iowa
(319) 273-2748

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Participant __________________________ Date ________________

Printed Name of Participant __________________________ Signature of Investigator __________________________

Guy A. Sims 319-268-8327 Guy.Sims@uni.edu
APPENDIX D:
PERSISTENCE RATES FOR ENTERING CLASSES OF 1991-1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNI Office of Information and Analysis, 2001