

AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE  
AND HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

By

Nicole L. McDonald

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Approved:

Dr. Robert L. Crowson

Dr. John M. Braxton

Dr. Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr.

Dr. Kassie Freeman

Dr. Jim Hearn

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This dissertation is especially dedicated to my mother,

Frances L. McDonald,

to my late grandparents,

Mary S. and Theodore Porter,

and to my late uncle,

Louis Young.

You gave me everything, and it was enough.

It provided the foundation for me to aspire to and complete this endeavor.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Most people would agree that attending college can have a substantial effect on one's life. In general, a college education is associated with better opportunities for employment, higher salaries, and increased opportunities for continued education. A high-quality educational institution has traditionally been measured in terms of institutional resources, facilities, endowments, faculty who conduct research, and institutional selectivity. The more of these criteria an institution has, the better the quality of the education is believed to be. But what about students' experiences at an institution?

There are a number of factors that affect the quality of a student's experience at an institution— not the least of which is race. For example, in any desegregated educational institution in America there is a persistent reality— Blacks and Whites in largely separate worlds (Steele, 1992). Black college students, on average, have higher attrition rates than their white counterparts and lower grade point averages (Steele, 1992; Allen, 1991). Differences in the levels of academic performance between Black and White students are often attributed to weaknesses in Black students' academic and personal orientations to college (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). For example, parental education level, family socioeconomic status, and pre-college academic experiences are reported as predictors of college student success (Braxton, et al, 1997; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1975, 1988). However, even if these predictors account for the differences in

academic experiences of Black and White students, they do not account for differences in the quality of Black and White students' social experiences in higher education. For example, compared to their White counterparts, Black students report more dissatisfaction, isolation, alienation, and racism. Steele (1992) argues these experiences tend to constitute the rule rather than the exception for Blacks in higher education, even at the most elite American colleges.

Conversely, Black college students who attend historically black colleges and universities do not seem to experience the same difficulties as their Black counterparts who attend predominantly white institutions. Black college students who attend historically black colleges and universities are more likely to graduate and are better academically and socially integrated than their Black peers attending predominantly white institutions. Further, Black students attending historically black colleges and universities have fewer socioeconomic resources, lower standardized test scores, and lower high school grade point averages than their Black and White counterparts attending predominantly white institutions (Thomas, 1981; Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1992). However, it has been argued that in attending a historically black college or university, "Black students purchase psychological well-being, cultural affinity, nurturing academic relations and happiness at the cost of limited physical facilities, fewer resources, and more restricted academic programs" (Allen, 1987, p. 30, capitalization standardized).

The college-going experience seems especially challenging for African Americans as advantages and disadvantages seem to abound from one institutional context to the next. "Wanting as we do, the best we can get in the way of education—the best as defined by endowment, facilities, library books, publishing faculty, and the

like... it is only natural to assume that an education from Harvard is better than one from Morehouse” (Fleming, 1984, p. 17). But for African American college students, is this really the case? More importantly, how can we better understand the experiences of African American college students such that not only can we help them adjust and succeed within a given institutional context, but also help institutions adapt to meet their needs?

### **Statement of the Problem**

“The classical models of education attainment have had so little efficacy for Black students in general, and black college students in particular, that the enrollment, retention, and graduation experiences of Black students in both predominantly white and predominantly Black universities remain a pressing—if [not] misunderstood—phenomenon” (Smith, 1991, p. 111). Although the literature on African American college students is increasing, comparative research that examines the experiences of African American college students attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly white institutions (PWIs) is limited. This is due, in part, to an overall lack of research on HBCUs. HBCUs “have existed for more than 100 years without becoming serious subjects for academic research or inquiry” (Brown & Freeman, 2002, p. 238). Much of the research that does exist regarding HBCUs has focused on disputing or justifying their continued existence rather than providing detailed accounts of the experiences of the students who attend.

Current higher education research has been useful in helping to predict and understand some of the factors that influence the experiences of some college students. However, it has not helped to create a model for retaining African American college

students that captures their socialization experiences. Thus, the prescription for attracting and retaining African American students has been based on models that do not consider the cultural context of their experiences (Freeman, 1997). Dominant models of student socialization operate from a cultural deficit perspective which suggests that students who have certain cultural backgrounds, patterns, and beliefs are marginalized because their background is inferior to that of other students and predisposes them to failure (Rendon et al, 2000). The success of HBCUs in producing approximately one-third of the African American baccalaureates each year calls into question the efficacy of the cultural deficit perspective. Laden, Milem, and Crowson (2000) suggest the inability of students to persist within a given academic environment might actually represent institutional deficiencies in the areas of social diversity, multiculturalism and power relationships. Accordingly, if we want to retain students of color in higher education, and African American students in particular, it is important to develop theoretical models that include different assumptions about reality and what must be done to engage those students who differ from the dominant culture (Tierney, 1992, p. 604).

“Equally important are the methods scholars have used to evaluate and study impediments to Black student success” (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002, p. 316). If researchers can determine how and which institutional characteristics are associated with differential outcomes for African American college students, the information could be used to enhance the general study of college impact (Smith & Allen, 1984). However, much of the current research on African American college students is quantitative. Understanding the experiences of African American college students requires a deeper examination of the issues than is available through the use of quantitative methods.

According to Feagin and Sikes (1995) “we need to listen closely to what Black American students tell us about what happens to them and how they feel, act, and think” (p. 91). Quantitative methods do not allow researchers to understand why differences exist in the experiences of African American college students between predominantly white and historically black institutional contexts (Fries Britt & Turner, 2002) or how African American students interpret their experiences. In order to better understand these differences, “future theory must lead to or be derived from the perceptions that the actors themselves have of the situation... In other words, theory must be grounded in the everyday reality of the lives of students and must make sense of their experiences in the various realms of college life” (Tinto, 1986, p. 379). Qualitative methods are primary tools for researchers in this regard. However, qualitative methods do not allow the researcher to do hypothesis testing.

The purpose of this study was to more fully understand the socialization experiences of African American college students, and to investigate and/or uncover new information that can offer meaningful insight for transforming institutional barriers that interfere with the success of African American college students. The existing literature indicates that the experiences of African American college students differ between historically black and predominantly white higher education institutions. This study explores these differences through the following primary questions:

How do individual and institutional factors interact to influence the socialization experiences of African American college students attending PWIs and HBCUs?

How do African American college students’ backgrounds assist or impede their socialization at HBCUs and PWIs?

How do African American college students perceive institutional factors as helping/hindering their socialization experiences (i.e., their ability to navigate and adjust to the academic and social systems of the institution)?

A secondary question that this study will explore is:

How do the socialization experiences of African American college students vary according to gender?

### **Significance**

This study is significant because it begins to fill gaps in the knowledge about the experiences of African American college students in general, and the comparative experiences of African American college students at predominantly white and historically black institutions specifically.

This study is particularistic and heuristic in that it explores the socialization experiences of African American college students and how predominantly white and historically black institutional contexts impact their experiences. The findings of this study add to the literature by providing information for understanding the experiences of African American college students not currently available.

One outcome of this research study is a better understanding of the impact of institutional factors on African American college students' socialization experiences. Inferences from this study could be used to enhance the general study of college impact and student development. In addition, this study could be useful to scholars as well as to college and university presidents, deans, faculty, and administrators in developing institutional environments that are optimally conducive to African American students' success. Further, this study provides school counselors, parents and African American

prospective college students with additional information to consider when making decisions about higher education.

## **Chapter II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

College student socialization is a complex, interactive process that is influenced by a wide range of factors. The literature review provides an overview of socialization theories, followed by a summary of institutional and individual influences on college student socialization. Additionally, the literature review illuminates the defining characteristics of historically Black and predominantly White institutional contexts as well as the literature on the experiences of African American college students within those contexts. Finally, the literature review describes the conceptual framework utilized to investigate students' perceptions of the phenomenon under study.

#### **Socialization Theories**

College student socialization refers to the process through which students come to understand, adjust to and acquire the values, norms, knowledge and skills needed to function within a given institutional context (Merton, 1957; Tinto, 1986; Weidman, 1987). Socialization is the primary mechanism through which the organizational structure is transmitted to members of the institution (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). There are several models of college impact that lend insight into the process of student socialization.

Sociological models of college impact represent one theoretical approach to studying student socialization. Sociological models (Tinto, 1975, 1988; Astin, 1984;



Pascarella, 1985; Weidman, 1987) provide an account of individual and institutional influences on college student socialization and emphasize the nature of individuals' interactions within the institution. More specifically, sociological models suggest that student experiences, and subsequent integration or departure, are influenced by the meaning that individual students ascribe to their relationship with the formal and informal dimensions of the institution (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997, p. 108).

Tinto (1975; 1988; 1986), Pascarella (1985), and Weidman (1987) argue that students begin post-secondary education with a set of important orienting background characteristics (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Generally, these background characteristics include family education level, family income, and prior academic experience and preparation. Tinto (1975) argues that insufficient interactions with others within the college environment and insufficient congruency with the dominant values of the institution increase the likelihood that students will decide to leave the institution.

Where these sociological models depart significantly is in their consideration of institutional factors and external influences on student socialization. Regarding the former, research suggests the formal institutional context has both direct and indirect effects on student socialization. The organizational properties of higher education institutions impact students' experiences and influence their perceptions of and decisions about the institution. These features include administrative structure, institution size, resources, and mission and goals. Regarding the latter, Tinto (1986) suggests that "while external forces may influence decisions to go to college and may greatly constrain the choice of which college to attend, their impact on departure following entry is generally quite minor" (p. 376). In contrast, Weidman (1984), to a greater extent than Tinto or

Pascarella, emphasizes the importance of external influences such as parents and non-college reference groups on student socialization. More on Weidman's theory will be discussed later.

Several researchers have challenged the way socialization theories fail to explain socialization experiences of minority college students. Rendon, Jalamo, and Nora (2000) argue that these theories, which are supposed to consider the interplay of individual and institutional characteristic in facilitating students' socialization to college, work from an acculturation/assimilation perspective that places sole responsibility for students' adjustment on the students without regard for systemic institutional factors that influence their ability to succeed. It is important to understand perceptions of the environmental context when studying the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in higher education; and to understand how embedded issues and definitions characteristic of the institution advantage some and disadvantage others (Tierney, 1992). Hurtado et al (1999) argue that an institutions' historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion can have a significant impact on the prevailing educational context and practices. According to Hurtado et al, many campuses sustain long-standing benefits for particular student groups that often go unrecognized because they are embedded in the culture of a historically segregated environment (p. 17). Allen (1988) argues that individuals who are not male, white, and middle-class are disadvantaged in higher education quantitatively in terms of the amount and economic return on education, and qualitatively in terms of satisfaction with their educational experience.

## **Institutional Influences on Socialization**

**Formal Organization.** Students' experiences are impacted in a variety of ways by the organization and administration of college environments including the way administrators interact with students and patterns of administrative decision making and organizational functioning (Berger, 2000; Bean, 1983; Berger & Braxton, 1998). According to Berger (2000), not only is the primary college environment impacted in this regard, but subenvironments or subsystems as well. Interactional models, like many other models, could give greater attention to the effects of formal organization in shaping students' experiences. Kuh and Love (2000) criticize interactional models of student socialization for underconceptualizing the role of the institution in creating optimal learning conditions for all students. In a review of the literature on student departure, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) found that there is a need for more research on organizational characteristics and student persistence.

Research typically includes organizational features such as administrative structure, and institution size, resources, mission and goals. However, "this approach does little to clarify or explain in any systemic fashion the reasons why effects occur" (Weidman, 1987, p. 7). Organizational attributes such as institutional communication, fairness in the administration of rules and policies and the participation of students in decision-making also exert influences on social integration and departure (Braxton, 2000). For example, the way college classrooms are organized can have a significant impact on the quality of students' experience (Tinto, 2000).

The social system of college not only involves student peers, but also faculty and administration. A number of studies (Allen, 1990; Fleming, 1985; Davis, 1990; Tinto,

1975) indicate the significance of faculty in the socialization process. Research (Pascarella, 1984; Tinto, 1975; Nettles & Johnson, 1987) suggests that contact with faculty influences student attitudes and performance in higher education. Findings in a study by Harris and Nettles (1991) indicate that both race and gender play a role in shaping students' perceptions of faculty interaction.

**Informal Organizational Factors.** Student subcultures can be pervasive in the lives and experiences of college students and constitute a normalizing force. Many student subcultures reflect and reaffirm the dominant culture of the institution. Others act as enclaves for students to find support not available in the campus mainstream (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). These groups can help students negotiate the larger institutional culture and/or affirm their individual identity or interests within it. Student subcultures are maintained through both formal and informal mechanisms of social control such as ceremonies, rituals, grades, and academic disciplines. "In this way, values and behavioral norms are handed down, with some changes, from one student generation to the next" (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 87).

### **Individual Influences on Socialization**

**Background.** One lens through which the socialization process might be understood is that of the consistency between students experiences while at the institution and their expectations and experiences prior to enrolling (Braxton, Vesper & Hossler, 1995). Tinto (1975, 1986) notes that students whose families have more education and affluence are more likely to persist in higher education institutions due to greater congruency between their preparation, values, attitudes and interests and those of the

mainstream institutional culture. This preparation, value orientation, and skill are referred to as cultural or social capital. “Cultural and social capital mean assets, in the form of behaviors, on which individuals and/or families can draw to meet a certain set of established values in society” (Freeman, 1997, p. 527). According to Bourdieu (1977), this set of established values reflects those of the dominant culture. Higher levels of particular types of cultural capital assist students in the meaning-making processes associated with participation in and adjustment to college. As cultural and social capital is based on adherence to and acceptance of the values and cultural patterns of White people in society, the acquisition of cultural and social capital depends on “socioeconomic factors, such as parental incomes level, occupation, educational level, and number of siblings” (Freeman, 1997, 529). For this reason background plays an important role in considerations about student socialization.

Prior educational experiences, in particular high school experiences, are critical in students’ academic preparation for college, and also impact students’ expectations and aspirations for college participation. Parental education and encouragement are significant factors in students’ decisions to participate in college (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1998; Freeman, 1997; McDonough, 1997). Research indicates parents’ educational level and socioeconomic backgrounds are directly related to student involvement in the college environment (Tinto, 1987; McDonough, 1997; Astin, 1975; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997).

**Gender.** Gender has been associated with consistent effects in many areas of functioning including motivational dynamics, coping mechanisms and occupational attainment (Fleming, 1982). Bean and Vesper (1994) assessed gender differences in

college students' satisfaction and found that different factors affect satisfaction for men and women. Women's satisfaction was significantly related to contact with advisors, having friends, and living on campus. For men in this study, Bean and Vesper found that major and occupational certainty were significantly related to satisfaction, but not for women. Hearn and Olzak (1982) found in a study of college men and women that men tended to opt for departments that were less supportive, but offered higher status rewards. Women tended to opt for more supportive departments with lower status rewards. According to Hearn and Olzak, this pattern suggests that women have greater sensitivity to social factors in college or university environments and men have greater sensitivity to external, achievement-related factors.

**Race.** Research indicates that students' experiences in higher education can differ significantly according to the student's race. African American students report more feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction, and do not fare as well as their White counterparts in terms of academic achievement, persistence, or psychosocial adjustment (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Astin, 1982; Feagin, Hernan, Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1988; Thomas, 1981). Sedlacek (1999) indicated that Black students are more likely to experience institutional racism. Allen (1986) found that approximately two-thirds of Black students on predominantly white campuses, but only one-third of White students, felt campus activities were not related to their interests. Findings in a study by Harris and Nettles (1991) indicate that both race and gender play roles in shaping students' perceptions of faculty interaction. According to Sedlacek (1999), Black college students who attended PWIs indicated less communication with faculty, less consistent

feedback from faculty that would allow them to gauge their progress, and less informal interaction with faculty than their White peers.

Research into the college choice process for African American students indicates differences in factors that influence their decisions about college participation. Freeman (1998, 1999) found job expectations, mother's education, and immediate and extended family relationships to be important in students' decisions about college. McDonough, Antonio and Trent (1997) explored predictors of African American students' decision to attend historically black and predominantly white institutions of higher education. They found the most powerful predictor of African American student attendance at HBCUs is geography. Religious affiliation was another predictor of African American student attendance at HBCUs. Sixty-percent of African American students who attend HBCUs are Baptist. Comparatively, less than twenty-percent of all college students report a Baptist affiliation. McDonough, Antonio and Trent also indicated social networks as a positive indicator of students' choice of a black college, particularly the comfortable and nurturing environment students perceive at HBCUs.

### **Predominantly White Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities Defined**

The American higher education system is regarded as one of the most diverse in the world. Its array of higher education institutional types, sizes, governance structures, funding sources, and traditions makes access to some form of post-secondary education possible to a broad range of people. However, despite its diversity, America's system of higher education is marked by a historical legacy of invidious exclusion. That is, although some colleges and universities have histories of admitting and graduating

students of color since their founding, many institutions have a history of excluding racial and ethnic groups from participation.

The historical exclusion of African Americans from participation in higher education is due to the legal prohibition of the education of Blacks in the south until 1865, and then de jure and de facto racial segregation (Nettles, 1988a). “De jure” racial segregation refers to racial separation and discrimination mandated by law. “De facto” racial segregation refers to segregation maintained more by custom than by law. African Americans were not legally permitted to attend segregated white institutions until the mid 1960s when Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited colleges and universities from discriminating against students in admissions solely on the basis of race. One major effect of the exclusion of African Americans’ from mainstream systems of higher education was the development of a post-secondary educational system reserved largely for Whites, and the formation of a separate set of institutions for the education for Black people. The term “predominantly white institution” (PWI) is used here to refer to those higher education institutions that have a historical legacy of excluding Blacks and a historically and predominantly white racial composition.

While HBCUs differ from one institution to the next, there are some basic characteristics that allow their placement in a distinct category of higher education institutions. Unlike other colleges and universities, HBCUs were formed outside of the mainstream system of higher education (Whiting, 1991). Second, HBCUs were founded for the primary purpose of educating Black people, although their charters were not, in most cases, exclusionary (Sims, 1994). Third, the Black College and University Act, Section 322 of Title III defines an HBCU as:



...any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary (of Education) to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation (cited in Sims, 1994, p. 6).

The development of HBCUs is marked by two major periods. The first half of the period was characterized by the rapid development of a large number of private missionary-sponsored schools. Dating back to the period following the close of the American Civil War, The American Missionary Association, the Freedman's Bureau and several African American church denominations undertook the responsibility of advancing African American higher education. These early institutions offered compulsory education for Blacks and eventually provided a college curriculum that mirrored the classical training offered at white institutions throughout the north. The second half of the period was marked by the rapid development of public land grant colleges. Land grant institutions focused on the preparation of Blacks for work in industrial and agricultural fields. For Blacks, the development of land grant institutions under the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 broadened the array of available educational options, at the same time paving the way for legally segregated public higher education in the south.

### **African American College Student Experiences at Predominantly White and Historically Black Institutions**

Since the 1960s, Black students' attendance at PWIs of higher education has increased significantly (Fleming, 1984; Thomas, 1981). It is estimated that approximately three-fourths of African American college students now attend

predominantly white educational institutions (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984). Although African American college students now have access to a broader range of higher education institutions, their experiences remain uneven (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Findings from Allen's (1985) study indicate that campus racial composition is an important influence on outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, social involvement, and occupational aspirations) for African American students. African American students who attend PWIs do not fare as well as their white counterparts in terms of academic achievement, persistence, or psychosocial adjustment (Allen, Epps, and Haniff, 1991; Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984; Nettles, 1988; Thomas, 1981).

Research also indicates marked differences between the experiences of African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs. In general, black students in black schools show better intellectual adjustment than their black counterparts in white schools (Fleming, 1982; Fleming, 1984). A number of studies have confirmed the important contributions of HBCUs to the education of African American college students because of the educationally powerful environments they provide (Allen, 1991; Fleming, 1984; Jackson & Swan, 1991). Davis (1998) suggests that the structures of HBCUs benefit African American college students because they generate and represent African American culture. More specifically, Davis argues that the cultural milieu—that is, the cultural content and the cultural context—of HBCUs have a positive affect on African American college students because HBCUs are vehicles for the production and transmission of African American cultural knowledge as well as for the generation of new life enhancing cultural resources such as networks, attitudes, and behaviors.

**African American Students' Experiences at PWIs.** Since the 1980s, the success of African American and other non-Asian minorities attending PWIs has paled in comparison to the success of White students at PWIs and African American students attending HBCUs (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). In addition, non-Asian minorities attending PWIs have lower grade point averages, are more likely to drop out, and have lower rates of graduate school matriculation than white students attending the PWIs and their Black counterparts at predominantly Black and minority institutions (Nettles, 1988; Astin, 1982).

Research indicates that African American college students who attend PWIs experience more overt racism within the campus environment than do their counterparts at HBCUs, and that African American students' perceptions of racism is often related to their feelings of social isolation, stress and dissatisfaction (Gloria et al, 1999; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Allen (1985) notes the importance of informal elements of organizational structure in predicting student outcomes. "On predominantly white campuses, Black students emphasize feelings of alienation, sensed hostility, racial discrimination, and lack of integration" (Allen, 1992, p. 39, capitalization standardized).

Jackson and Swan (1991) found several differences between African American students attending HBCUs and PWIs and across genders. For example, Black males and females attending PWIs had higher family incomes, high school grades, and felt less engaged in the campus environment. In addition, Black students on predominantly white campuses tended to rely more on their families for financial support, and to help them resolve problems.

Jackson and Swan (1991) found the experiences of Black men attending PWIs and HBCUs to be dissimilar. However, self-confidence was important to Black males at both predominantly white and historically black institutions, but in white universities self-confidence was much more related to achievement than in black universities, although self-confidence was an important factor in both contexts (p. 135).

In the same study, Jackson and Swan found background factors for women were more important in predominantly white institutional contexts, especially the mother's educational and occupational level. Racial consciousness was also an important factor for female students at predominantly white, but not at historically black institutions. Findings revealed that the less racially conscious female respondents were at PWIs, the less likely they were to perform well academically (Jackson & Swan, 1991).

**African American Students Experiences at HBCUs.** On historically Black campuses, "Black students emphasize feelings of engagement, connection, acceptance, and extensive support and encouragement" (Allen, 1992, p. 39). Outcalt and Skews-Cox (2002) found in their study of African American college students at predominantly white and historically black colleges that African American college students attending HBCUs were more satisfied with their sense of community, student-to-student interaction, and the availability of opportunities for leadership than their African American counterparts at PWIs (p. 342).

Black students, both male and female, attending HBCUs tended to rely more on institutional resources for financial support, but resolved more of their own problems relying less on family and institutional support when compared with their Black counterparts at PWIs (Jackson and Swan, 1991). In addition, Jackson and Swan found that social

support was much more critical for students on predominantly white campuses as they experienced feelings of alienation. However, academic services such as tutoring and academic advising emerged as predictors of African American students' satisfaction on historically black campuses. Finally, self-confidence was important for the academic achievement of female students at HBCUs. "Interestingly, [this] factor was totally irrelevant in the white university environment" (Jackson & Swan, 1991, p. 138).

Overall, HBCUs "do a better job of promoting growth and development for African American students than do PWIs in a wide range of student outcomes, including cognitive development, academic achievement, educational aspirations, degree attainment, and college satisfaction" (Berger & Milem, 2000, p. 381). Allen (1992) argues that HBCUs provide social and psychological environments for African American students that compare to the social and psychological environment experienced by white students at PWIs.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Weidman (1989) offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the process of student socialization in higher education, with particular attention to the individual and institutional characteristics. According to Weidman (1989), socialization can be usefully considered from the perspective of the society or groups as well as the individual. From the perspective of the individual, socialization involves learning. From the perspective of the society or group, socialization involves ensuring conformity to group norms. In short, "the individual learns the behavior appropriate to his position in a group through interaction with others who hold normative beliefs about what his role

should be, and who reward or punish him for correct or incorrect actions” (Brim, 1966, p. 9 cited in Weidman, 1989, p. 295).

Student background, institutional characteristics, and student interactions within the college environment are central factors in college students’ experiences and in the impact of college. Student background characteristics include parent socioeconomic status, prior academic experiences such as high school performance and standardized test scores, goals and aspirations prior to matriculation. Research regarding the influence of institutional characteristics on college impact has tended to focus on institution size, resources, and control. However, additional organizational attributes such as mission, faculty expectations, administrative decision-making/leadership, and the extracurricular environment are also important agents of socialization within institutions (Weidman, 1989a). Students’ interactions with faculty and peers, the amount of time devoted to academic endeavors such as studying, and involvement in campus activities are all important influences on a student’s experience. According to Tinto (1993), there is an important link between learning and persistence that arises from the interaction with one’s peers and with the faculty, inside and outside the classroom.

Weidman (1989a) argues that there are differences in the basic content of socialization (group norms), the contexts in which socialization occurs (organizational settings), and individual responses to socializing influences. Just as individuals may become differently socialized because of differences in past experience, motivations, and capacities, they may also become differently socialized because colleges differ in the structuring of both normative contexts such as student residences and classrooms, and of opportunities for social interaction among students, faculty, and staff (Weidman, 1989, p.

297). Therefore, an important step in understanding undergraduate socialization is identifying those sources of influence that are the most salient for a particular student.

Weidman's (1989a) conceptual framework for undergraduate student socialization is based largely on his own research (Weidman 1984, 1989b; Weidman & Friedman, 1984; Weidman & White, 1985), as well as the research of Chickering (1969), Tinto (1975, 1987), and Astin (1977, 1984). Weidman suggests that the process of undergraduate student socialization includes student background characteristics, parental socialization, noncollege reference groups, pre-college normative pressure, the college experience, in-college normative pressure, and socialization outcomes. Figure 1 depicts Weidman's (1989) conceptual model of undergraduate student socialization.

**Parental socialization.** Parents are a primary influence in shaping students' pre-college experiences, college choice decisions, and career aspirations (Tierney, 1992; Braxton, et al, 1997; Tinto, 1975, 1988). Weidman (1984) found that parental lifestyle was influential in the career orientations of college freshman, but decreased in influence by the student's senior year. To some extent, then, the effects of parental socialization or parental pressures are likely to persist throughout students' college careers and impact students' college experiences (Weidman, 1989a).

**Background Characteristics.** The influence of students' background characteristics has been consistently related to student experiences and outcomes (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987). The most influential aspects of students' backgrounds are family socioeconomic status, academic ability, and aspirations prior to college. Socioeconomic status refers to a combination of family and parental traits including family income, occupational status, and educational level. Academic

ability is often associated with high school academic performance and standardized test and entrance exam scores.

**Noncollege Reference Groups.** Institutions of higher education are not completely encapsulated environments (Weidman, 1989a). College students are likely to develop and/or maintain relationships with people outside the immediate institutional context such as friends, employers, and members of church or other civic organizations. These are non-college reference groups. The influence of noncollege reference groups involves the extent to which students' experiences are affected by interactions with those who are not a part of the campus community or more immediate family. The support of noncollege others, including friends and relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.), is also important for students, and for older students and minority students in particular (Weidman, 1989a).

**Precollege Normative Pressure.** "Preferences, aspirations, and values held by students prior to college enrollment form the perspectives and expectations held by students prior to enrollment and shape their encounters with the higher education institution" (Weidman, 1989a, p. 303). Precollege normative pressure represents the cumulative effect of students' background, parental socialization, and noncollege others in shaping students' expectations and responses to the new environment (Weidman, 1989a).

**College Experience.** Weidman (1989a) divides the college experience into academic and social dimensions, and further divides the academic and social dimensions into formal and informal dimensions. The academic dimension of the college experience involves those features or aspects of the institution that are designed to help achieve its



educational objectives. The social dimension of the college experience is comprised of the mechanisms through which individuals at the institution interact. Formal organizational structures are designed to accomplish stated objectives, and are explicit features of the institutions. Informal structures are organized around implicit rather than explicit norms and values and would include relatively unstructured institutional experiences. Examples of the formal academic dimension include the institutional mission, the organization of academic departments, faculty, instructional resources, and written policies and procedures. The “hidden curriculum”—that is the unspoken, unwritten rules defining faculty expectations for student performance, would constitute one example of the informal academic dimension (Weidman, 1989a). Residence halls, student organizations, extracurricular activities would all be a part of the formal social dimension; whereas interactions among peers and friends at the institution represent informal social norms within the institutional context. According to Astin (1993) and Blimling (1988) on-campus residence tends to increase student involvement and satisfaction with the institution.

**Socialization Processes.** The academic and social values and behavioral norms of the higher education institutions are exerted through intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. Intrapersonal socialization processes are students’ personal perceptions and assessments of the college environment and the institution’s contribution to the attainment of personal goals (Weidman, 1989a). Intrapersonal socialization processes mediate students’ socialization experiences and include, for example, students’ feelings of satisfaction at the institution and the fulfillment of personal expectations.

In addition to intrapersonal processes, the impact of college is also determined by the extent and content of one's formal and informal interactions with agents of socialization on campus (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Socialization may be thought of as a process that involves continuous interaction between the individual and those who seek to influence the individual (Weidman, 1989, p. 304). Weidman (1989a) refers to this interaction as interpersonal socialization processes. The effectiveness of interpersonal processes is enhanced by the frequency and intensity of interactions with others (Weidman, 1989a).

Integration is the extent to which the student begins to accept and adhere to the norms, values, and relationships characteristic of the institution. However, "the expectation is that the less favorable the student is in his or her perceptions of the college environment, the less likely the student is to be socialized towards the norms of the college" (Weidman, 1989a, p. 319).

**In-College Normative Pressure.** "In studying college student socialization, it is important to explore the impacts of normative contexts as well as ways in which interpersonal relationships among members serve to either reinforce or counteract the normative influences exerted within various specific contexts" (Weidman, 1989a, p. 205). In-college normative pressures are the conditions within the context of the institution that contribute to the change or reinforcement of students' values toward institutional norms. In essence, in-college normative pressures are aimed at ensuring conformity to group norms. While change in student orientations is an expected outcome, reinforcement of already present student orientations may also be expected (Weidman, 1989a).

**Socialization Outcomes.** Career choices, life style preferences, aspirations, and values are examples of socialization outcomes (Weidman, 1989a). Outcomes are important because they represent change or growth in students during the college experience (Astin, 1993) as well as the quality of life following students' undergraduate education (Weidman, 1989a). According to Weidman (1989a), minority students may experience different socialization outcomes as a result of difficulties in their social integration.

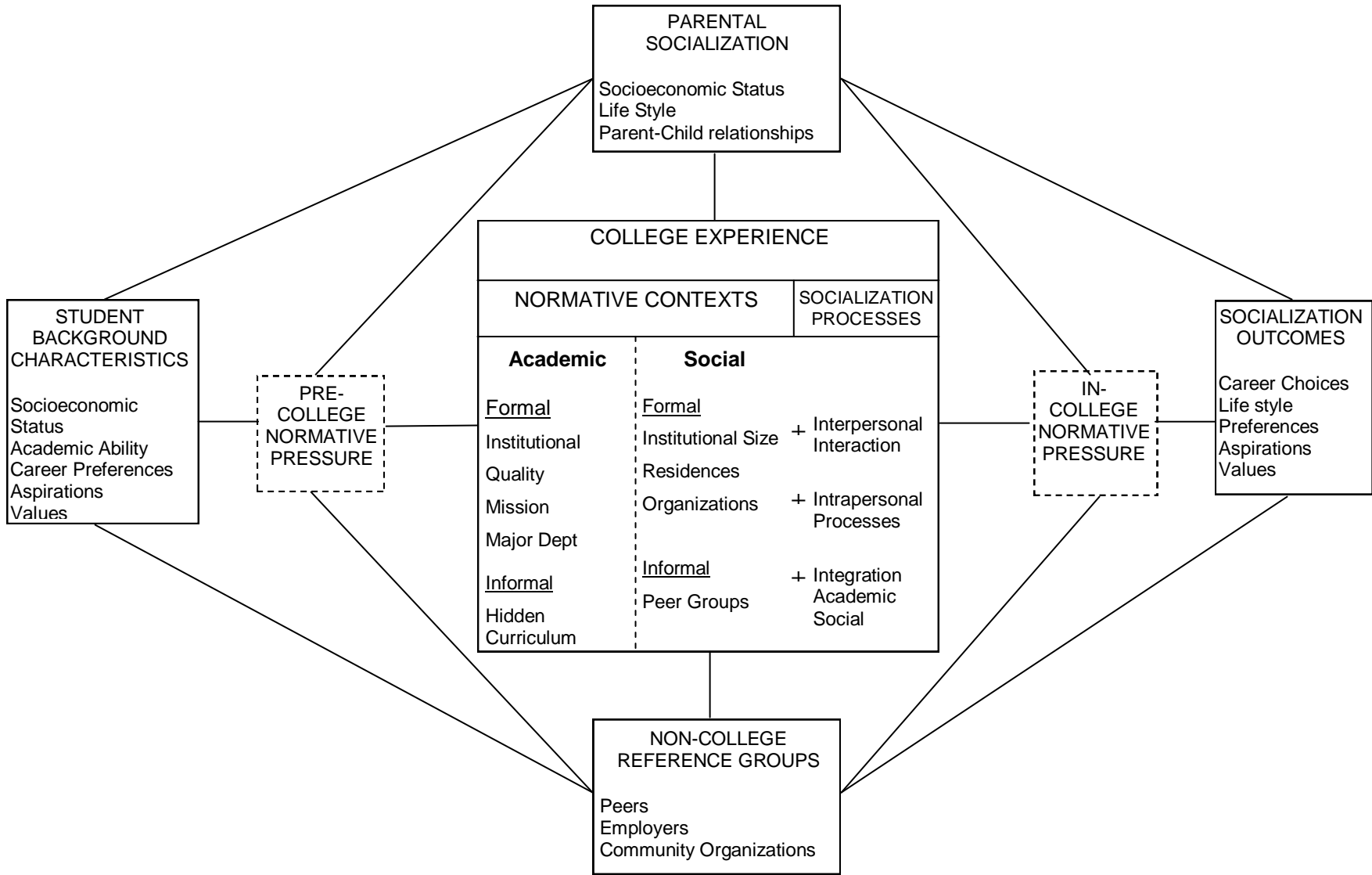


Figure 1. Weidman's Conceptual Model of Undergraduate Socialization

### **Influences on African American College Students' Socialization Experiences.**

African American college students' race, the predominant racial composition of the institution, experiences of parents, particularly with racism, and informal interaction with faculty seem to exert some influence on the socialization experiences of African American students at PWIs and HBCUs. Research (Tracey and Sedlacek, 1985; Nettles et al, 1986; Himelhoch et al, 1997) indicates that the experiences of minority college students are influenced by different socio-cultural and contextual factors than those that have an impact on white students.

***Student background.*** Research regarding the effects of Black students' backgrounds on their experiences across predominantly white and historically black institutional contexts is mixed. For example, findings from Allen's (1985) study of Black college students at PWIs indicate that for Black males, background characteristics such as family income, high school grades and degree aspirations were not correlated with higher college grades. Background factors for Black women were more important at PWIs than HBCUs. In particular, the mother's educational and occupational level and racial consciousness were important factors for female students at PWIs, but not at HBCUs (Jackson & Swan, 1991). Research by Freeman (1997, 1998) highlights the importance of African American students' immediate and extended families, and particularly the role of mothers, and the importance of job expectations in the college choice process.

***Parental Socialization.*** Parental socialization influences may be especially salient in the experiences of African American college students. Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) found that Black and white parents share a number of common concerns about the education of their children. However, Feagin, Vera and Imani also found that Black

parents and their children often face, in addition to more general educational concerns, educational dilemmas that are unique. For example, in making decisions about which college to choose Black parents and students must consider the racial climate of the institution. Further, “Black parents’ difficult choices and racial struggles become part of the lives of their children both before and after they choose a college, particularly if they choose a predominantly white institution” (p. 20). Feagin, Vera, and Imani also indicate that Black parents view their children’s participation in college as giving meaning to their struggle against racism, and as a continuation of their own individual and familial hopes and aspirations. According to Freeman, “African American students describe the feeling of carrying the hopes and dreams of the entire family” (p. 186).

***College Experience.*** It is clear from the existing literature that the experiences of African American college students differ not only according to their race, but the predominant racial composition of the institution they attend. Across institutional contexts, socializing agents of the college or university such as faculty, students, and staff or administrators are central to the experiences African American college students. The nature of these experiences seems to vary. Allen (1992) found that in settings in which African American students were the minority, these students were more reliant on faculty to help them adjust to the university environment, whereas for students on Black campuses significant others are more likely to be other students (Davis, 1991). For African American students at black schools there is greater informal interaction with faculty (Allen, 1992). At PWIs, white faculty members may give less consistent reinforcement to Black students than to White students (Sedlacek, 1999). This lack of reinforcement makes it difficult for students to develop realistic self-appraisals of their

performance at the institution which, in turn, makes it difficult for them to have a sense of how well they are actually meeting faculty expectations (Sedlacek, 1999). Further, Sedlacek indicates that Black students may not be in a position at PWIs to become a part of the central informal communication systems used by faculty, staff and other students.

***In-College Normative Pressure.*** The quality of African American college students' experiences in post-secondary institutions are impacted by students' perceptions of the university environment, perceptions of cultural fit within the environment (i.e., cultural congruity) and stress created by the environmental context (Gloria et al, p. 25). Research indicates differences in African American students' perceptions of the campus environment across contexts, and differences in these students experiences as well. For example, Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993) argue that minority status stress affects the adjustment of minority students and that the most significant minority status stresses are those 1) which undermine minority students' academic confidence and ability to integrate into the campus community (i.e., stigmatized or special status despite individual accomplishments); and 2) failures within the institutional structure (such as academic expectations and institutional intervention or support).

***Socialization Outcomes.*** The literature indicates that HBCUs do a better job of promoting growth and development for African American students than do PWIs in a wide range of outcomes, including cognitive development, academic achievement, educational aspirations, and occupational aspirations (Allen, 1992; Berger & Milem, 2000; Fleming, 1984; Himelhoch et al, 1997; Terenzini & Flowers, 1999).

Weidman's conceptual model of undergraduate student socialization (1989) will be used to investigate the socialization experiences of African American college students

at PWIs and HBCUs in this study. Weidman's conceptualization is appropriate for this study because of its attention to individual and institutional characteristics, and its adaptability to "the differing patterns of socialization that may be represented among specific ethnic and gender groups" (Weidman, 1989, p. 313).



## Chapter III

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### Fit of the Paradigm

It is imperative that methodological concepts “be devised in such a way as to capture those phenomena which hold the causal or functional relations that science seeks to discover. Those relations and the character of the phenomena that they relate must be discovered, they cannot be legislated by definitions” (Hammersley, 1989, p. 121).

Qualitative studies offer researchers the opportunity to explore phenomena about which relatively little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, the use of qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, and the flexibility to adapt the design of the study to incorporate new information and interpretations about what people communicate about their experiences (Hammersley, 1989). This includes the ability to document the creative, unexpected, and subjective side of action— that is, the side of human behavior that cannot be predicted. Moreover, the use of qualitative methods can reveal “the process or sequence of events in which individual factors and the particular social environment to which [one] has been responsive have united in conditioning habits, attitudes, personality and behavior trends” (Hammersley, 1989, p. 94).

Qualitative methodology was appropriate for use in this study for several reasons. First, this study investigated how individual and institutional factors influence the

socialization of African American college students at PWIs and HBCUs. Second, this study specifically considered the impact of the institutional context on the socialization of African American college students (Yin, 1994). In addition, the use of qualitative methodology allowed the researcher the flexibility to adapt the research design to incorporate new information and develop an in-depth understanding of the socialization of African American college students (Yin, 1994). Qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, are superior for identifying the complex relationships among institutional features and the behavior of individual and groups of students (Kuh, 1990) because they generate descriptions and narratives which capture the complex relationships between and among variables and provide detailed information about the phenomenon under study. Descriptions and narratives were used in this study to provide in-depth information about the socialization experiences of African American college students (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Merriam, 1998).

### **Site and Sample Selection**

“The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Purposive sampling was used in this study to select information-rich cases that take adequate account of the contextual conditions and cultural norms that shape the socialization experiences of African American college students and illuminate the questions under study (Merriam, 1998; Erlandson et al, 1993).

**Site Selection.** Two sites were selected for this study to compare socialization experiences of African American college students attending predominantly white and

historically black colleges and universities. To maximize the comparative value of the data and to illuminate the obvious and subtle dimensions of the institutional context, one PWI and one HBCU were selected based on roughly similar institutional characteristics including: a) institutional type; b) funding source; c) geographic location; and d) size of the student body.

As previously discussed, research indicates the formal institutional context has both direct and indirect effects on college student socialization. The organizational aspects of higher education institutions impact students' experiences and influence their perceptions of and decisions about the institution. Administrative structure, institution size, resources, and mission and goals are among the most noted formal institutional structures in college impact research (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The sites selected for this study included: a) Wellington University, a private, research university with very-high research activity, located in an urban area, with a total student population of 11,092 students; and b) Branham University, a private, research university with high-research activity, located in an urban area, with a total student population of 10,658 students.

***Branham University.*** Chartered in 1867, Branham University is located in the northwest section of a major metropolitan area. Branham University is a private, co-educational urban university, offering more than 100 programs to its 10,658 students. Branham University has four campuses covering more than 250 acres. Two of these campuses house the School of Law and the School of Divinity respectively. Another campus houses a facility for the study of life and physical sciences. Branham University's 89-acre main campus sits on a hill-top just minutes from the city's

downtown, and contains most of the University's classroom buildings, administrative offices, centers and institutes. Branham University is also the home of a hospital with the designation of level-one trauma center.

On typical day, the mall of the main campus is full of students talking, studying, and moving from building to building to building. The mall is surrounded by academic buildings in which students take classes, as well as an undergraduate library, administration building, auditorium, and student center. In addition to buildings, the mall includes and is surrounded by oaks and a variety of other trees and foliage. The flag pole near the center of the mall, and trees closest to the student center auditorium provide a place for students to congregate with peers.

In Fall 2003, Branham University was comprised of 7,059 undergraduates. Approximately seventy percent percent of the undergraduate student body was African American, while approximately ten percent were international, approximately twenty percent were ethnically unknown, and less than one percent were White, Hispanic, or Asian and/or Pacific Islander. Approximately three-quarters of the student body received some type of financial aid to assist with tuition. Geographically, Branham University's student body is comprised of students from all 50 states, and more than 100 countries. The majority of the student body is comprised of students from the mid-Atlantic (approximately 50%), southeastern (approximately 20%), and western (approximately 10%) United States.

***Wellington University.*** Chartered in 1873, Wellington University is located just minutes southwest of the downtown of a metropolitan area. Wellington University is a private, co-educational urban university, offering more than 100 programs to its 11,294

students. Wellington University has two campuses covering more than 300 acres. These campuses include the main campus, and the campus of the college of education and human services. The 280-acre main campus contains most of Wellington University's classroom buildings, administrative offices, centers and institutes.

On typical day, the mall of the main campus may have a few students playing frisbee or tossing a ball, and scurrying to class. However, in the student center and adjacent dining hall many students can be found talking, studying, and gathering with peers. The main campus is expansive and park-like. Almost all of the academic programs and schools are located on the main campus as well as a main library and several school-specific libraries. Administration and administrative services are located in several buildings, including one dedicated exclusively to admissions and financial aid, and one for the executive administration of the university including the chancellor, provost and related offices, and university counsel. This building also includes the college of arts and sciences. Wellington University's campuses is surrounded by oaks, magnolias, and a variety of other trees and foliage.

In Fall 2003 Wellington University was comprised of 6,283 undergraduates. Seven percent of the undergraduate student body is African American, while seventy-two percent were White. Approximately four percent of undergraduate students were Hispanic, nearly six percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, two percent were international students, and approximately seven percent were ethnically unknown. Approximately one-half of the student body received some type of financial aid to assist with tuition. Geographically, Wellington University's student body is comprised of students from all 50 states, and more than 100 countries. The majority of the student

body is comprised of students from the southeastern (45%), mid-western (15%), and mid-Atlantic (15%) United States.

**Sample Selection.** The strength of purposive sampling lies in selecting respondents based on what they can contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon (Erlandson et al., 1993). Thus, participants for this study were selected for their perceived ability to elaborate on the constructions that had already been introduced (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 91) and to enhance the researcher's understanding of their socialization experiences within their specific institutional context.

Very little of the research on the experiences of Black college students distinguishes the within-group differences among them. Some Black college students are Black American or African American, some are from Africa or the Caribbean, and others are biracial (White, 1998, p. 93). This study specifically explores the experiences of African American college students attending PWIs and HBCUs. Therefore, the sampling frame was limited to those students who identified themselves as African American.

In addition to self-identification as African American, other attributes of interest for participants for this study included traditional students enrolled full-time and between the ages 18 and 23, and of junior class standing. In a study of the perception of the university environment from the perspective of traditional freshmen as compared with adult learners, Kuh and Sturgis (1980) defined traditional aged students as those between the ages of 18-22. Kuh and Sturgis (1980) argue that students beyond this traditional age may face the demands presented by full-time work and family in addition to classroom demands. Further, as compared with traditional students, "older students tend to spend relatively little time on campus and rarely attend or participate in extra curricular

activities” (Kuh & Sturgis, 1980, p. 484). Students who were classified as juniors were included in the sampling frame to capitalize on their length of experience at the university and within their major departments. An effort was made to balance the gender of study participants because, as previously discussed, the undergraduate experiences of college men and women may differ substantially. An effort was also made to include students from various academic disciplines for “variety but not necessarily representativeness” (Stake, 1994).

In qualitative research the size of the sample is determined by the quality or richness of the information as opposed to information volume (Merriam, 1998). Thus, “the basic rule is, there are no rules for sample size” (Erlandson et al, 1993, p. 85). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), sampling should be terminated at the point of redundancy— that is when no new information is forthcoming. A minimum of six participants from each site was set “based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study” (Patton, 1990, p. 186). Nine participants from each site were included in the study. Table 1 depicts the pseudonym, sex, city of origin, and college major of participants in the study at Branham University. Table 2 depicts the pseudonym, sex, city of origin, and college major of participants in the study at Wellington University.

Table 1. Study Participants, Branham University

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>City of Origin</b>	<b>College Major</b>
Camille Mitchell	F	Yonkers, NY	Business, Marketing
Henry Abrams	M	Chicago, IL	Engineering, Chemical Engineering
Justin Stewart	M	Bowie, MD	Business, Computer Information Systems
Jeff Farris	M	Atlanta, GA	Arts and Science, Political Science
Janine Smith	F	Englewood, NJ	Business Administration
Melanie Scott	F	Richmond, VA	Arts and Science, English Literature
Le'chelle Banks	F	Nashville, TN	Business, Marketing
Janice White	F	Durham, NC	Business, Finance
Jack Johnson	M	New Orleans, LA	Communications, Radio/TV

Table 2. Study Participants, Wellington University

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>City of Origin</b>	<b>College Major</b>
Danae Oberman	F	Baytown, TX	Art History
Kelly Brooks	F	Oklahoma City, OK	Neuroscience
Melissa Yates	F	Decatur, IL	Finance/ Human and Organizational Development
Larry Parsons	M	Detroit, MI	Human and Organizational Development
Priscilla Smead	F	Detroit, MI	Sociology
Patricia West	F	Windham, NH	Women's Studies
Jason Brown	M	Memphis, TN	Engineering
Jared Simpson	M	Bronx, NY	Human and Organizational Development
Tonya Jones Barnett	F	Queens, NY	Premed/Human and Organizational Development



## **Data Collection Procedures**

Snowball sampling technique was used to select study participants. Snowball sampling benefits inductive, theory-building analysis because it identifies cases of interest from people who know what cases are information-rich and who will make good interview subjects (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Contact was made with specific administrative and faculty members at each institution to establish institutional contacts and to provide an overview of the study and seek their recommendations for initial participants for this study. Participants were initially based on the recommendations of the administrative or faculty contact established within each institution. Campus directory or public telephone information was used to make initial contact with prospective participants. Initial contact occurred through a telephone call in which the nature of the study and criteria for participation in the study were explained, and their willingness to participate in the study was determined.

During this telephone call: participants indicated their interest; eligibility based on the sample criteria; and a time and location for the interview was determined. Also, during this phone call, as well as at the conclusion of the interview, students were asked to recommend others who fit the sampling frame and who would make good interview subjects. Because of the varying nature of students' schedules, several attempts were made to reach prospective participants at different dates and times. Whenever possible, a brief voice message was left with the subject and researcher's contact information. Some prospective participants never responded to efforts to contact them. Some who were

identified as prospective participants declined participation due to the fact they did not meet the criteria.

Students who agreed to participate were sent a cover letter (Appendix A) and a human subjects informed consent form (Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the study, confirming the time and location of their interview as well as other pertinent information. A human subjects informed consent form was also taken to each interview and signature obtained.

Data for this study were collected from interviews, observations within the campus context, and relevant artifacts. The use of multiple sources of evidence is a major strength of the study, and provides multiple measures of the same phenomenon and enhances the accuracy of the findings (Yin, 1994).

Semi-structured interviews were used for this study. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a basic set of questions to allow the researcher to address common issues with each respondent and across institutional contexts while maintaining the flexibility to respond to the unique perspectives of the participants (Merriam, 1998). The general focus of the interview questions centered on the dimensions of Weidman's concept of undergraduate student socialization. In particular, the interviews focused on students' background, parental relationships, relationships with non-college others, interactions within the college environment, and socialization outcomes (Appendix C). To achieve and maintain a conversational quality in the interview process, the wording and order of the questions were flexible. For example, participants' responses to some questions led into other questions. The initial interviews lasted a minimum of one hour, but not more than two hours, and were audio taped. Follow-up interviews were conducted as

necessary and did not last more than two hours. Interviews were conducted in a variety of places and were selected based on the student's schedule and preference. For example, several interviews were conducted in campus study lounges, libraries, and eateries.

Notes were taken after each interview via a contact summary form (Appendix D) to summarize and capture key points, provide back up notes to the interview, and to initiate the data analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 1994).

Additional sources of data included observations and artifacts. Direct observations were informal and included visits to the study sites to observe the physical setting, activities and interactions among individuals in the environment, and other factors suggested by the students that offered insight into their experiences within the institutional context such as the quad, residence halls, and other campus facilities and spaces. Observations were captured in field notes. Artifacts included items referenced by students such as the student newspapers, and other items, such as documentation and demographic information, that could be used to help provide an understanding of the institutional context and/or the experiences of the students within it.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, the purpose of analysis is to construct a comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon under study including the interpersonal, social, and cultural dimensions of the environment (Erlandson et al, 1993). One of the few rules of qualitative research is that the processes of data collection and analysis are recursive. Because data collection and analysis are complimentary, on-going, simultaneous

processes, they help the researcher develop findings that are trustworthy (Merriam, 1998).

The process of data analysis included using insights and information gained during earlier interviews and observations to inform later interviews. A contact summary form was used to facilitate this process. Once data collection was completed, the second phase of data analysis began. This involved taking information obtained during the data collection and reconstructing it into meaningful wholes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Interviews were transcribed verbatim to provide a strong database for analysis. The other sources of evidence collected in the study were compared with interview transcripts, field notes of observations and contact forms, and artifacts.

The constant comparative method of grounding theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used to analyze the data and search for interactive behavioral patterns and basic social processes that characterized the experiences of the study participants. Coding was developed according to this method— which included examining the data for key issues, recurrent events, and activities that became the categories of focus, carefully looking for the diversity of the dimensions of the categories. The researcher then described the categories of focus and categorized all of the incidents in the data while constantly searching for and comparing new incidents of a category with others already in that category. The logic was clarified and data were integrated and rearranged as necessary, until a model emerged that uncovered the basic social processes and relationships under study. Nudist QSR software was used as a tool to assist in coding and storing data analyzed in this study. Peer debriefing was also used during data analysis to discuss, confirm, and refine emerging themes and patterns.

## **Trustworthiness**

Validity and reliability in qualitative studies are determined by trustworthiness. “Trustworthiness enables a naturalistic study to lay claim to methodological soundness” (Erlandson et al, 1993, p. 131). Criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of the study includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Triangulation of multiple sources, including interviews, observations and artifacts, was used to ensure the representation of multiple constructions of reality (Erlandson et al, 1993). In addition, member checking occurred during the study through informal conversations with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing was also used during data analysis to evaluate emerging themes and patterns.

Transferability is established by describing in detail the relationships and intricacies of the environment being studied (Erlandson et al, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposive sampling was used in this study to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the socialization of African American college students. Further, a detailed description of each institutional context is offered to allow readers to determine similarities between institutional contexts and whether the findings might be applied to their campus environment (Erlandson et al, 1993).

Dependability was established in this study by establishing an audit trail including use of an interview guide, field notes, and artifacts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As previously indicated, this study utilized triangulation and peer-debriefing as two mechanisms of confirmability. In addition, the case report for this study will include a thick description of the socialization experiences of African American college students

including examples of raw data to illustrate and support the study's findings (Erlandson et al, 1993).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The use of a qualitative research methodology is one of the major strengths of this study. "A person filling out a questionnaire... even though he is trying to be genuine—may not be able to provide accurate information about his usual behavior in real, complex settings" (Hamilton et al., 1977, p. 194). The use of open-ended, semi-structured interviews makes explanation and clarification possible. Another strength of the study is the use of in-person interviews. This will allow the interviewer to develop a rapport with interviewees and observe non-verbal gestures.

A strength and limitation of the study is the race of the researcher. This will provide a common cultural reference with the interviewees and insight about the nuances of language and cultural experiences that an "outsider" may not understand. In addition, the race of the researcher may help build trust between the interviewer and participants and help put the participants at ease with sharing information about their experiences. Simultaneously, the race of the researcher may be a limitation in that I have my own cultural experiences. These may affect my interpretations of meanings and understandings unique to the participants' cultural experiences.

Other limitations of this study would include the size. Although qualitative methods involve investigation of phenomena until no new information emerges, the constraints of time and expense are limitations of qualitative methods. The lack of anonymity associated with in-person interviews may be a deterrent to some prospective

participants. However, students who agreed to participate were assured that their identity and the identity of their institution would be kept confidential and referred to only by pseudonym.

## Chapter IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the socialization experiences of African American college students at PWIs and HBCUs. The primary research questions were: *How do individual and institutional factors interact to influence the socialization experiences of African American college students attending PWIs and HBCUs? Moreover, how do African American college students' backgrounds assist or impede their socialization at HBCUs and PWIs? How do African American college students perceive institutional factors as helping/hindering their socialization experiences (i.e., their ability to navigate and adjust to the academic and social systems of the institution)?* A secondary question that this study explored was: *How do the socialization experiences of African American college students vary according to gender?*

In order to address the primary and secondary questions associated with this study, the findings included in this report represent only the themes and patterns that emerged in the data collected in this study. From analysis of the data across institutions, several common themes emerged which addressed the primary research questions.

Across both institutions, students' early commitment to college participation, expectations and preparation for college, parents, and formal college experiences including interaction with faculty in class, were identified as influences on students'



socialization experience. Participants also had similar perceptions of non-college references at both institutions. Several themes emerged that differed across institutional contexts relative to students' socialization experiences including institutional choice, and perceptions peer norms. At Branham University institutional values and administrative support also emerged as themes in the data.

In exploring the secondary question, "How do the socialization experiences of African American college students vary according to gender?", no differences in the socialization experiences of the males and females emerged as a trend among the African American college students who participated in this study.

### **Perceptions of Similar Influences on Student Socialization at Branham and Wellington Universities**

Research indicates that a wide range of factors, both prior to college and upon matriculation, may tend to push or pull students toward or away from an ideal state of social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the institution (Tinto, 1988; and Benjamin, 1993). In this study, across both institutions, perceptions of individual factors related to students' backgrounds centered on influences on their college participation such as early commitment, and academic preparation and expectations. Students' perceptions of institutional factors that emerged as push and pull factors across both institutions included faculty-student interaction in class, and, more specifically faculty expectations and class structure, concern for students' learning, rapport with students, and engagement of students in class. The role of parents was also perceived as an influence on students' pre-college as well as in-college experiences.

**Early Commitment to Participation.** Research (Orfield et al, 1984; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989) indicates that environmental influences inside and outside the home affect students' college choice decision-making process. Inside the home, parents may have considerable influence on college choice (Freeman, 1997), and, according to Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith (1989), the influence of parents is a predictor of students' educational aspirations. The literature also suggests that the college-choice process can be lengthy (McDonough, 1997). According to the students at Branham University and Wellington University, college was always a part of the plan. It was both an expectation set by parents, and a goal to which the students aspired for themselves. Denaë's sentiments echo the sentiments of almost ninety percent of the students in this study:

It was never really an option not to...Because me and my mom have been talking about college for as long as I can remember. Like, where I wanted to go, and I've always wanted to go to this school or that school...I think that's just something that I have talked about for myself. Like, I wanted to go to college, and my mom has always talked about college...It was always "what college do you want to go to now?" She left the options open for me but it was mutually discussed that I would apply to like all top 50 schools, but then, like, from there I could choose considering all of the benefits.

Similarly, another student, Henry, elaborates on his commitment to attend college:

My parents made it known quite early that I was either going to go to the military or I was going to go to college because I was not going to be staying in their house...So it was kind of like the next step for me...I was pretty self-motivated. I really wanted to go to college. I didn't want to go out and get a job. College was kind of like that next step. It was kind of understood that you have to go to college if you wanted to get ahead, if you wanted to meet your goal. Like, college was a goal of mine. I actually graduated from high school to go to college...That's what you do...I made the decision to go ahead and go to college and take my education seriously.

**Parents' Influence on College Choice.** At both Branham and Wellington parents played a significant role in students' choice to participate in college. In particular, parents of students in this study were perceived as setting the early expectation of college attendance. While the college attendance of parents in both groups of students varied, students perceived their college attendance as very important to their parents. The data indicate that students perceived their education as being important to their parents because their parents wanted them to have opportunities that they (parents) did not have, in particular better economic opportunities.

According to the data, students described parents as emphasizing the students' ability to compete for jobs and having access to the economic advantages associated with a college education as important reasons for college participation. Larry described it as:

They feel like if I don't get an education, I'm not going to be anything...My parents feel like the number one thing is to get an education because there is nothing like having the type of knowledge that competes in the workplace. So they value that a lot..."When you get that, you'll be right in the door. You're going to make something out of yourself. Go get your education."

Similarly, Justin described his parents' sentiments on the importance of a college education as:

"It's very important. It comes first. Nothing else matters, but the education. Everything else will come second..."They just want me to succeed. They don't want to see me staying where I am now, doing—they don't want to see me poor. "Get a good paying job, and get some benefits, don't just stay working a regular teenage job like retail and stuff like that all your life."

Another dimension of parents' interest in students' having better opportunities than they did was the idea of college attendance as a matter of family legacy. As represented in the data, the notion of family legacy situates the importance of students' college attendance in relationship to the educational opportunity, success, and expectation

of the family. More succinctly, family legacy is largely influence exerted by parents, and reflects students' perceptions of the value of education beyond benefit to just themselves.

In almost every instance for students at both Branham University and Wellington University, going to college represented a personal goal as well as an opportunity to contribute to the family. Two students, Lechelle and Patricia, describe the importance of their choice to attend college to their families as continuing the legacy:

...with education comes a lot of advantages, so they want me to have every advantage and surpass them in the things they did. There is no growth in a family if everybody is always—if you go in a circle. So you have to move upward...where education isn't as important, you notice that the families continue to do the same thing...Whereas in families where education is very important...there's always upward movement, so the family can do better at home. (Lechelle)

The occupations that my family has always had—it was just an understanding that you have to go to college. I mean, there're judges, lawyers—it's just the expectation for the most part. This is your cousin GiGi and she's a magistrate. You just can't roll into these types of positions—there is the idea of preparation. That is that. (Patricia)

Tonya, Jack, and Dena describe being the first in their families to participate in college as breaking the pattern of non-participation in college.

A lot of my other cousins did not fare very well. I mean, my age-mates didn't even finish high school, didn't show any initiative, started having babies, that whole thing. So, it was like, somebody's got to make it. Even when I go home, I think it's very important to my cousins... They're really proud of me, but they wouldn't think to do it themselves. I have one cousin who is three years younger than me, and she just started a semester behind what she should have...So she's really just excited for herself but also excited that there is somebody who has done this before...I think she appreciates having somebody come before. (Tonya)

As long as I was in school, it seemed like college was the next thing...[My mom] was from Alabama and she was from the era of bussing...and her class was like one of the first classes to get bussed to her high school...her advisors didn't really talk to the black kids about college, so for the black kids high school was it. You go to high school and then you pick up a trade or something. And her mom wasn't the type of mom to push kids...her mom didn't push her to go to college. So, like, raising us, my mom, she was always pushing us and was like, "Well y'all

are smart so naturally y'all will go to college, but y'all will have to get a scholarship cause I can't afford it"...She realizes if she had been pushed in school she could do more, you know, have a more stable life. (Jack)

My whole life she's put a huge emphasis on my doing well in school and that being my first priority besides job and family...When I was real young, I guess she saw a talent in me and saw something that she felt like she had to nurture because other people in my family are really intelligent people, but just never went to college and made really bad choices, and she felt like that couldn't happen with me. I learned to read when I was two and was in gifted programs and accelerated programs...she just really wants me to do well because she didn't like even graduate from high school, you know, she had to get her GED. (Danae)

**Academic Expectations and Preparation for College.** Academic ability and preparation are also predictors of student' educational aspirations, and success in college (Tinto, 1988). Overall, students at both Branham University and Wellington University expected college to be challenging academically, and felt academically prepared for college. Students attributed their academic preparation directly to the curriculum and related skills, such as study skills and time management, of the secondary school context. Justin's remarks capture the perceptions of students in the study that their high school curriculum prepared them for college, and in many instances was similar to the information covered in their college courses during their first year.

...Classes that I took in high school, things I learned in high school I found myself repeating at college...like math classes, typing skills, English class, stuff like that... Yeah, I felt pretty much prepared because at first, I mean, of course they would use stuff, like some stuff you already know just to kind of brush up on it. So I felt prepared. Then they started getting into things I didn't know as much about. It got a little harder, but you've got to learn, so that's what learning's all about.

In addition to preparing them for college academically, participants described the high school experience as helping them balance the academic and social demands of college. Students perceived study and time management skills they learned in high school as

being the biggest help. Priscilla's comments below summarize students' sentiments regarding experience of the value of the secondary experience:

My experience prepared me very adequately for college as far as—I know that if I do too much socializing my academics are going to falter. That was an adjustment I didn't have to go through freshman year. I have friends who were, like, on their last semester of probation...so there are adjustments that I didn't have to make when it came to college, so it just kind of was a continuation of senior year.

**Parents' Role in the College Experience.** In addition to playing a major role in students' college attendance, parents at both Branham University and Wellington University also played key roles during the college experience. Students at both institutions perceived parents as allowing them to pursue their own major/career interests, having high expectations of their academic performance, and providing support during the college experience. Students perceived parents as encouraging them to study and pursue careers that interested them, to do things they were good at, and would enable them to make a living.

Students perceived parents as supportive in helping them explore majors, and encouraging them to “do what you want to do.” Camille described her parent's response:

My mom is just basically, like, ‘You can do whatever you put your mind to. I may not agree, but I support you in any way I can...’ We have conflicts sometimes...And then she has to come back, like, ‘I understand that it's your life...I know [you're] a planning person, so I know if that's what you want to do then you're going to do the right steps to take care of what you want to get done.’

Another student, Jeff, underscores this sentiment regarding his career goals and aspirations and describing his parents as “...kind of just let me go and do what I wanted to do. My parents knew that I was a self motivator, and that I was kind of dedicated to what I wanted to do and that I had good vision of where I wanted to try to go, so they just

let me go.” Some students indicated their parents offered suggestions, but even in those instances the sentiment was still one that encouraged the student to determine what they wanted to do. For example, Janine summarized it as, “My mom would make suggestions, like, about, ‘Well, if you don’t know what to do, you like math, so what about that?’...My mom would always try to make suggestions, but she would never be like ‘I don’t think it should be this, or I think it should be that’.”

In terms of academic performance, students perceived their parents expected them to excel academically. In general, the students characterized this expectation as “doing their best.” About her education, Lechelle summarizes parents’ expectations for performance as, “It’s ridiculous. My mom wants me to make the grades. My dad always says, do your best. But he feels like my best is As, so it’s the same thing. Another student, Tonya, remarks:

They just expected me to perform well. Like the semester when I didn’t do well...when I contacted my mother, my mother was just like, ‘I don’t understand... What’s going on here?’...Her only concern was thinking I’m going to do well...So, when the bad mark came, she was just like, “What’s this all about? I don’t understand it.” I don’t think she was in tune with what I was doing, so it was just hard for her to understand...I think [my dad] had the same expectations that I would perform well basically...They still expect a lot out of me. As a result of my poor performance...I was at summer school here, and [my mom] received the paperwork. She said, “I didn’t put you at summer school. You want to do it? You have to do it on your own.”

Students at both Branham University and Wellington University perceived parents as supportive during their college experience. Student perceptions of parent support during the college experience at Branham University centered on financial support; whereas student perceptions of parent support during the college experience at Wellington University centered on academic support.

At Branham University parent support included support for the costs of tuition and housing, special tests and test preparation such as LSAT and GRE, and other expenses. Camille provides an example of the financial support provided by her mother:

I mean, it's just her and so she basically sacrifices. If my mom has a choice, she would move, but there's no moving because she has to pay for my college education. So—you know, she's not letting me take any loans out—so she's taking all the responsibility of trying to put me through school...I work because now I have my own car...I have to take good care of my little minor bills, but she pays for housing and tuition and, you know, just whatever she can do.

Further, Justin describes the support of his parents, in particular his mother, in supporting providing support for tuition:

My parents played a very important role. I mean my mom—she may have simplified it by working here because she really could get a better paying job. She's really over qualified to work here, but she decided to work here so that we could get free tuition and come get our education and take it seriously. She wants to see us succeed.

At Wellington University, student perceptions of parents' support focused on assistance related to students' academic efforts. In addition to having high expectations regarding student academic performance as indicated earlier, students at Wellington University described talking with their parents about their academic difficulties and their parents efforts to help them problem-solve. The two responses below characterize Wellington University students' perceptions of how their parents helped support their academic performance by inquiring about their progress and suggesting strategies for success. Tonya describes it as:

They stay on my back with the grades and stuff. It's really the influence of my dad, too, because, like I said, he's a nerd. So when I don't understand stuff, he can get it... I had trouble with organic chemistry. He would research that incident and send me links to tutorials on the web. And the same for physics. Like calculus, he'd buy me software, you know, all this kind of stuff. It's really important to him that I do well.



Larry says:

My mom calls me 'til this day and is like 'Now you know you're supposed to be studying your homework. You know you're supposed to be doing this. You better do this. In order to compete in the classroom, you better know your stuff. I been there, I done that.' ...My argument all the time—Ma, look, you don't know what kind of work load they be giving me...She's like, 'But yeah baby, but you need to go study, stay two days ahead and if you have any problems go to a tutor, so on and so forth.

**Faculty Student Interaction.** Several themes emerged from the data at Branham University and Wellington University regarding the students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction. The investigation of students' perceptions of out-of-class faculty student-interaction yielded very little. The study specifically explored student's perceptions of the nature of their out-of-class interactions with faculty as well as relationships with faculty that students would describe as close. Regarding students' out-of-class contact with faculty, the data revealed that out-of class faculty-student interaction was virtually non-existent. Where students indicated out-of-class interaction with faculty did occur, it was limited to following up with faculty on course- or academically-related questions.

At both Branham University and Wellington University, students' perceptions of in-class interactions with faculty were influenced by students' perceptions of faculty expectations and structure, faculty concern for students' learning, faculty rapport, and student engagement in-class.

***Faculty Expectations and Course Structure.*** The clarity and consistency of faculty expectations and the structure of the course emerged as important aspects of students' in-class interactions with faculty. Faculty expectations refer to the guidelines faculty set regarding student and faculty conduct and performance in a given course.

Structure refers to the way faculty planned and organized the course and how effectively faculty made use of class-time. While literature on faculty expectations and student performance is limited, Cohen (1981) indicated that there is some relationship between student learning and students' perceptions of faculty proficiency. The data suggested a relationship between students' perceptions of faculty expectations and the structure of a given course and students' academic performance within that course.

Two examples, from Jack and Jeff respectively, illuminate students' perspectives regarding the benefits of clear expectations and class structure on their academic performance.

Like, my best professors ...they expect a lot out of their class. They expect—that's one thing I like, high expectations. If a teacher has low expectations, I'm expecting an 'A' and usually I don't do as well. If they have high expectations, I'm trying to meet them when they try and challenge me—when they present that high expectation. (Jack)

She was one of the best teachers here... I took a lot of classes from her. She's really good. Teachers who are prompt, very organized, very...even if they're stern, that's fine because you always know where you stand. It's no discrepancy...oh, how come they come in late every day and I can't come in late, or so on and so on. And if you walk into her class and you knew you were more than five minutes late you were absent, that's it. There was no discussion, no need to be mad about it because you knew if you walked in there five minutes late you were absent. But you're going to come in anyway because if you miss the class that day you're out of the loop. (Jeff)

Kelly and Priscilla provide examples of the impact of a lack of clear expectations on their perceptions of their learning experience. According to Kelly, "...some professors, they expect a lot from you yet they don't tell you that, and they don't teach you anything. That's what I don't like. They'll teach you about one subject and test you on another. That's not having high expectations, that's just not teaching me anything." Priscilla elaborates as follows:

Academically I would describe the school as mediocre. I am in an upper-level [class] and there are freshmen in there who don't know how to define words that I use because they haven't had the intro stuff—it's disrespectful. I am a second semester junior and I have classes with whoever wants to sign up...I think it's part of the CPLE, the core liberal education program that everyone has to take, but they want us to take so much from other departments...So, I mean, I think it's poor[ly] designed as far as liberal education, I think it's poorly designed.

***Faculty Investment/Concern for Student Learning.*** Students' perspectives about faculty investment in their learning were straight forward. One student, Jared, described it simply in the statement, "I think what really makes someone a good professor is the amount of time that they spend with you to make sure you understand." The essence of students' perceptions of faculty investment in their learning is captured below:

It just depends... a lot depends on their mood and their reasons for being here and the way they feel about what they're supposed to be teaching you. Some teachers feel they're supposed to teach you what's in the book from chapter to chapter...other teachers feel they're supposed to teach you as much as they can and as much as you can grasp so you know as much as you can. It depends on whether they care about you learning or them teaching.

Further, Justin posits that "They go over it and make sure you understand it. And they try to give examples and do all they can—give examples that you can relate to or real life examples of what's going on in the world today. But they make sure that you understand."

***Faculty Rapport.*** Faculty rapport refers to the extent to which faculty demonstrate empathy, approachability, and availability to help students outside of class (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The following examples are emblematic of the students' perceptions about positive and negative faculty rapport.

About some of her in-class interactions, Kelly recounts that some of her professors, particularly those in non-science classes, "pay attention, and maybe it's just

because the class sizes are smaller. There's no falling by the way side. I've had personal experiences where a professor could see me slacking off and then come to me, like, "What's the problem?" Whereas other faculty, are "pretty rough and un-nurturing...just expected and waiting for people to drop out. That's how I really feel." Henry describes it as, "All of them aren't very personable. They know their information for themselves...but as far as teaching someone else what they know and what we need to know in order to be successful, they kind of have a gap there."

*Student engagement in class.* "Active learning" is the term used to refer to engaging pedagogical strategies. Active learning techniques go beyond traditional listen-lecture instruction methods to include a range of activities that allow students to become participants in enhancing their own learning (Astin, 1993). Jeff and Janice describe the manner in which discussion serves to facilitate their active engagement in class.

It's a lively classroom. People are involved in discussion. People are not afraid to ask questions or that the teacher will think they're stupid or anything like that. It's like the class is totally involved. It's not just sitting up and dictating notes. It's tying into something relevant so we can understand it as being useful. (Jeff)

She showed how relevant history was to the present day...And so then, usually, somebody says something that is controversial, we break into an argument and have just intelligent conversation for the rest of class. So, I really enjoyed her class, there was a lot of interaction. Uhm, you were allowed to express your opinion. A lot of people did not agree with her and a lot of people did, so it was interesting to see people's points of view. And sometimes you learn more that way than if she just got up and lectured. And she did that sometimes, when a lot of people didn't read so there wasn't a lot of conversation... but not too often. (Janice)

Further, Larry expands on an engaging experience as involving discussion and group activities:

...we'll have a group activity and group presentations that focus on the point the professor wants to get across, and allows you to actively engage, you know. It's interesting because not everybody wants to sit there and listen to the teacher

talking all day. It's kind of like 'can I say something, can I do something?' So, now it gives the opportunity to work with people who either know what they're doing or maybe I can help guide other students in class for a specific purpose. So, uhm, in HOD 2700 [the] professor...he kind of like has us in groups and we— every week there is a new leader of each group, so you take on a leadership role. So, I think that's a really good sign. I'm doing really well in that class.

Effective teachers use examples and analogies, make courses interesting, and are available to students outside of class (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) suggests that greater positive changes occur in students' attitudes and values in courses that encourage open discussion and in courses that students are intrinsically motivated to attend. Data from this study supports the research in this regard. Students indicated that they were more likely to attend class in which they were involved. For example, Janice shared, "...like my 8:00 am class...I enjoy that class. I like the teacher. And I would make sure I was up. There's one or two times that I was late. And then other classes, I'm like, I won't try to be here...I don't care if I go..."

Students described dictating notes, and lecturing and reading to them as interactions that did not involve them in the class. Further, students described reading from books or lecture notes as undermining the credibility of faculty. Henry summarizes this in the following:

They really didn't actually know what they were talking about. Like they couldn't... Like, it's one thing to have knowledge of something, but then to apply knowledge. They didn't know what they were speaking about. They were just reading out of the book. They would get in front of the class, and listening to them actually reading out of the book. Instead of actually knowing what they're talking about. I mean, don't just read it to us—actually teach us, you know.

Lack of active student engagement in classes may have an impact on students' motivation for attending class as well as their academic performance (Pascarella &

Terenzini, 1991). Students in this study described falling asleep, arriving late, and non-attendance as behaviors in classes that lacked student involvement. Specifically:

There might be, like, 8 people who go walk in, if it's an hour and thirty minute class, probably like 30 minutes or 45 minutes late. People usually be sleeping... usually because they know they're not going to learn anything—the teacher's not going to be doing anything, so they'll sleep. There are people who will put their bags down, leave the class, won't come in until the class ends. They'll come and get their bag and then walk out...like that. (Jeff)

Midway through you could turn around and see heads on the desk, some people asleep, people get up... I remember I used to get up and leave and go to [computer] lab for awhile and do something, and come to class a little later. And then the worst is just...you know you just come in, you sit down, you're falling asleep. (Janine)

**Interaction with Non-College References.** Non-college references refer to students' interactions with those who are not a part of the campus community or more immediate family. Research (Weidman, 1989a) describes the support of non-college others as important for students and for minority students in particular. In this study, non-college references were operationalized as relationships with people outside of the immediate institutional context such as pre-college friends, extended family members, and relationships developed through off-campus employment and/or memberships in church or other civic organizations.

While student's at both institutions affirmed the existence of extended familial relationships and ongoing friendships with individuals from high school, participants described minimal, but supportive, contact with these extended family and friends. Parents are described as providing the strongest base of non-campus student contact and support. Moreover, participants' responses across both Branham University and Wellington University underscored the primacy and importance of the institutional context in students' college experience. Only four participants in this study held off

campus jobs. Only two regularly attended church services off campus. Several participants in this study participated in community service activities such as mentoring and tutoring youth; however, in every instance participation in these activities was facilitated through a campus-based group such as a fraternity.

Students' responses regarding their lack of involvement with individuals and organizations that were not affiliated with their institutions centered primarily on their focus on college-related endeavors and a subsequent lack of time for additional non-college activities. The idea that "I just get glued to this campus and, like, things that I'm involved with mainly involve [Wellington University]" summarizes the general experience described by students at both Wellington University and Branham University.

### **Perceptions of Different Influences on Student Socialization at Branham and Wellington Universities**

Several themes emerged that differed across institutional contexts. At Wellington University, institutional choice, and peer norms, including perceptions of the image of a Wellington University student, and patterns of peer interaction emerged as themes in the data. At Branham University, themes that emerged in the data included institutional choice, institutional values, as well as peer norms including perceptions of the image of an Branham University student, and students' perception of a lack of administrative support.

#### **Wellington University**

**Institution choice.** For most of the students who participated in this study from Wellington University, initially the students did not have a high institutional commitment

to Wellington University. However, upon further exploration students perceived Wellington University was an institution that met their overall college choice criteria, provided the most financial aid, as well as an opportunity for them to obtain a college education at an institution with a strong academic reputation.

Two students capture the role of high school counselors in facilitating their awareness of Wellington University, the University's efforts related to diversity, and the other criteria, including not getting accepted into their first-choice institutions, as influences that shaped their choice of Wellington University. Denae shares:

See, I wasn't going to apply here, and I kind of fought my mom about it [because] I didn't really feel like [this city] had anything to offer me. My mom talked me into applying here because it's a really good school, and I ended up not getting into the schools that I really wanted to go to...It was between here and two schools in California. I was advised not to go to California because my morals and values would be swayed as opposed to coming to [this city] and the bible belt. And that being a minority—one of my teachers told me that being a minority, a black female at [Wellington University], could be to my benefit...because they are trying to promote diversity.

Tonya describes it as:

It's like the luck of the draw...Duke was like my dream school. [My college mentor] was like, "Well, if you're really interested in Duke and really interested in Emory, what about considering [Wellington University]? It's kind of along the same lines as what you're going for..." So I was like, you know, 'Sure I'll look into it.' She told me they contacted schools about programs for minorities. So, I'm like, 'Sign me up.' So, I applied and, I mean, not really thinking much of it just because there were so many other things...When everything came in, I got into every one except Duke...But then financial aid packages came in. And most of the other schools, they were okay, but nobody beat out [Wellington University] in the financial aid package. So that decision was made.

Although not related to financial aid, another student, Priscilla, summarizes a similar process for choosing to attend Wellington University based on institutional characteristics such as academics, environment, and location.



...I applied to twelve schools. I was looking for a major research university because I wanted to be pre-med and I wanted a place that had research opportunities in a major hospital... Well it came down to the last three... and when I visited [Wellington], it was little jaded because I visited with five other people from my high school. And so we just had a really, really good time. I enjoyed the people, I enjoyed my classes, and I was in small classes like I was used to in high school... And just the environment seemed protective and safe, and people were happy. At University of Rochester the kids were not happy to be there... And then with Emory there was just too much going on for me in Atlanta... I was there a weekend and I was like, how I am ever going to study—it was way too much for me to do. And I was like, you know, [this city] seems about right.

**Student Interaction.** Participants at Wellington University describe class, ethnicity, and Greek-letter organizations as influencing patterns of student interaction on campus, with the predominant image of Wellington University's student culture as being White, wealthy, and influenced by fraternity/sorority life. While participants acknowledged that there were students who attended Wellington University that did not necessarily possess those characteristics, they described the pervasiveness of this image as the prototypical Wellington University student. Tonya summarized the overall culture as, "It just feels like this is a real homogenous place, but it's not really like the real world... It's just like... Greek. Rich. Got to be rich. Got to be White. Got to be Greek. Mom and Dad, one or the other has to be a doctor. Maybe Dad's a doctor and Mom doesn't work... That's the stereotype." Echoing this idea, Jared describes the typical Wellington University student as "Rich. White. In a fraternity, and drives a BMW." Another student, Priscilla, describes, "It's definitely a white image. And it's promoted by white people. But I mean, because they are such a majority, everything that is a part of their culture becomes [Wellington University]."

In addition to the prevailing image of Wellington University students, study participants described the student culture at Wellington University as heavily influenced by Greek-letter organizations. The several references to fraternities or sororities above underscore their prominence at Wellington University. All of the study participants described Greek-letter organizations as playing a major role in students' social interaction at Wellington University. Denae captures this sentiment best with "...I didn't realize that sororities and fraternities were such a predominant presence at [Wellington University]...Like, you can't escape the sight or hearing about it, which is not a negative statement per se, it's just that it's extremely prevalent in everyday life. Not just because I know people who are in it, but that's a large part of the social life—what a lot of people talk about, what a lot of people do." Participants identified predominantly White fraternities and sororities, and Black fraternities and sororities, as major socializing influences. Participants described White fraternities and sororities as providing social support for White students, to the exclusion of or limited access by African American students. Priscilla elaborates that, "It's mostly just access...Black people don't go to the same parties that white people go to. First, they don't get invited to them; there's just not a real intermingling." As another example, Melissa shares, "A lot of White students and Black students, especially here, have different experiences for the most part. Oh, and I have a lot of White friends, but I don't see myself hanging out with them all the time because they do things a little bit different. I'm not into the frat and sorority parties they have." Participants described themes such as "ghetto party", and "Tupacalypse party" at which White students dress up like thugs as themes which deterred their interest in participating in the parties of the White fraternities and sororities as well as the

requirement to know someone who is part of the Greek-letter organization and to have them approve the admission of non-members in order to gain entry into the party.

According to participants, the majority of social activities for Black students at Wellington University are sponsored by Black fraternities and sororities. These activities primarily include step shows and parties; however, five participants indicated that participating in membership-related activities associated with Black Greek-letter organizations provided them an opportunity to build new friendships. Tonya captures the overall role of Black Greek-letter organizations: "...the Black organizations were the ones who set up everything. They set up the first parties, they set up the outings...and stuff like that."

While several participants at Wellington University indicated that they have White friends and/or friends of other ethnicities, more than three-quarters of participants indicated there was limited interaction between Black and White students at Wellington University outside of class or campus activities, and that the experiences of Black and White students differ. For example, Larry describes his experience as, "I feel like the White community here will only interact with me—with my color—if I'm either in the same class as them or if I've done some kind of activity with them. They would not ever—I don't think that anyone would ever come up to me and be, like, 'Hey, how are you doing?'...It's not like that." Similarly, Priscilla echoes this sentiment by commenting that "Monday through Friday, from nine to five, everyone talks to everyone pretty much and everyone has classes together, but I doubt if you talk to them outside of class." Further, Priscilla illustrates with an example from her residence hall.

...it's full of a lot of Black girls and a lot of White girls, and all the Black girls definitely rely on each other just for little things as far as borrowing things or just

hanging out...we all just hang out randomly all the time...But at the same time, a lot of White girls won't just come in the TV lounge with us on a Friday night and talk. And they won't feel comfortable to. I mean, we might talk on a one-on-one basis, but not on a hanging out type of thing.

## **Branham University**

**Institution Choice.** In contrast to the low initial institutional awareness and commitment of students who attended Wellington University, participants that attended Branham University had a high degree of institutional commitment in choosing to attend the University. Students described Branham University as their first and/or only choice, and described what would appropriately be summarized as the “Branham University connection” as helping to facilitate their high commitment to Branham University. In particular, students’ described networks or contacts which facilitated an early awareness of and connection to Branham University, as well as their awareness of famous people who are Branham University alumni.

One student, Jack, indicated that he started to look at Black colleges because he did not want to be just another number at a large university like Florida State or University of Michigan—and moreover, just a minority number. He decided to focus on HBCUs with his particular major, and he met an HBCU faculty member who was a Branham alum who shared the Branham legacy. He also established email contact with a Branham faculty member in the communications department. According to the student, the cards were there for him to go to Branham because:

You have those teachers that go the extra mile or whatever and that’s actually how I ended up at [Branham]...My Spanish teacher’s brother was the provost at [Branham] at the time so I was talking to her and telling her I was interested in [Branham]. So, I applied to [Branham] and they didn’t offer me a scholarship,

and there was no way my parents were going to be able to pay for me to come here. So she just called her brother and the next day I had a scholarship in the mail...I got the partial scholarship for my ACT scores and grades or whatever, so I decided to come here.

Regarding the choice of Branham, another student, Janice, indicated that she had been telling people she wanted to go to Branham since middle school and she just stuck with it. "It's the only school I applied for which was a very risky move...I believe I got in on recommendations...[Branham] alumni mainly. My aunt went to [Branham], and the guy in charge of my band, he also went to [Branham]."

**Institutional Values.** Students' perceptions of Branham University's institutional values included academic excellence, cultural pride, and leadership particularly in the form of personal and financial success. While no single student response encapsulated all of the values of Branham University, the sum of the students' responses reflected most of the core values of Branham University. As described in the Branham University mission, Branham University identifies its core values as: dedication to the search for truth; to be a place where African Americans and others can study, free of oppression; to engender and nurture an environment that celebrates African American culture in all its diversity; to provide a caring, nurturing respectful environment for students, faculty and staff; to engender in its students the spirit and quality of leadership; and commitment to diversity of Branham University in which the diversity of the global community is reflected in the composition of its students, faculty and staff as well as diversity in a wide range of fields of study and scholarship (Branham University Mission Statement, 1997).

Students described Branham University's commitment to academic excellence as including the development of resources to benefit students and the campus community

such as the construction of the I-Lab (state of the art computer lab for student use) and the renovation of the Health Science Library, the Campus Bookstore, and the Law Library; as well as cutting edge research. Henry summarizes the academic excellence of Branham University as, “[Branham University] is on the forefront of research especially in math and science. You have the human genome center right up the street that is studying breaking into chromosomes...Medical research. [Branham University] is in the forefront of it all.” Branham University’s commitment to academic excellence was also by described by Justin as Branham University’s desire for and promotion of student success. “They value their students doing well. We’ve had two Rhodes Scholars in the past four years. And they want their students to do well...And all kinds of awards and international stuff—they love that.”

In describing leadership, Jeff summed Branham University’s value of leadership as “Leadership is probably the biggest one. I constantly hear that word over and over and over again because you always see [Branham University] students in the forefront of either research or student movements or just anything...[ Branham University] students are leaders and that’s something that [Branham University] teaches you to do in whatever way.” Further, Jack elaborated on one way Branham University cultivates the value of leadership:

They almost try to show their appreciation to the people...like they try to honor those people... Debbie Allen, Stokely Carmichael—just always keeping their names floating around, having different functions, maybe honor those people...they have their picture and information for students to get a sense of...Usually you go in [to the student center] and have an exhibit or something. The freshman seminar books have mention of those students—those people...It’s always there. You find it one way or another.

Branham University is described by students as a place where race and culture are held in regard, and where acknowledging race and culture is a part of institutional and student identity.

Everybody seems to have a lot of pride for your race... They're not racist by any means, they don't discriminate against people, but they do recognize there is a color line there. Because not recognizing there is a color line you're just disregarding everybody's culture. That's how I see it and a lot of people have a similar view or they wouldn't be here... Everybody has pride in their culture and pride in being Black. (Janice)

The prominence of Branham University's racial and cultural value is captured in students' reference to Branham as "The Mecca"—a focal or reference point of black culture and thought.

Definitely [Branham University] is the Mecca as far as the forefront in black wealth as far as knowledge and research and stuff like that. Everybody seems to look to [Branham University] as far as to see what [Branham University] is doing, as far as in the political realm. What is [Branham University] saying about this topic? And how [do] [Branham University] students feel about this? How [do Branham University] students feel about Morris Brown closing? And how do [Branham University] students feel about George Bush and the war and stuff like that. Like a lot of people turn to [Branham University] as far as the wealth of knowledge of black individuals.

**Student Interaction.** Participants described the student culture at Branham University as very culturally diverse—which generally seemed to contrast with their expectations of an HBCU. Overall students anticipated a high degree of cultural preparation and fit with the HBCU context because they are African American students and felt "it's Black people". However, the students came to understand, as Henry described it, that while Branham University "may not be diverse in certain terms by definition, it is diverse in other ways because you have people here from the Virgin Islands, Bahamas, Jamaica. So, it is well represented—seeing all different shades and

different representatives of black people and different ethnicities and getting to understand their views of the world.”

In addition to being culturally or ethnically diverse, participants described Branham University students as diverse stylistically. Whether attributable to differences in geographic regional background, social interests, socio-economics, and stylistic differences— Branham University students perceived Branham as a place where different types of students can find their niche. Le’chelle expressed it as “Anything goes at this place. Anything goes. I could wear my hair sticking straight up and...They’d probably say something behind my back, but it wouldn’t be a big to do.”

Le’chelle’s description is apparent in the researcher’s observation of students on the main quadrangle of Branham University’s main campus, where several different student groups and groups of students were represented. Students were dressed-up, including men in shirts and ties and young women in stiletto heels and contemporary style trends. Posted at different locations around the quad, and centered largely among brightly and organizationally-specifically-adorned oaks tree at one end of the quad were members of various Greek-letter organizations and student groups gathered at their tree and in what appeared to be a normal routine. Several members of male Greek-letter organizations engaged in stepping, which includes synchronized step movements as well as chanting, around their designated areas. In addition to the groups gathered among the oak trees and elsewhere around the quad, students also gathered in the far right corner of the quad, just outside the student center. Dressed mostly in large white tee shirts and baggy jeans, these students—who appeared to be all men, engaged in several rap-offs—open, free-style rap competitions.



Although Branham University students were perceived as being highly diverse ethnically and stylistically, participants also described Branham University students as possessing a number of qualities which are characteristic of leadership including: intelligent, confident, and purposeful or motivated. Students expressed very similar descriptions of how these characteristics manifested in student behavior. Henry summarized it best as:

[Branham University] students are on Capitol Hill. We have a girl that just won the Rhodes Scholarship [as] the third student in the past five years of [Branham University] is a Rhodes Scholar. So, [Branham University] students are definitely leading the way as far as college students and doing research and stuff like that...A lot of people say [Branham University students]...always have to be in the middle of something. Never really quiet, always very outgoing. Very well-rounded. Highly motivated.

**Administrative Support.** Branham University students' perceptions of administrative support centered on problems with critical student services such as financial aid and registration and records. The problems students described include difficulty identifying and removing holds on their student accounts, resulting in late registration and fees; not receiving financial aid refunds in a timely manner; and making students run around campus to different offices to try to resolve problems. As a contributing factor to these problems, students indicate that the responsiveness of administrators and staff in facilitating resolution to these issues depends on who you are or whom you know. More specifically, students indicated that the administration responds to parents' inquiries regarding student problems more readily than to students' efforts to address problems themselves.

Camille's experience summarizes the institutional response to parent's inquiries:

I usually have my mother to take care of everything because I seem to get a better response with her doing something than for me to go and talk to these people because sometimes they just don't care. And it's not—I don't even think that they just don't care, but I think that if you don't push it on them or force them to make a change they're not going to make it seem like it's a priority.

Another student, Henry, indicates:

There is definitely a lot of respect in some offices between administrators and students...But in others, administrators are just hard to deal with. They make things a lot harder than they need to. Especially in financial aid and things like that...Financial aid is already a touchy subject because it's already hard when you're dealing with somebody else's money, especially when you won't give us our money back when we need to get our money back in a timely manner. Like, [Branham University] is very strict on getting their money in a timely manner, they're not real good about giving you your money back when you've got an excess of money in your account...And they make students run around a lot...They need to arrange something so that they have a much better turnaround time with a lot of things they have going on.

## **Summary**

Several themes emerged at both Branham and Wellington Universities regarding students' socialization experiences including individual and institutional factors. Individual factors related to students' backgrounds included students' early commitment to college participation and their academic preparation and expectations regarding college. In particular, students' early commitment to college participation was inspired in part by their own goals and motivation, and in part by their parents' expectations and influence. Students' perceived their academic preparation for college was facilitated by their high school classes and study skills required by the secondary school context. High school also played a role in shaping students' expectations that college would be challenging academically.

Individual and institutional factors both played a role in students' in-college socialization experiences. In particular, parents, faculty and peers were important influences. At Branham University and Wellington University, parents provided support for students' career-related goals. At Wellington University parents also assisted students' academic efforts; whereas at Branham University, parents provided financial support for college and related expenses such as housing and tests, etc.

Students' perceptions of institutional factors that emerged as push and pull factors across both institutions included faculty-student interaction in class, and peer-interactions and norms. Students identified similar perceptions of faculty-student interaction across both institutions. Specifically, students described faculty expectations and class structure, concern for students' learning, rapport with students, and engagement of students in class as influencing their socialization experience.

While factors associated with peer norms and interactions were identified by students at both Branham University and Wellington University as influences on their experiences, students' perceptions of the nature of peer norms and interactions differed according to institution. At Wellington University, peer interactions and norms which were identified as influences on students' socialization experiences included class, ethnicity, and Greek-letter organizations. In particular, the predominant image of Wellington University's student culture was perceived as White, wealthy, and a member of a fraternity/sorority. These factors were described as creating a largely homogenous culture at Wellington University and influencing patterns of limited interaction between Black and White students at Wellington

University outside of class. Participants also credited Black fraternities and sororities with being the primary provider of social activities for Black students.

In contrast, at Branham University, students described the University as very culturally diverse, and as a place where different types of students could find their niche. The predominant image of Branham University students included qualities which were characteristic of leadership including, intelligent, confident, and motivated. This image of an Branham University student is closely aligned with the values students ascribed to Branham University, which are also a part of Branham University's mission. These values include academic excellence, cultural pride, and leadership particularly in the form of personal and financial success. While Branham University has a number of student organizations, students' described state clubs and fraternities and sororities as providing the primary social activities for students, in addition to homecoming.

In addition to peer norms and interactions, institutional choice also emerged as a theme. While not their first choice, students selected Wellington University because it met their overall college choice criteria, provided the most financial aid, and had a strong academic reputation. Here again, in contrast, students from Branham University had a high degree of institutional commitment in choosing to attend Branham University. Branham University was their first and/or only choice, and was facilitated by the "Branham University connection". The Branham University connection includes networks or contacts which created an early awareness of and connection to Branham University and the renown of people who are Branham University alumni.

Students also had similar perceptions of non-college references at both Branham University and Wellington University. Moreover, students at both institutions described contact with non-college references such as extended family and friends as supportive but minimal; and described a lack of involvement with individuals and organizations that were not affiliated with their institutions as the result of their focus on college-related endeavors and a lack of time for additional non-college activities.

At Branham University students' perception of a lack of administrative support also emerged as a theme in the data. Branham University students' perceptions of administrative support centered on problems with critical student services such as financial aid, and registration and records. As a contributing factor to these problems, students indicate that the responsiveness of administrators and staff in facilitating resolution of these issues depends on who you are or on connections with individuals in administrative offices.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This study examined the socialization experiences of African American college students at a PWI and an HBCU. The primary research questions were: *How do individual and institutional factors interact to influence the socialization experiences of African American college students attending PWIs and HBCUs? Moreover, how do African American college students' backgrounds assist or impede their socialization at HBCUs and PWIs? How do African American college students perceive institutional factors as helping/hindering their socialization experiences (i.e., their ability to navigate and adjust to the academic and social systems of the institution)?* A secondary question explored by this study was: *How do the socialization experiences of African American college students vary according to gender?*

From analysis of the data across institutions, several common themes emerged which addressed the primary research questions. In addressing the question of background factors which assist or impede students' socialization, students' responses fell into the broader categories of early commitment to participation in college, and students' expectations and preparation for college. According to the students, "college was always a part of the plan", and their early commitment to participation in college was facilitated by their parents' expectations as well as their own

aspirations. In addition to emphasizing students' participation in college parents emphasized the value of college in providing better opportunities including better economic opportunities.

Students attributed their academic preparation for college to the curriculum and skills facilitated by the secondary school context. Effectively, academically, the students' first-year of college reflected many aspects of their senior year of high school. Coursework in college was consistent with, and in some cases constituted a repeat of the content of coursework from the secondary school context. Students at both Branham University and Wellington University also described the secondary school context as helping them to develop study skills and time management skills that were useful in college.

At Branham University and Wellington University parents, faculty and peers were primary influences in students' in-college socialization experiences. Across both institutional contexts parents played a supportive role related to students' in-college experiences, including support and encouragement for students' career-related goals. Additionally, students at Branham University described parents as financially supportive of college-related expenses such as tuition, housing and living expenses, exams. Students at Wellington University described parents as academically supportive—aiding and encouraging them related to their academic and career success.

Both in-class and out-of-class faculty-student interactions were explored as part of this study. The findings indicated that across both institutions, students' interactions with faculty were primarily limited to in-class interactions. In the few

instances in which out-of-class interaction was mentioned, it was limited to follow-ups on class assignments during office hours or immediately following class. At both Branham University and Wellington University, in-class faculty-student interaction was indicated as an influence on students' in-college academic experience. In particular, faculty expectations and class structure, concern for student learning, rapport with students, and engagement of students in the learning process were identified as factors influencing students' socialization experiences.

Peer-norms emerged as a common theme of influence regarding the in-college experiences of students in this study, and at both Branham University and Wellington University student organizations such as Black fraternities and sororities were credited with providing the primary social activities for students. However, the specific dynamics of the peer norms associated with each institutional context varied. At Wellington University, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and participation in a fraternity or sorority were primary influences. At Branham University, cultural diversity and leadership characteristics aligned with Branham University's values and emerged as primary influences among peers. In addition to fraternities and sororities, state clubs and homecoming were also identified as influences on students' socialization experiences. Several themes emerged that differed across institutional contexts relative to students' socialization experiences including institutional choice, and perceptions of peer norms. At Branham University institutional values and administrative support also emerged as themes in the data.

Non-college references did not appear to influence the socialization experiences of students in this study. In exploring how gender influenced the



socialization experiences of students in this study, the results indicated no differences in the socialization experiences of the men and women who participated in this study.

### **Background Factors that Influenced Students' Socialization Experiences**

**The Role of Parents in Students' College Participation.** The results of this study affirm the research that indicates that parents are important to the college participation of students. Specifically, the literature identifies parental characteristics such as education level and socioeconomic status as predictors of students' educational attainment, and parental encouragement as an influence in students' decision to attend college. This study extends the research in this regard by illuminating students' perceptions of parental behaviors which contributed to their college participation. While students in this study described the educational backgrounds of parents as ranging from GED completion to professional degree completion, without regard to educational level parents encouraged their children to attend college. Moreover, in this study, parents were described as facilitating students' early commitment to attend college by setting a context in which students' own motivation was nurtured and took hold. Parents engaged students in active discussions about college-choice, the professional and economic benefits associated with obtaining a college degree, and the importance of a college education as related to beginning or continuing a family legacy of college-going.

Regarding the latter, beginning or continuing a family legacy, the literature is scant. While higher education research provides support for the influence of parents' socioeconomic status and education level on college-attendance, in this study even participants whose parents did not attend college actively encouraged their children to

attend college and engendered the notion of beginning or continuing a family legacy of college attendance. Research by Freeman (1999) indicates that “even when there are no family members educated beyond high school, there still tends to be a strong desire for African American students to “go beyond the family’s level of schooling... carrying the hopes and dreams of the entire family” (Freeman, 1999, p.9). In researching ways to promote high-achievement among African American students, Perry (2003) describes the influence of “an indigenous African American philosophy of education” (p. 12). According to Perry, this philosophy took shape and is found in African American literary and historical traditions from slavery through the modern Civil Rights movement, and has been used to motivate generations of African Americans to vigorously pursue education. Essentially, this African American philosophy of education emphasizes the idea that the pursuit of education is connected to African Americans identity as free, liberated people and necessary for racial uplift and success. One of the narratives utilized by Perry to expound on this philosophy is that of Jocelyn Elders, the first African American United States Surgeon General: “Elders describes the struggle for subsistence of the entire family, and the importance of reading and learning especially espoused by her mother and grandmother. Specifically, you got to get an education if you want to be ‘somebody’.” (p.23). Participants at both Branham and Wellington expressed responses similar to Elders.

Parents are important in their children’s college-going behavior. The results of this study indicate that, without regard for education- or economic-level, parents can influence their children to attend college. Moreover, parents’ emphasis on college attendance as a goal for their children, engagement in discussions and activities related to

college attendance and planning, understanding and communicating the economic benefits of postsecondary education to their children, and the association between education and personal and familial or racial uplift are essential elements of success in motivating college participation. Building on these findings, strategies to increase college participation, such as pre-college programming and college recruitment programming for African Americans students, could be enhanced to include educating parents about postsecondary educational planning, institutional benefits, and the economic success of graduates, and should incorporate the values of a college education for African Americans as related to a family legacy of college-going or as part of an African American philosophy of education.

**Factors related to Students' Institutional Choice.** While the factors that facilitated students' participation in college were similar across both Branham and Wellington Universities, there was marked contrast between students at Branham and Wellington regarding institutional choice. Research (Astin & Cross, 1981; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1995; Freeman, 1999) suggests that African American students' attending Black colleges are influenced by relatives, teachers, or others who attended Black colleges, and by the academic reputation of the institution; whereas financial aid and academic reputation of the institution were identified as important influences for African American students attending predominantly White colleges (Astin & Cross, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1995).

Students attending Branham University expressed a high degree of interest and commitment in attending Branham. Branham students' central attraction to Branham was facilitated through an early awareness of the university, including an awareness of

Branham's famous alumnae and faculty and a connection to individuals associated with Branham's network of alumnae and supporters. These factors worked together to create an institutional mythos about Branham's legacy as a "Mecca" for Black culture, leadership, and success—which secured the University as the first or only choice for the Branham students who participated in this study.

In contrast, the majority of Wellington students learned of Wellington after they considered other institutions similar to Wellington in type, size, and selectivity. Effectively most of the Wellington students in this study were aware of and applying to other institutions, including Wellington's peer institutions, but had little knowledge of Wellington. Many of the students heard of Wellington late in their institutional choice process through referrals from high school officials who were aware of Wellington's efforts to recruit diverse students. Students attending Wellington ultimately selected Wellington because of its academic reputation, the availability of substantial financial aid, and other college-choice criteria.

The results of this study underscore the importance of the strategic use of institutional connections and alumni involvement in the recruitment and admissions process. Additionally, Branham and Wellington could benefit from building stronger relationships with high school teachers and counselors including more extensive and earlier recruitment strategies targeted at African American students that intentionally and fully incorporate information related to African American students' college- and institutional-choice processes.

**Students' Expectations and Preparation for College.** Cultural and social capital are important in students' transition to an institution as well as for their

experiences while at the institution. Moreover, cultural and social capital can serve as assets in the socialization process depending on the consistency between students' pre-college expectations and experiences and their in-college experiences. The results of this study confirm the research regarding academic background and expectations in facilitating student adjustment to college. The data in this study, across both institutions, illuminated high school course work, and study and time management skills, as assets regarding students' expectations of college and their academic socialization in college.

While there was consistency in both institutions in students' perceptions of academic expectations and preparation for college, there were differences between the institutions in terms of students' perceptions of their cultural and social expectations and preparation for college. While students at both institutions thought they were prepared culturally and socially for college, their initial encounters with the institutional context were not consistent with their expectations.

At Branham, participants based their cultural/social expectations of the university context on their personal cultural context—thus expecting the university to be very homogenous. However, participants described the University as highly culturally and socially diverse and having a broad range of Blacks represented from across the Diaspora, geographic areas in the United States, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Although Branham was more diverse than the students expected, the difference between their pre-college background and expectations and their experiences at Branham did not undermine their transition to the university or their socialization experience. Rather, Branham provided a context in which difference was valued and in which students felt they could find their niche.

At Wellington, the students based their cultural/social expectations of the university context on the cultural context of their high school environment, which in most instances was ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, and with the majority of students being White. As indicated in the findings, the prevailing perception of Wellington was one of ethnic, economic, and social homogeneity. Effectively, students perceived Wellington as less diverse than they expected. This contrast between their pre-college experience and expectations and their in-college experience hindered their socialization experience.

Academic preparation as well as time management and study skills are key in the successful transition of students from secondary to postsecondary education. Secondary courses that prepare students for college and include content reflected in the college curriculum strengthen students' academic competence and confidence; and contexts which help students learn to balance academic and social activities promote the acquisition of time management skills which aid student socialization in college. As a part of institutional outreach to prospective students and as a mechanism of support for new students, establishing a culture of expectation in which students receive clear messages about the institutional context and the tenants of success at the institution based on a multidimensional profile of successful students at the institution would create opportunities for students to be engaged around the institution's legacy of expectation and success at the institution as well as identify and make stronger connections to successful students and alumnae, and the institution overall. According to the findings, Branham University enjoys some de facto success with participants awareness of the mythos and famous alumnae associated with Branham. However, both Branham and

Wellington Universities, in recruiting African American students, have an opportunity to create more formal mechanisms for African American students in this regard.

### **Influences on Students' Socialization Experiences in College**

**The Role of Parents' Support.** Parents of the students in this study played a major supporting role, not only in students' pre-college experiences, but in their in-college experiences as well. At both Branham and Wellington Universities parents continued to be a primary external influence on students within the institutional context. Moreover, the findings indicate that participants perceived parents as allowing students to pursue their own interests in selecting a major and career-related plans. Parents across both institutions were also perceived as having high expectations for students' academic performance. While parents were perceived as being supportive across both institutional contexts, the parents of Wellington students were perceived as providing more direct support for assisting students academically whereas the parents of Branham students were perceived as providing more direct support assisting students financially. The findings of this study suggest that these differences in parents' support across Branham and Wellington Universities may be a function of institutional resources related to scholarships and financial aid. The financial aid and scholarship package was one of the key criteria that sealed students' selection of Wellington over similar institutions. However, at Branham, only one student received a partial tuition scholarship. Freeman (2002) suggests that HBCUs may operate with more constricted resources as compared to other institutions. This could have implications for the tuition and other financial resource support the parents of Branham students provided. Although this study does not

provide an unqualified explanation for these differences in parental support, the implications of this study provide an opportunity for further research regarding the nature of parental support for African American college students at historically Black and predominantly White institutions, as well as across same-race institutional contexts and the implication of institutional aid for the ability of institutions to attract a broader range of African American students and to facilitate their success.

Both Branham and Wellington have parents' programs. However, given the role of these parents in supporting African American students' in-college experiences, intentionality in providing and packaging information for parents and engaging them in groups, such as parents' programs, or other related activities to support students' at the institution, may be beneficial to institutions and other organizations. These programs may be enhanced to include focused information and opportunities for parents related to academic support opportunities for students and parents, and educational information about campus resources to provide that support. It might also be beneficial for a specialized subset of these parents programs to become integrated into targeted affinity- or sub-groups, for example, parents of African American students, such that particularized resources and information may be made available to them to help facilitate their support for African American students and their concerns, and as related to specific programs of study.

**Faculty-Student Interaction.** Faculty are among the major agents of college student socialization (Davis, 1991; Fleming, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and faculty contact is associated with students' increased intellectual and social development. More specifically, faculty-student interaction influences student attitudes and



performance as well as the quality of student learning and persistence in postsecondary education (Nettles & Johnson, 1987; Pascarella, 1984; Tinto, 1975). The extent of faculty-student interaction is significantly and positively related to students' degree completion, educational aspirations, and educational attainment through the doctoral degree (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Hearn, 1987; Pascarella, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

This study provides insight regarding African American students' perceptions of the types of faculty-student interactions that assist and impede their in-class experiences at predominantly White and historically Black universities. Findings from this study illuminate the importance of several factors which influenced faculty-student interaction. Generally, students characterized positive in-class faculty-student interactions as those that challenged them, engaged them, and gave them the sense that they were learning. Specifically, these factors included faculty expectations and structure of classroom activities, faculty investment in and concern for student learning, faculty rapport with students, and student engagement in class. Students in this study were disengaged in contexts in which there were unclear expectations about student performance and where the level of faculty interest in student learning was unclear.

This study not only offers a framework for expanding the knowledge of how African American college students experience in-class faculty-student interactions, it has implications for how institutions might continue to enhance the experiences of students through faculty development. For example, this study identifies high faculty expectations of students as a matter of motivating student performance as well as classroom management. The availability of seminars and resources for faculty on establishing and

communicating high expectations, specific strategies for motivating African American college students, addressing various learning styles and utilizing pedagogical techniques to engage students in learning; and making student engagement in learning a core value assessed in teaching and faculty evaluation as well as enhancing the alignment between learning assessments and course instruction topics and methods may enhance the opportunities for the success of both college faculty and African American students.

The assumption of better fit between African American college students and historically Black college environments is implicit in the research on African American college students' experiences at predominantly White and historically Black colleges and universities (Allen, 1991). An outgrowth of this research is the perception that historically black colleges and universities provide more nurturing environments for African American college students, and facilitate stronger informal relationships between students and faculty members—for example, that for African American students at HBCUs there is greater informal interaction with faculty (Allen, 1992). In this study there was no difference between students' perceptions of faculty-student interaction outside-of-class at Branham and Wellington Universities. Further, without regard to predominant campus racial composition there was a high degree of consistency across institutional contexts regarding the nature of in-class faculty-student interactions that assist and impede African American college student socialization.

Both Branham and Wellington are research-focused institutions, which may account for the similarity in students' lack of out-of-class and informal interaction with faculty. Institution-type may moderate faculty-student interaction regardless of the primary racial composition of the institution. Because colleges vary in the structuring of

both normative contexts and opportunities for social interaction among the major agents of socialization within the university, encouraging out-of-class interactions among students and faculty may be particularly important in helping African American students see faculty as role models. Out-of-class interactions such as mentoring, working with student organizations, and participating in extracurricular activities such as lectures and other student events could help enhance the quantity and quality of faculty interaction with students as well as student persistence at the institution. However, even out-of-class interactions that are facilitated through class-based learning activities could be beneficial to engaging students beyond the context of the classroom, and provide opportunities to introduce out-of-class interaction as an enhanced pedagogical strategy to support student learning. Such opportunities might include service learning, undergraduate research opportunities, course-related meetings and presentations, and field trips.

**Student Interaction.** Research suggests a relationship between student engagement in on-campus activities, work opportunities, etc., and student integration and success at the institution. Students at both Branham and Wellington describe student organizations as playing a major role in shaping the social context for students on campus. At Wellington Greek-letter organizations are a primary influence. White Greek-letter organizations as being the most pervasive influence on student culture at Wellington for both African American and White students. In particular, White Greek-letter organizations are rooted in the participants' perceptions of the identity associated with Wellington students as well as the social lives of Wellington students. Parties were described as the main factor in the social support of White Greek-letter organizations, and implicitly as providing private social space for their members and friends of their

members to gather to socialize. While study participants perceived White Greek-letter organizations as providing social mechanisms to support the main of Wellington students, they did not feel that these were mechanisms in which they could be engaged. It is imperative that institutions provide opportunities to engage all students in the campus community, and to mitigate the effects of any one organization or organizational type in the impact on the overall student culture.

### **Revised Model**

This study identified a number of influences on the socialization of African American college students. In particular, student background characteristics including expectations and preparation for college, and parents were primary influences on students' college participation. Moreover, the influence of student background and parental socialization combined to create a pre-college normative context that pushed students toward college participation. Additionally, this study identified parental support, faculty-student interaction, and peer interaction as influences on students' in-college socialization experiences—which combined to create the primary in-college normative influences on students' experiences.

This study also identified several factors which support revision of the original conceptual model; specifically, the component of the model focusing on non-college references. In exploring students' interaction with individuals and organizations who were not part of the campus community, and the extent to which students' experiences were influenced by those interactions, the findings of the study indicated that students had very limited interaction with non-college others. While students, certainly, had

friends and family members who were not a part of the institutional context and with whom they maintained association while in college, the findings implicate parents as one of the most significant influences on students' experiences prior to college, and as the most significant influences outside of the campus community on students' experiences within the institutional context. Additionally, where students were engaged in community service activities, their engagement was facilitated through formal structures, such as student organizations and/or community service offices at each university.

Figure 2 depicts revisions to the model based on the results of the study. Revisions include incorporating community and civic activities as part of the college experience component of the model, and modifying the linkages associated with non-college references to other components of the model represent their influence and connection to other components of the model. While this study did not affirm the research (Weidman, 1989) on the importance of non-college references relative to African American college students' socialization experiences, the revised model reflects the role of the institution in facilitating student interactions with non-college references such as civic organizations—which may serve to help institutions mediate the nature and quality of student engagement in these experiences and foster greater alignment between these experiences and the academic mission of the institution.

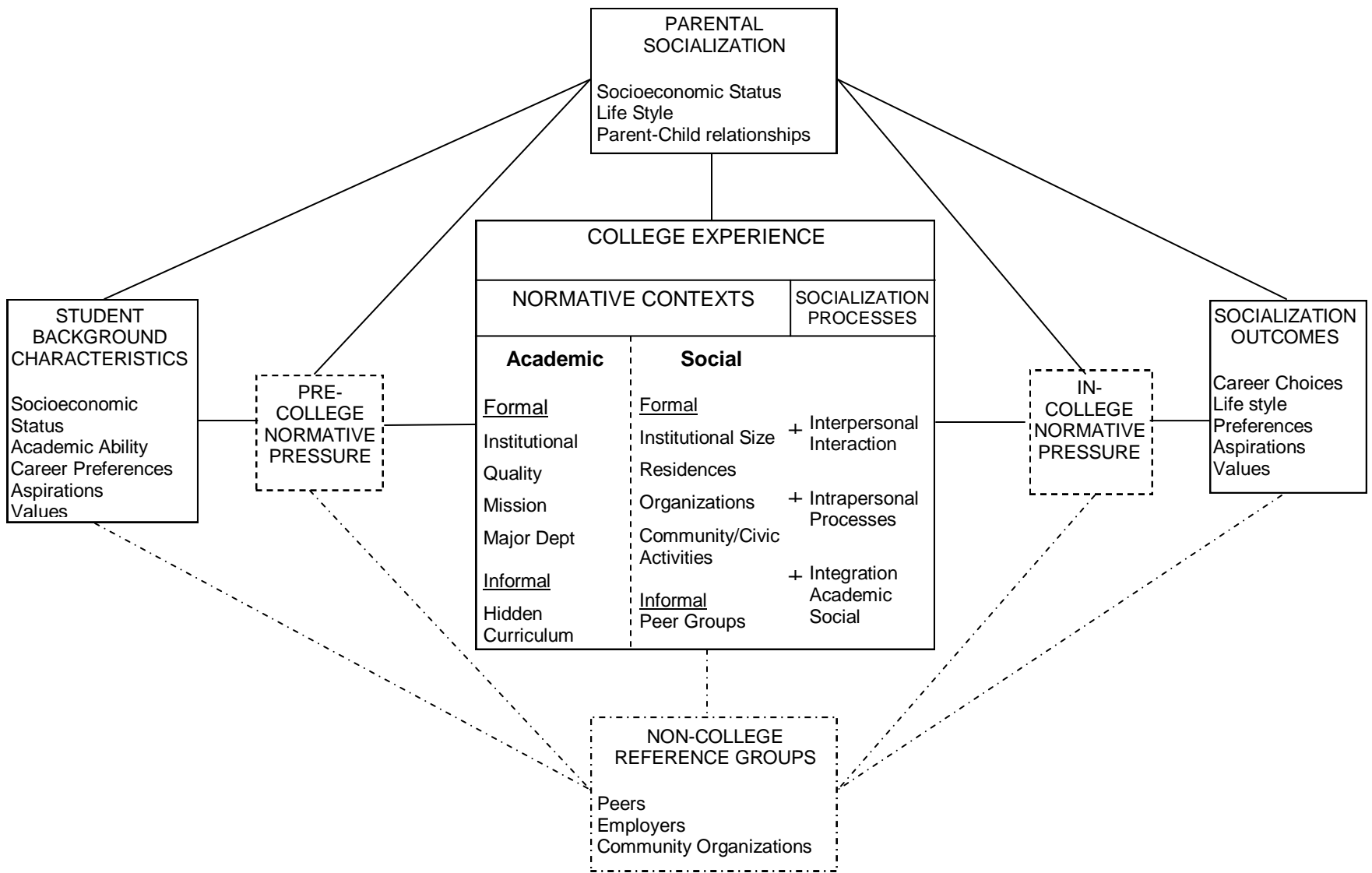


Figure 2. Revised Conceptual Model of Undergraduate Student Socialization based on Weidman's (1989) Conceptual Model.

## **Implications for Future Research**

This study presents several implications for future research regarding the socialization experiences of African American college students in historically Black as well as predominantly White institutional contexts, and the particular individual and institutional characteristics that operate to create advantages and disadvantages for the African American college students who attend.

While this study provided insight regarding African American college students' socialization experiences across one historically Black and predominantly White institutional context, a larger, multi-site comparative analysis of the socialization experiences of African American college students attending HBCUs and PWIs across different institution-types would illuminate the individual and institutional influences on African American college students' experiences across the different types of historically Black and predominantly White institutional contexts.

There are several opportunities to build on the results of this study to expand the knowledge of African American college students socialization experiences in general, and related to historically Black institutional contexts in particular. As indicated previously, HBCUs are credited with providing educationally powerful environments for African American students, including strong relationships between students and faculty. Building on the findings of this study regarding African American college students' perceptions of the types of faculty-student interactions that assist and impede their experiences, a broader examination of faculty-student interaction across a variety of historically Black institution types could reveal differences in faculty-student interaction due to institutional characteristics such as size, type, and funding source. A larger, multi-

site study could also reveal patterns of faculty-student interaction that might be attributed to the structures within historically Black institutions. Future research of this type could be especially useful to historically Black institutions struggling with the tension between their historic role as teaching institutions and pressures to become more research-focused.

Further, additional research which expands the knowledge of how student success is facilitated through high-institutional-expectations is important to understanding how postsecondary institutions can create conditions that foster equitable long-term achievement among students from diverse educational backgrounds. Additional research in this regard—building on the findings of this study related to students’ academic expectations and preparation, institutional values, and role of faculty-student interaction, especially expectations and course structure—could yield information that can be used to assist institutions in intentionally planning and developing environments that are optimally conducive to African American college students’ success.

While there is considerable research on the influence of social and cultural capital in predicting students college participation and success, research regarding the role of parents of African American students in facilitating their college participation and success is limited. This study provides insight regarding the role of parents in supporting African American students’ pre-college and in-college success; however, additional studies in this area would provide greater analyses of the relationship between parents of African American students and their participation and success at HBCUs and PWIs.

Parents have been identified in this study as an important influence on students’ college participation. This study suggests strong similarities in the approaches used by parents to facilitate commitment to college participation within their children. Building on the



findings from this study, a quantitative study aimed at understanding African American students' perceptions of the processes by which their parents helped cultivate and formulate their commitment to college participation and testing the existence of an African American philosophy of education could be useful in understanding enhancing the knowledge of how parents influence students' college participation, and comprehending how college participation can be fostered among African American students from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

In addition the limitations previously identified regarding the existing research on social and cultural capital related to African American college students' college participation and success, the existing research is also limited in its ability to deepen the understanding of African American students' socialization experiences based on the particular nuances associated with emerging intra-racial differences among African American college students. For example, Eugene Robinson, in *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* (2010), suggests that instead of one Black America, there are really four Black Americas, including: a mainstream middle-class; a large abandoned, impoverished underclass; a small, transcendent elite class; and two newly emergent groups including mixed-race and immigrant communities. While the socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of students in this study varied, a number of similarities emerged regarding the influences on their socialization experiences across both historically Black and predominantly White institutional contexts. However, future research on social and cultural capital and the influences on the socialization of African Americans college students should include comparative research that explores the

differential experiences of African American from diverse backgrounds such as the ones identified by Robinson.

Finally, more in-depth gender-based examinations of the experiences of African American male and female college students attending HBCUs and PWIs is needed. There is increasing public policy interest in the determinants of success for African American males in particular; however, a comparative study to explore perceived differences in the experiences of African American college students based on gender could yield information to enhance the socialization of African American college students overall as well as strategies to close gaps in African American students' achievement by gender.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides information about the influences on African American college student socialization within historically Black and a predominantly White postsecondary institutional context. It illuminates students' perceptions of the critical role of parents and the secondary context in supporting their pre-college and in-college adjustment. This study delineates the role and function of engaging in-class interactions between faculty and students, and institutional values and peer culture that affirm students' connection to the institutional context and supports their socialization in college. Student organizations, and Greek-letter organizations in particular, serve as a primary factor in the social support of students on campus, and have a significant influence in shaping the predominant student culture at the institutions. Across both institutional contexts, Black Greek-letter organizations help facilitate a supportive

environment for African American college students; and at Wellington, White fraternities and sororities reify a student culture that mitigates the adjustment of African American college students within the institutional context.

In addition to illuminating the factors that help and hinder the socialization experiences of African American college students, this study provides evidence which supports revision of the Weidman's (1989) conceptual model of undergraduate student socialization as related to African American college students socialization within historically Black and predominantly White institutions. Revisions to the model centered primarily on the area of non-college reference groups. Although institutions of higher education are not completely encapsulated environments, the college students in this study maintained primary association with individuals and entities within the immediate institutional context. For example, the institutional context, through offices and student organizations, provided the mechanisms through which students became involved in civic and community activities. The primary external influences on students' in-college experiences were parents.

This study suggests additional opportunities to enhance the understanding of key factors regarding African American college student socialization. The insights provided by this study can be utilized in enhancing the socialization experiences of African American students within both historically Black and predominantly White institutional contexts

## APPENDIX A

### Cover/Confirmation Letter

(Date)

(Name)  
(Address)  
(Address2)

Dear (Salutation):

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a participant in my study of the college experiences of African American college students. Your willingness to take time from your busy schedule to share your experience is greatly and sincerely appreciated.

As discussed, your interview is scheduled for (Interview Date) at (Interview Time). If you need to change the interview time to one more convenient with your schedule, please contact me at your earliest possible convenience to reschedule.

My research protocol requires that I obtain your written permission to interview you for this study. The attached form outlines the specific details of your participation and your consent to be interviewed. I will bring a copy of the consent form to the interview to obtain your signature and answer any questions you may have regarding participation in the study prior to the start of the interview.

Once I have finished collecting the data, I will analyze the notes and recordings and develop a written report of the findings. This written report will serve as my dissertation. In the written report, the identity of all participants and institutions will remain anonymous, and both you and your university will be assigned and referred to by a pseudonym (i.e., false name) only. Audio tapes and notes from this interview will be used exclusively for this study and no one except me and my dissertation advisor, Dr. Robert Crowson, will have access to these items at any time.

Again, thank your for your assistance with my research project. I look forward to meeting you for our interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at (615) 361-9424 or by e-mail at [Nicole.l.mcdonald@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Nicole.l.mcdonald@vanderbilt.edu).

Sincerely,

Nicole L. McDonald  
Ph.D. Student  
Education and Human Development

## APPENDIX B

### HUMAN SUBJECTS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: African American College Students at Predominantly White and Historically Black Universities

Principal Investigator: Nicole L. McDonald

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The following information is provided to inform you about this study and your participation in the study. Please read this information carefully and feel free to ask any questions about the study and/or your participation in it.

The purpose of this study to learn about the college experiences of African American college students attending historically black and predominantly white colleges and universities. This study will explore your experiences with faculty, administrators and other students while attending your university, and what you think and feel about the influences that have shaped your college experience.

This information is being collected as a part of a dissertation. By participating in this study, you will be helping to fill a void in the research available on the experiences of African American college students.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study and you may withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason without consequence. If you choose to withdraw from this study, you may do so in writing (including e-mail). All participants who choose to withdraw from the study can also choose to have their data removed from the study. All notes and audiotapes will be destroyed upon receipt of your written request to leave the study and to have your data removed.

Your participation in this study involves at least one in-person interview. I would like to interview you one time in-person, with a follow-up interview scheduled as needed. All interviews will be scheduled at a time that is convenient with your schedule. The interview will occur at a location that is mutually agreeable and will last no more than 2 hours. If a follow-up interview is necessary, it will not last more than 1 hour. All interviews will be audio taped.

There is no need to do any advanced preparation for the interview. I am only interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions about your experiences at your university. The questions will not be unduly personal or cause you any discomfort. A minor inconvenience of the study includes the time taken from your daily activities to be interviewed. A minor risk associated with this study could be that you reveal information that could lead to your identification.

Several measures will be taken to reduce the likelihood of this. Your privacy and your identity as well as the identity of your university will be kept as confidential as legally possible.

To maintain your confidentiality the following steps will be taken: 1) raw data (that is the unedited information that you give me) will only be accessible to me and my dissertation advisor, Dr. Robert Crowson, a Professor in the Department of Leadership, Organizations, and Policy at Vanderbilt University; 2) all notes, audiotapes, transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my home during and upon completion of this study; 3) any use of the results of the study that refer to your comments will not identify you by name, institution, or personal characteristics; 4) both you and your university will be assigned and referred to by a pseudonym (i.e. a false name) in any use of the results of the study; and 5) one year after the completion of this study all audio tapes and field notes will be destroyed.

The results of the study will be compiled in a written report that will serve as my dissertation. If you are interested, I would be happy to share a copy of the report with you.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Nicole L. McDonald at (615) 361-9424 or [Nicole.L.mcdonald@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Nicole.L.mcdonald@vanderbilt.edu). If you have general questions about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board Office at (615) 322-2918.

**STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I have read this consent form. All my questions have been answered and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate. I understand that I may withdraw at any time.

The material in this consent form has been explained to me verbally. All my questions have been answered and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate. I understand that I may withdraw at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Guide

#### Student Background

- 1) Where are you from?
- 2) When did you start thinking about what you wanted to do occupationally?
- 3) Where did you go to high school?
- 4) What was your high school like?
- 5) What kinds of activities were you involved in?
- 6) What kind of student were you in high school?  
Probe: What kinds of classes did you take?  
Probe: What were your grades like in high school?
- 7) How and when did you decide to attend college?
- 8) How did you choose this college?
- 9) What did you expect this college to be like?  
Probe: What did you expect it to be like academically?  
What did you expect it to be like socially?  
What did you expect it to be like culturally?
- 10) What were your first impressions of COLLEGE NAME?  
Probe: What did you think of the Orientation?  
What did you think about your first classes?  
What did you think about the people (faculty, staff, students) you first met?
- 11) How prepared did you feel for college?  
Probe: How prepared did you feel for college personally?  
How prepared did you feel for college academically?  
What would say helped to prepare you?

Parental Socialization

12) Tell me about your parents.

Probe: What are their occupations?

Did they go to college?

13) How important is your education to them?

Probe: Why?

14) What role did they play in your decision to go to college?

15) What role did they play in your choice to attend this school?

16) What influence did your parents have on your goals and aspirations?

17) Did your parents have an impact on your expectations about college?

Probe: How so?

18) Did your parents have expectations about what you would study or how you would perform in college?

19) Have their expectations changed at all?

Non-College Others

20) Do you have brothers or sisters?

Probe: Tell me about them.

21) Are there other members of your family or your friends who had an impact on your decision about college?

Probe: Who and how so?

22) Is your going to college important to anyone besides you and your parents?

Probe: Why?

23) What are some of the people you spend time with who don't go this school like?

24) Do you participate in activities outside campus?

Probe: Such as church, civic or community organizations, ethnic/race related activities, political organizations?

Tell me more.

If not, why not?

25) Do you have a job off campus?

Probe: Tell me about that.



## College Experience

### *Academic Dimension*

- 26) What would you say the institution values?
- 27) How would you describe this school academically?
- 28) What is your major?
- 29) Why did you choose to study this?
- 30) What do think about your courses?
- 31) What do you think about the quality of classroom instruction?
- 32) How are your grades?
- 33) What do you think about your overall classroom experiences?
- 34) How would you describe faculty in terms of their sensitivity to the needs and interests of African American students?
- 35) How would you describe your interactions with faculty inside the classroom?
- 36) Have you observed any differences in the way students are treated in class?
- 37) How would you describe your interactions with faculty outside the classroom?
- 38) Do you find some faculty more approachable than others?  
Probe: Why?
- 39) Do you have close relationships with any faculty members at this campus?  
Probe: Why?
- 40) Do you ever feel like you are discriminated against by faculty?  
Probe: How so?
- 41) Do you feel faculty expectations regarding your performance are clear?  
Probe: Why or why not?
- 42) Do you feel like grading is fair and consistent?  
Probe: Why or why not?
- 43) Tell me about some of your best professors.  
Probe: What makes them stand out—what makes them the best?  
How have they impacted you and your experience?

44) Tell me about some of your worst professors.

Probe: What makes them stand out?

How have they impacted you/your experience?

#### *Social Dimension*

45) How would you describe relations between students and the administration?

46) How would you describe administrators in terms of their sensitivity to the needs and interests of African American students?

47) How would you describe the administrative support of student groups on campus?

Probe: (at PWI only) How would you describe the support of African American student groups?

How would you describe the support of other minority student groups?

48) How would you describe interactions among students at this institution?

Probe: Do there appear to be any differences or dividing lines in interactions among students?

49) What things have most shaped or influenced your experience at this institution as an African American student?

Probe: What kinds of things helped you adjust?

What kinds of things were obstacles or made adjustment difficult?

Defining moments

Critical Incidents

50) Do you feel you fit well with this institution?

Probe: Why or why not?

51) If you had to make this choice over again, would select this institution?

#### Socialization Outcomes

52) Tell me about your goals following graduation.

53) What are your top priorities in life?

54) What do you value most?

#### Interview Closing

55) Is there anything else about your experience at this institution that you want to share?

56) Do you have any questions or comments?

## APPENDIX D

### Contact Summary Form

Contact:            Interview\_\_\_\_    Observation\_\_\_\_    Artifact\_\_\_\_    Other\_\_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

1) What were the main issues or themes in this contact?

2) Which research questions and which variables in the initial framework did the contact bear on most centrally?

3) What speculations/hypothesis/hunches about the field situations were suggested by the contact?

4) Anything else important, salient, or interesting?

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