

Adjustment Experiences of African American Graduates of Historically Black Colleges or  
Universities Attending Graduate School at a Southern Predominantly White University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs) attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). A discussion of narratives and themes across participants provided information about the adjustment experiences of African American graduate students who transitioned from a university community where the student population was predominantly African American to one where African American students were the minority. This information can be utilized by both PWUs and HBCUs to develop resources that address issues related to adjustment for African American graduate students

This study was phenomenological by design and focused on analyzing the adjustment experiences of 11 female African American graduate students attending a Southern PWU. Participants were between the ages of 22-28, graduated from 10 different HBCUs across 8 states, represented 8 different graduate majors and had been in graduate school an average of 3.5 semesters. Research methodology included participant interviews, demographic questionnaires and investigator field notes. Collected data were analyzed using a coding iteration strategy.

Descriptions of participant experiences were documented and ten prominent themes emerged from the data: support systems, negative emotionality, distrust, academic frustration, lack of African American presence, non-cohesive African American community, racial microaggressions, prior acquaintances and resilience.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Being an African American college graduate with a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees from two Southern predominantly White universities (PWUs), I have noticed that my personal, social and academic experiences in higher education varied somewhat from those of my African American peers whose undergraduate education was at a historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs) in the same region.

My undergraduate experience at a Southern PWU in the mid-1980s was individualistic, and though there were various opportunities on campus for a more collective educational experience, many were through student organizations that were specific to race, culture or ethnicity. Outside of these opportunities, there was an atmosphere of individualism that was fostered by strong academic competitiveness and social separatism. I am certain there were opportunities to engage in various personal, academic and social events, but my African American friends and I believed that such opportunities were for the academic and social elite; not all students were encouraged to participate, and in particular, African American students were excluded. University social and academic events were often a mirror of the microcosm reflected by American society at the time, segregated by race, economics, social status or ethnicity. This, in part, was because African American and other minority students felt socially comfortable and accepted associating with their own race, and partially because there was a lack of inclusiveness for African American students and other racial minorities within the university campus and surrounding community.

According to many of my African American peers who attended HBCUs for their undergraduate education, their universities tended to center their undergraduate students'

experiences on a collectivist framework, where strong social networks were established to assist students with their personal, social and academic adjustment to the university and its surrounding community. Many spoke of the vast array of opportunities in which they were encouraged and invited to participate during college, including research and other academic experiences, as well as numerous social events. Overall, my peers who attended undergraduate HBCUs disclosed that they were encouraged to work collectively on many aspects of their higher education experience. This was distinctly different than my undergraduate experience attending a Southern PWU.

Later, I revisited conversations with these same African American peers who subsequently had earned graduate degrees from a Southern PWU. My assumption about their graduate school experiences was that they paralleled my own. However, this was not the case and I discovered that many of their graduate school experiences at Southern PWUs differed greatly from my own. From our conversations I began to question if I had been attentive to the social and academic atmosphere of the two Southern PWUs I had attended, or if I was unaware that my experiences were different from theirs because I received my undergraduate education from a Southern PWU. Such dialogue with my African American peers about our personal, social and academic experiences during graduate studies at a Southern PWU led me to explore the similarities and differences in our higher education experiences further. This inevitably led to numerous differences of opinion regarding the implications of the social and academic environment for the African American student experience at Southern PWUs. Upon further reflection of the content of our discussions, and the verbal and nonverbal interaction that accompanied this content (e.g. strongly stated opinions and uncomfortable periods of silence), I began to question if our differing views of the African American student experience at Southern

PWUs might be a result of our undergraduate experiences, theirs taking place at an HBCU, and mine taking place at a Southern PWU.

Eventually, we came to accept and appreciate our varied personal, social and academic undergraduate experiences, as well as our different perspectives regarding the African American graduate student experience at a Southern PWU. We also questioned the extent to which our undergraduate experiences informed our perceptions of our graduate school experiences. Finally, we continued to have ongoing dialogue about the personal, social and academic aspects of our undergraduate and graduate higher education experiences in search of a deeper and clearer meaning of the African American graduate student experience at a Southern PWU.

#### Context for the Study

Between 1976 and 2008, college enrollment for African American students rose from 943,000 to 2,269,000, an overall increase of 4% over a 32 year period (USDOE, 2010). However, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2007), only 43% of all African American college students enrolled at four year degree granting institutions graduate. Currently, according to the 2010 *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*, 2,584, 478 African American students are attending college. However, past studies have indicated a trend that most have attended a PWU (Ginter & Glouser, 1997; Nettles, 1988; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Stewart, Wright, Perry and Rankin (2008), reported statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities that indicated the enrollment of African American Students at PWUs comprised 84% of all African Americans enrolled in college in 2000. Further data from the 2003 *Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks* study revealed that though African American students were enrolling in PWUs at higher rates than at HBCUs, a large percentage

were not completing their degrees (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). In the 2008 Education Sector Reports, Carey reported statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Statistics (1996) that revealed a six year graduation rate of 45% for African American students who attended non-HBCUs, 20% lower than their White counterparts. Between 2001 and 2002, of the 1,291,900 bachelors degrees conferred, 70.8% were awarded to Whites, while only 8.6% were awarded to African Americans (Lee, 2007). The graduation rate of African American students attending four year degree granting institutions lags far behind those of their White counterparts. Many reasons have been cited in the literature as to why students in general leave college, some specific to African Americans. Constantine (1999) reported a significant finding that African American students attending PWUs were more likely to drop out of college than any other student due to difficulty with social adjustment and a lack of personal and social support systems.

Findings from past research have shown that all students, regardless of race, face four significant demands when negotiating the college environment: 1) academic adjustment, 2) institutional adjustment, 3) personal-emotional adjustment, and 4) social adjustment (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Baker & Siryk, 1984, Schwitzer et al., 1999). It is the last two, social and personal-emotional adjustment that engage interpersonal relationships and permeate all sectors of the college student experience. According to Baker et al. (1985), social adjustment refers to the negotiation of interpersonal relationships between roommates, peers, faculty, and other members of a student's immediate university environment and surrounding community. Adjusting to the social environment appeared to have had the most negative impact on African American student success at PWUs (Baker et al., 1985), thus creating negative implications for their personal-emotional adjustment as well.

Because social, personal and emotional adjustments directly involve interpersonal relationship building, it is worthy to note that racial differences and race relations are paramount in the adjustment of African American students' experience at PWUs. Coleman (2008) asserted that racial difference and distinctiveness for African American students within the PWU environment often inhibited these students from engaging, accessing and building relationships, mainly due to the negative views and perceptions held by White Americans about African American students at these institutions.

Numerous research studies have addressed the phenomenon of adjustment for African American students transitioning from high school to college life at a PWU. Likewise, a body of literature exists that has focused on the adjustment experiences of African American undergraduate students at HBCUs. However, there is a scant amount of research in the literature that addresses the adjustment experiences of African American graduate students attending school at a PWU. Further, an extensive review of the literature revealed that there is no research about the adjustment experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending graduate school at a Southern PWU, hence, an important gap in the literature. The aim of this study was to provide information about this important topic, introducing a body of knowledge to address this gap.

### Background

A plethora of the research in the field of African American college student retention and completion of college degrees has dealt specifically with cognitive variables. However, variables such as personal, emotional and social adjustment have not received equal attention. Fleming (1990) asserted that other contextual variables such as support systems within the

university environment and surrounding community should be considered in understanding the academic success of African American college students.

Prior studies have indicated that the social lives of African American college students played a significant role in their academic achievement. Further, researchers have revealed the importance of context on the social and academic lives of African American students at HBCUs (Anderson & Hrabowski, 1977; Fleming, 1984; Jordon-Cox, 1987). In the contextual setting of an HBCU the African American students' experience with social discomfort due to their majority status was minimal, and social integration was encouraged and fostered (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1992). On the other hand, Jay and D'Augelli (1991) stated that African American students experienced complex ecological factors that influenced their social and academic lives at PWUs, making problematic the prediction of academic success. Results of past research suggested that African American college students attending PWUs experienced a significant amount of stress due to their racial minority status in a predominantly White educational environment (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Nelville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004). Such stress was said to have impacted their adjustment process (Anderson, 1988; Edmunds, 1984; Henderson, 1988; Nelville et al., 2004; Smedley, 1988).

A significant amount of research has posited that there was a less favorable social environment for African American students on PWU campuses than for their White counterparts. Wilkerson (1988) concluded that adjustment for African American students was critical because in many cases African American students came from a non-integrated social setting where their experience led them to experience and perceive prejudices. Additionally, African American students disclosed factors that had a negative impact on their social adjustment such as inadequate dating opportunities, social isolation, racial prejudice, alienation, loneliness and lack

of social integration in the PWU and surrounding community (Fleming, 1981a, 1981b, 1984; Gibbs, 1973, 1975; Gunnings, 1982; Jay & D'Augelli, 1991; Madrazo-Peterson & Rodriguez, 1978). African American students who have not had to interact with people of a dominant culture status on a regular basis may see a PWU with disdain (Von Robertson, Mitra, & Van Delinder, 2005). When attending a PWU, African American students are faced with making significant personal, family, and social adjustments, especially if the campus is geographically positioned far from their homes (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1992). Allen (1988) suggested that academic problems, cultural adjustment problems, social adjustment problems, and racial prejudice were some of the difficulties experienced by African American students on White college campuses. Von Robertson, et al. (2005) stated that the student adjustment model showed a typology of social and academic domains of experience for the college student. Von Robertson et al. posited that the social domain emphasized students' relationships with other students, while the academic domain involved students' interactions with faculty and other academic staff.

Numerous studies about African American students' adjustment experience in higher education at HBCUs and PWUs (e.g. Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1992; Jay & D'Augelli, 1991; Schwitzer et al., 1999; Von Robertson et al., 2005) have focused on the transition of African American students from high school to four year degree institutions of higher education and their personal, academic and social experiences while there. However, though some researchers have written briefly about African American students' adjustment experiences in graduate school, none, to date, have explored the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Kim and Otts (2010) speak to the typical difficulties of entering graduate [doctoral] education for all students, discussing factors other than academic responsibilities such as finances, family and job. With this in mind, add to those

responsibilities the probable stress associated with transitioning from an HBCU undergraduate higher education experience into a Southern PWU graduate school experience where you are a racial minority. The implications of such a transition and adjustment on the personal, social and academic lives of African American students can have an impact that is profound and unsettling.

### Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of historically Black colleges or universities (HBCU) attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). A phenomenological approach was used to frame this study about a specific population of African American graduate students; those who had undergraduate degrees from a HBCU, who were experiencing adjustment to life at a Southern PWU graduate school. Participants who identified racially as African American were participants in this study.

The specific aim was to create a body of knowledge about this student population's adjustment experiences at a Southern PWU. The principle investigator used the following questions to guide the research. Please note that all references to "students" in these questions refer to African American students who attended an HBCU for undergraduate studies and were attending graduate school at a Southern PWU.

- What are the experiences of students attending graduate school at a Southern PWU?
- How do students experience their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?
- How do graduate students cope with their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?

## Definition of Terms

1. *African American* refers to Black Americans who are direct descendants of ancestors from the continent of Africa, Sub-Sahara Africa, the Caribbean, and other areas with direct genealogical links to the continent of Africa. For the purpose of this study, students who self identified as African American were included.
2. *Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)* are institutions that were founded for the primary purpose of educating African Americans, though not racially exclusive in their admission policies (Stewart et al., 2008).
3. *Predominantly White Colleges and Universities (PWU)* refers to higher education institutions with a majority White student population.
4. *Personal-emotional adjustment* refers to a student's need to deal with and control his/her own emotional and personal health (Baker, et al., 1985)
5. *Social adjustment* refers to the negotiation of interpersonal relationships between roommates, peers, faculty, and other members of a student's immediate environment and surrounding community (Baker, et al., 1985).
6. *Individualistic* is a perspective that views selection procedures and outcomes as fair because all individuals are judged equally on consistent, clearly stated competence criteria, regardless of race or ethnicity (Chang, Witt, Jones & Hakuta, 2003)
7. *Collectivist* is a perspective that tends to focus on the participation and cooperation of group membership to reach a common goal and where individual goals can be attained without sacrificing the integrity of the group (Chang, et al, 2003).

8. *Graduate Student* refers to a student who is enrolled full time in a graduate or professional degree program (e.g. master's, doctoral, medical, dental). Full time status is determined by their universities. Certificate programs are not included in this category.
9. *Degree Granting Institutions* refer to universities that offer bachelor's and graduate degrees. Two-year and technical colleges are not included in this category

### Significance to Counseling

Although this study was indirectly related to the clinical practice of counseling and therapy, it was designed to reinforce the role of the counselor as a client advocate. Much of the literature has revealed that interpersonal relationship factors were reasons for the difficult adjustment of African American students to the PWU environment. In particular, the role of college counselors and counseling centers can be focused on resources and programs that assist the African American student and other racial/ethnic minority populations by implementing programs that encourage social justice advocacy (e.g. student empowerment, student advocacy, community collaboration, systems advocacy, public information and social/political advocacy). There is a rising need for counselors to become social justice advocates and to include advocacy strategies and interventions as part of their roles (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Ratts, D'Andrea & Arrendondo, 2004; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, & Israel, 2006). Lee and Waltz (1998) also supported the need for counselors to extend their roles to embrace that of social justice advocate.

The stories of the lived experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending a Southern PWU graduate school where they were racial minorities can be utilized by college counselors and college counseling centers to forge their role as social justice advocates for these students. Lee (2005) stated that while counselors work to advocate for student academic success,

they should also develop working alliances with students that give them the empowerment to eventually advocate for themselves. Counseling interventions to address adjustment can be grounded in the concept of empowerment, moving past traditional counseling practices to promote academic, career, and personal-social development for students (Lee, 2007)

### Limitations

A scant amount of current literature exists on African American graduate student experiences at PWUs. There is no evidence of existing literature that speaks to the experiences of African American students who graduated from HBCUs who have attended Southern PWUs for graduate school. Because the participants in this study were attending a Southern university within a specific geographical area, the reader should note that transferability of the study's findings should be constrained to this setting and should not be generalized across all PWUs in the United States. Self reported data were a further limitation because the researcher relied only upon information that research participants were willing to reveal during interviews. Additionally, participant demographic questionnaires were the only other source of data for analysis, other than the principle investigator's field notes. Though many African American males responded affirmatively for participation in the study, only female participants followed through with the interview process. Because of this, results could reveal gender bias. Finally, research has shown that African American participants in research studies are often suspicious about and reluctant to participate in such studies. Because of the nature of this study and its specific topics, the information gathered from participants was limited to the types and amounts of information they were willing to disclose.

## Chapter Summary

This research examined the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending a Southern PWU graduate school. Research participants' narratives about their adjustment experiences were examined for prominent themes that emerged. Results from this research will be submitted to three peer reviewed journals, the Journal of College Counseling, the Journal of College Student Retention and the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development. With the publication of this research, it is hoped that a new body of knowledge will be established to give voice to the experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending Southern PWU graduate schools.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to have a clear understanding of the African American graduate student experience on a Southern PWU campus, it is first important to be aware of the historical context of the African American experience in higher education. This chapter includes background about the African American experience in higher education in the United States and imparts a body of knowledge that contextualizes the need for and importance of this study. This overview will inform the reader about the history of educating African Americans in higher education in the 20th and 21st centuries, including equal access to higher education before and after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, past and current trends in African American college enrollment and graduation rates, and the experiences of African American students who have attended both HBCUs and PWUs. An in depth review of the literature will also show trends in the retention of African Americans at PWUs, and the non-cognitive variables that have impacted these rates. It is noteworthy to mention that sources of statistical information regarding African Americans in higher education have presented conflicting data. This, in part, is due to the fact that statistical data about individual minority groups in higher education were first recorded in 1976 (Chang et al., 2003). Overall, the review of literature should give the reader a foundation with which to frame the contents of this study and what it may reveal about the African American experience in higher education at a Southern PWU.

#### History of Segregation and Desegregation in Higher Education

##### *Segregation Overview*

As late as 1907, HBCUs were typically the only higher education opportunity available to African American students (Stewart et al., 2008). Stewart, et al. defined HBCUs as “institutions

founded primarily for the education of African Americans” (p. 25). Further defined, the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2008) referred to HBCUs as Black degree-granting institutions established prior to 1964, with most being established prior to 1954. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, HBCUs were responsible for the education of more than 90% of all African American students enrolled in higher education (Kim & Conrad, 2006; NCES, 1996). HBCUs were necessary prior to the mid 1960s because higher education for African Americans was inaccessible at most PWUs due to their racially exclusive admission policies. However, though HBCUs were founded on this premise, they were not racially exclusive in their admission practices. The following overview provides the reader with an understanding of this educational inequality for African Americans.

### *Beginnings of Desegregation*

In 1896, the United State Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision in the Plessy vs Ferguson case that stated “separate but equal” facilities for Blacks and Whites was not only legal, but preferred (Holzman, 2008). On the basis of this position and prior to the establishment of HBCUs, the United States government rationalized that both Black and White students would fare better being educated separately with their own race. Massachusetts later implemented the principle of a “separate but equal education” in an effort to justify the United States government’s and states’ arrangements for public primary and secondary schools to educate Black and White students in separate but equal facilities (Foner & Kennedy, 2004). Though separate, they were far from equal. Such legalized efforts in the course of United States history assisted in setting the precedence for inequality and inaccessibility for African Americans in education. However, in the 1954 Brown v the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas case

regarding public school desegregation, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that all students, regardless of racial background, were entitled to a high quality of education, remanded the notion of a separate but equal education, and stated that public institutions of education were legally obligated to provide racially integrated education (Jones & Hancock, 2005). This court decision overturned the ruling of Plessy v Ferguson, clearly invalidating any state laws that permitted racial segregation in public primary and secondary education. Further, it concluded that racial segregation in education violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth amendment of the Constitution (Foner & Kennedy, 2004). Though the 1954 Brown v the Board of Education Supreme Court ruling was a turning point for more equitable and accessible educational opportunities for African Americans, racial segregation in public education continued to persist.

#### *Desegregation Attempts Before the 1960s*

Prior to Brown v the Board of Education, several court cases regarding race and African American admissions to PWUs were tried and won. Between 1935 and 1950, Murray v University of Maryland Law School (1935), Missouri ex rel Gaines v Canada (1938), Sipuel v Board of Regents in Oklahoma (1948-1950), Hawkins v Florida Board of Control (1949-1956), McLaurin v Oklahoma Board of Regents (1950), and Sweatt v Painter (1950) were cases in which the plaintiffs, African American applicants, were granted admission into PWUs, but only under the premise of “separate but equal” status (Smith, 1975, 2005). In these cases the courts failed to recognize the illegalities of racial segregation in public education. Smith (1975, 2005) reported that the Court’s rulings in the previously listed cases indicated that the defendants (states) had to provide equal education for the plaintiffs, or admit them unconditionally to their chosen PWU. Two states, Oklahoma and Texas, proceeded to set up separate law schools for their single African American applicants under the premise of separate but equal education.

However, in the two court cases that challenged this notion of separate but equal education, *Sipuel v Board of Regents in Oklahoma* and *Sweatt v Painter in Texas*, the U.S. Supreme court ruled that the schools, though separate, were not equal to the PWUs to which they had been denied admission on the basis of race, and ruled in favor of the plaintiffs' admission to the PWUs (Smith, 2005). Such rulings reemphasized the essence of the *Brown v the Board of Education* decision of 1954 of separate but not equal education.

#### *Desegregation Attempts After the 1960s*

The 1960s introduced a new era of public opinion that pressured PWUs to further desegregate their campuses. The civil rights movement and other initiatives of the 1960s sought to increase equal access to educational opportunity for African Americans and other ethnic minorities (Baker & Velez, 1996). Four court cases in the 1960s regarding racial desegregation in higher education, *Holmes v Danner* (1961), *Meredith v Fair* (1961), *Lucy v Adams* (1963), and *Gant v Clemson University* (1963) ruled in favor of the admission of African American students to Southern PWCs (Smith, 2005). Several courts ruled that racial segregation in public education was illegal; however, many states continued with racially exclusive admissions practices. In 1973, *Adams v Richardson*, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia ruled that 10 states that had received financial assistance from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare still exercised racial segregation in higher education, and instructed them to desegregate their campuses by filing plans for the desegregation of their campuses (Smith, 2005). Of the 10 states, Louisiana, to this date, has not filed such a plan for desegregation (Smith, 2005). Although these court cases were directed at public colleges and universities, they included all colleges and universities that accepted public funding; therefore, private colleges and universities were impacted as well.

Late in the 20th century, PWUs continued to receive ongoing pressure to become more racially integrated, especially in the South. In the 1992 court case, *U.S. v. Fordice*, state courts were granted extensive authority to review and revise policies and practices that had restricted the proportions of African Americans admitted to many public institutions of higher education, particularly in the South (Orfield, 1993). As recently as 2003, the fight for racial integration in higher education continued with a favorable ruling in the *Grutter v Bollinger* case in which the Supreme Court ruled that the University of Michigan was permitted to consider race in its admissions policies (Smith, 2005). Though United States legislators have passed laws making segregation illegal in public education, higher education institutions have continued to be non-compliant (Smith, 2005).

Even though several court rulings have favored desegregation in higher education, issues related to desegregation still remain. Affirmative Action has often been publicly criticized as “reverse discrimination,” and the climate for African Americans attending PWUs continues to be a problem. Baker and Velez (1996) suggested that rulings like *U.S. v Fordice* might have negative implications for African American student enrollment at HBCUs. With more equitable access to PWUs, the proportion of African Americans enrolled in HBCUs had decreased to 13.1% in 2000, while their enrollment at PWUs had increased to 84% according to the *Status and Trends in Educating Blacks* study (Hoffman & Llagas, 2003), giving some credibility to Baker’s and Veldez’s assertion. However, it is worthy to note that these enrollment rates could be due to the higher accessibility of PWUs for African Americans because the number of PWUs vastly outnumber HBCUs. To better understand the status of African American enrollment in higher education, the next section will outline trends in African American enrollment in higher education.

## Trends in African American College Enrollment

### *Enrollment Overview*

According to The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (JBHE), 55.7% of all African American students who graduated from high school in 2007 were enrolled in higher education either full time or part time in October of that year, as compared with 69.5% of their White counterparts (JBHE, 2009). In 2007, 33.1% of the entire African American population between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in degree granting institutions, up 20% from 1967 (13.1%), according to the Center for Education Statistics (USDOE, 2008).

### *Enrollment Gaps*

In 1976 there was a 73.2% enrollment gap between Whites and African Americans in college attendance at two and four year degree-granting institutions: 82.6% were Whites and 9.4% were Blacks (USDOE, 2008). This gap increased slightly during the 1980s, showing a slight decrease in African American enrollment [9.2%] and a slight increase in White enrollment [84.1%]. The enrollment gap decreased in the 1990s to 68% between African Americans [9%] and Whites [77%] (USDOE, 2008). A similar gap in enrollment continued through the first decade of 2000s.

The fact that some statistical variability in attendance has persisted over the years might be best explained by inconsistencies in methods of reporting minority student enrollment in higher education. The first formal method for reporting statistics on minority student enrollment in higher education was not implemented until 1976 (Chang et al., 2003). However, though variability in enrollment statistics exists, it is still apparent that the number of African Americans enrolled in higher education has increased since the enactment of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that ordered racial desegregation of education (Smith, 2005). To further examine trends

in African American enrollment in higher education, it is important to disaggregate African American enrollment figures at HBCUs and PWUs to substantiate the claim that equal and accessible education for African Americans in higher education has decreased the percentage of their enrollment at HBCUs, and has increased it at PWUs (Baker & Velez, 1996).

In 1996, the NCES reported that since the early 1960s there has been a 17% decline in African American student enrollment at HBCUs, partly because of the pressures and initiatives to desegregate higher education and greater accessibility for African Americans to pursue higher education at PWUs. A 2008 report on the Condition of Education by the NCES reported figures from 2002 that showed only 12.4% of college eligible African American students enrolled at HBCUs, while 87.6% enrolled at PWUs. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (2000) showed the enrollment of African American students at HBCUs to be only 14% of African Americans who enrolled in higher education in fall 2003. These figures reveal a downward trend for African American student enrollment at both private and public HBCUs, and a steady increase in their enrollment at PWUs. However, because PWUs outnumber HBCUs and can accommodate larger student bodies, one must take into account these factors when reviewing these statistics.

Though the higher education enrollment data have shown an increase in the percentage of African American students attending PWUs over the decades, partly due to successful desegregation activism and legislation, the graduation and retention rates for African American students enrolled at PWUs have remained low in comparison to their White counterparts. A growing body of research has been dedicated to studying this trend, and has pointed to the disparity in graduation rates between African Americans and their White counterparts at PWUs.

## Graduation and Retention of African Americans in Higher Education

### *Graduation Rates*

Overall, the current African American college graduation rate is low nationwide. According to a 2006 report submitted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], the graduation rate ranged from 86-95% for African American college students at universities identified as highly ranked by admissions standards (NCAA, 2006). However, a very small percentage of African American college students are educated by these elite institutions, which implement aggressive recruitment strategies to attract selectively high achieving African American students to their campuses. Three fourths of the African American college student population is educated by our nation's state universities that had a national average graduation rate for African Americans of 43% in 2006 (JBHE, 2008). In 2007, the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education reported a 20% disparity between African American and White college graduation rates, with African American college students graduating at a rate of 43% while their White counterparts were graduating at a rate of 63%. Carey (2008) reported that African Americans had a six year institutional graduation rate of 45% from degree granting non-HBCUs. Given that a large percent of African Americans enrolled in higher education attend PWUs, there is growing concern about the low graduation rates of these students, and the disparity between their graduation rates and those of their White counterparts. Why has the national graduation rate for African Americans at PWUs continued to be low while their enrollment rate has increased steadily? Examining the retention of African American college students at PWUs might best explain some of the reasons for this trend, though it does not account for it solely.

## *Retention*

The retention of African American students in higher education at PWUs has been a focus of attention since the desegregation of education in 1964 (Smith, 2005). PWUs historically have not been as successful as HBCUs in retaining and conferring degrees of African American college students (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). In 2004, 30% of all African American students enrolled in PWUs completed their undergraduate education, as compared to 80% of their African American counterparts at HBCUs (Davis et al., 2004). Though our nation's state universities educate over 70% of enrolled African American college students, only 15 of the 50 top state universities in the South reported a graduation rate of 60% or more for African American students (JBHE, 2007).

Thomas et al., (2007) conducted a phenomenological study on the experiences of 22 African American students at a Southern state university defined as “struggling undergraduates” because they had been placed on academic probation or were at risk of dropping out of college. Two of the strongest findings in this study revealed themes related to negative experiences with social interaction and adjustment: 1) encountering incidents of White peer stereotyping of African Americans, and 2) searching for study companions and social outlets. Findings from both studies indicated that stressors related to social adjustment for African American students on PWU campuses were critical in how they perceived their experiences while there.

Other studies have suggested that negative social adjustment experiences were related to low rates of African American retention at PWUs (Edwards, Bryant & Clark, 2007; Nelville et al., 2004; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Schwitzer et al., 1999, Von Robertson et al., 2005). However, though existing research points to social adjustment difficulties as paramount to the lack of success in retaining African Americans in higher education, a body of research exists as

well that provides a framework for strategies that have been successful in the retention of African Americans in higher education.

## Research on African American Retention in Higher Education

### *Factors Affecting Retention*

Factors affecting the retention of African American students at PWUs have been the focus of many research studies (e.g. Grier-Reed, Madyun & Buckley, 2008; Jones & Williams, 2006; Love, 2008; Thomas et al., 2007). Much of the extant quantitative research on African American student retention and attrition in higher education suggested that the more tangible measures of student college success such as SAT scores and high school grade point averages were less predictive measures for academic success for minority students, and failed to take into consideration the less tangible social and psychological factors that may lead to drop out (Thomas, et al., 2007).

Jones and Williams (2006) conducted a study that suggested the most effective strategy for African American student retention at a PWU in the Pacific Northwest was the university's focus on promoting academic and social development and creating a nurturing environment through its African American Student Center. In a pilot study, Grier-Reed et al. discussed the effects of the African American Student Network (AFAM) on the retention of African American students in higher education. AFAM is a networking group for African American students led by university faculty members to facilitate intact social support systems for the psychological well-being of African American students by providing a safe space for them to address, understand and cope with stressors of being on a PWU campus (Grier-Reid et al., 2007). Relationship to self, others and institutions is the cornerstone of AFAM. Results of this study indicated that AFAM provided a safe space where students found connectedness, validation,

intellectual stimulation, resilience, cultural affirmation and empowerment (Grier-Reed et al., 2007). As with other programs that have been successful in African American student retention in higher education, AFAM focused on the emotional and social aspects of their experience at PWUs.

According to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter 2007), PWUs with favorable racial climates, nurturing campus environments, race-sensitive admission policies, strong orientation and retention programs related to campus cultural adaptation, mentoring programs, strong African American student organizations, and the presence of a relatively large core of African American students had stronger retention and graduation rates. Of the nation's highest ranking colleges and universities with low retention and graduation rates, all PWUs, were ones where African Americans had difficulty adjusting to college life in a predominantly White environment, and that had fewer African American oriented social and cultural programming opportunities to address the social needs of the African American student (JBHE, 2007).

#### *Research on College Student Retention Models*

It was evident in the literature on African American student retention in higher education that positive adjustment experiences on PWU campuses was a critical factor that facilitated their retention, attrition and graduation rates. As the focus of this research was on the adjustment of African American graduate students attending a Southern PWU school, it was important to examine research on the significance of students' overall adjustment and decisions that impacted student retention. Two models of student retention in higher education have focused on the sociological and psychological variables related to student retention.

### *Tinto's Model of Student Retention*

Tinto's 1988 model, which is sociologically based, described how students became socially and academically integrated into college culture (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). This model asserted that a student's decision to persist or drop out of college was predicted by the degree to which he/she was socially and academically integrated into the college culture (Tinto, 1975). Tinto proposed that a student's retention or attrition in college was dependent upon the student's interaction experience with, integration in, and commitment to the college at the time of the decision.

### *Bean and Eaton's Revised Model of Student Retention*

Bean and Eaton (2000) revised Tinto's 1988 retention model, and reflected a more psychological approach to understanding student retention (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Their model suggested a high correlation between students' attitudes, goals, and behavior, with behaviors and attitudes reflecting goals. Rodgers and Summers examined Bean and Eaton's model and concluded that though the model recognized the importance of students' social and external interactions with their college environment, and that these interactions were affected by the entry characteristics (e.g. personality, self-efficacy, past behavior, normative beliefs) of students, African American students who attended PWUs likely differed in their entry characteristics from their White peers, much like they experienced PWUs differently. Though these models and revisions thereafter sought to create an understanding of African American students' social interaction with their college environments, and how these interactions impacted the connection between students' social adjustment, attrition and retention, Rodgers and Summers (2008) asserted that the effects of race and culture were not accounted for when examining and describing the social experiences of African Americans at PWUs. Schwitzer et

al. (1999) addressed these issues in their study, *Social Adjustment Experiences of African American College Students*.

*African American College Student Adjustment Model*

Schwitzer et al. (1999) used a qualitative methodology to create a descriptive model (Table 1) depicting four features of African American college student social adjustment, taking into consideration the African American students’ sense of under representation, direct perceptions of racism, hurdles approaching faculty, and effects of faculty familiarity with African Americans on a PWU campus.

TABLE 1		
Four Features of African American College Student Social Adjustment: A Descriptive Model		
Features	Key Quality	Exemplar Responses
Area I. Aspect of Adjusting to Institutional Climate as a Whole		
Aspect		
Sense of Underrepresentedness	Uncomfortable feelings of being isolated, alone, numerically underrepresented	“The first time I felt like a minority was at this school.”
Direct perceptions of racism	Experiences of racial problems, incidents of racism, or institutional racism	“Black roommates don’t get the same treatment.” “Black organizations are stereotyped.”
Area II. Influence on Academic Relationships with Faculty		
Influence		
Hurdle of approaching faculty	Ambivalence about initiating student-professor interactions	“It’s intimidating.” “Professors will think I need help because I am Black.”
Effects of faculty familiarity	Increase comfort approaching more similar or familiar professors	“I’m more comfortable with Black professors because they have my best interest in mind”  “Other professors make Black students feel uncomfortable.”

This model was specific to African American students’ experience with the campus social and academic climate at a PWU, and took into account the social and cultural interaction

implications for these students. The results of the Schwitzer et al. (2008) study indicated that students' descriptions of their social adjustment experience at a PWU suggested feelings of aloneness, isolation, under representation and racism.

The results of this study pointed to African American students' perceptions of how they experienced the social environment at the PWU they attended for their undergraduate education. The authors inferred that students' social adjustment experience was impacted by variables like race and culture. Other studies have explored the overall adjustment experiences of African American students on PWU campuses and a small body of research has examined the adjustment experience of African American graduate students at a PWU (e.g., Von Robertson et al., 2005), which emphasized the importance of the difference between students' relationships with others on campus through social and academic domains. However, an extensive review of the literature indicated that no studies have taken into account the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a PWU. HBCUs have a culturally specific campus environment that might have impacted how these students experienced graduate school at a Southern PWU.

The purpose of this study was to examine adjustment experiences of African American graduates of historically Black colleges or universities (HBCU) attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). These students' narratives about their experiences were examined for common and prominent themes across the research participant group and gave voice to the students' individual and collective experiences.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of historically Black colleges or universities (HBCU) attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). A phenomenological design was utilized to examine the stories of the lived experiences of selected participants and how they negotiated adjustment to their graduate school setting. The personal narratives of participants were analyzed for prominent and common themes to develop further the meaning of college adjustment as it related to African American students attending a Southern PWU graduate school, specifically those who graduated from an HBCU as an undergraduate. The research questions that guided this inquiry were:

- What are the experiences of students attending graduate school at a Southern PWU?
- How do students experience their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?
- How do graduate students cope with their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?

This study gave a voice to these students through their stories which related their experiences and encounters from a personal perspective, giving meaning to adjustment experiences of African American graduate students attending a Southern PWU graduate school.

The components of this chapter will provide specific information about the research methodology used, including the research design, data collection, researcher's role and reflexivity, participant selection process, interview setting, participants, and selection criteria. Methods taken to maximize participant confidentiality and explanations of the informed consent, gaining access, field notes, and data quality, will also be discussed. The final section includes

data management and analysis procedures. Results are displayed in a coding iteration table (see Appendix A).

### Research Design

This study followed a phenomenological research design. The purpose of a phenomenological research design is to describe and interpret study participants' experiences in an effort to understand these experiences from their perspectives (McMillan, 2004). McMillan asserted "a phenomenological study focuses much more on the consciousness of human experiences" (p. 274). Further, Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that the tradition of phenomenology focuses on the use of participant narratives through storytelling to make sense of their lived experiences. In phenomenological research, giving the research participant a voice is the central focus (McMillan). Using the phenomenological research design for this study helped the researcher give an in-depth understanding of these African American HBCU graduates' lived experiences of the transition from their HBCU undergraduate experience to their current adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU.

### Data Collection

Compared to other research designs that use only self-report tests, questionnaires, and inventories, phenomenological researchers typically use intensive interviewing where the researcher and research participants engage in direct face to face verbal communication, allowing for greater depth and richness in information (McMillan, 2004). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), a long, extensive interviewing process is necessary when using the narrative approach that is utilized in phenomenological research.

Data for this study were collected through the use of intensive in-depth interviewing of research participants. Seidman (2006) stated that in-depth interviewing is rooted in the concept

of understanding how others make meaning of their lived experiences, and how these lived experiences, which are delivered through narratives, are of value. Intensive in-depth interviewing allows for more comprehensive exploration of specific issues or experiences, and encourages each participant to interpret their experience (Charmaz, 2006).

Interviews were scheduled with participants at a time that was conducive to their schedule and at a location that was comfortable to them. According to Patton (2002), “It is the responsibility of the interviewer to provide a framework within which people can respond comfortably, accurately, and honestly to the questions posed” (p. 381). Prospective participants were notified by email about the length of each initial interview, approximately 90 minutes, and of possible follow up interviews not to exceed 45 minutes. These time limits were established so that interviews would not exceed the agreed upon parameters, permitting participants opportunity to share their in depth experience while allowing the researcher to remain diligent and focused.

### *Interviewing Method*

The researcher utilized a combined strategy during interviews. Patton (2002) suggested using unstructured standardized open-ended questions for the initial interview, and semi-structured follow up questions towards the end. McMillan (2004) described unstructured questioning as a method of inquiry where the researcher asks broad questions that have a general goal in mind. Semi-structured questions do not have predetermined choices, but are open-ended questions with a specific intent (McMillan, 2004). The combined strategy format allows the interviewer flexibility to probe, determining when it was appropriate to explore certain subject areas in greater depth (Patton, 2002). The standardized open-ended interview establishes a fixed sequence of questions to fit a structural format (Patton, 2002). The standardized open-ended interview consisted of a set of interview questions that were sequenced and carefully worded,

asking each participant the same questions with essentially the same words and in the same order (Patton, 2002). However, participants were encouraged to respond as openly as possible (Seidman, 2006). If follow up interviews were required, semi-structured questions were utilized. The combined strategy served to ensure that time was being used efficiently by focusing the questions and establishing priorities for the interview (Patton, 2002).

### *Interview Protocol*

Each interview began with general introductions and the researcher had each participant read a statement that highlighted the overview of the study including confidentiality and the rights of the participant. This information was provided to the participant prior to the date of the interview. The researcher then answered any questions the participant had regarding the study and its procedures before continuing with the interview. Each participant was informed that the interview was being audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting their experiences and personal reflections, and that a transcription of the interview would be made available to him/her. Seidman (2006) stated that tape recording and transcribing interviews was the principal method for creating text from interviews. Two recording devices, a standard tape recorder and a digital recorder, were utilized during each interview to minimize the possibility of losing data due to recording device malfunctions. These recordings increased the accuracy of data collection and permitted the interviewer to be more attentive to the participant's affectations and nonverbal communications (Patton, 2002).

To help the participant feel more at ease, and to establish interest in hearing their genuine story, the researcher established rapport by generating conversation with non-threatening and non-invasive questioning. Patton (2002) stated, "Rapport means that I respect the people being interviewed, so what they say is important because of who is saying it. I want to convey to them

that their knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and feelings are important” (p. 365-366). Interview questions were organized around the purpose statement and research questions (Appendix B).

The interviews began with general questions that were simple to answer, asked for relatively uncomplicated descriptions, and required minimal recollection and analysis on behalf of the interviewee (Patton, 2002). Questions 1-4 asked for general information from each participant. Questions 6 and 7 gave the researcher an idea of how the research participants conceptualized social environment and adjustment, giving context to their experiences. These questions required participants to define the terms social environment and social adjustment in their own words so that the researcher was able to appreciate the meanings of these terms from the viewpoint of the participant, and how they related to various parts of each participant’s life. Later, responses from this initial inquiry helped frame the more detailed responses participants disclosed about their lived experiences with the environment of and adjustment to their graduate school experiences. Questions 8 through 13 gave the researcher a look into each participant’s adjustment experiences during two educational transition periods, from high school to undergraduate education and from undergraduate education to graduate school. The remaining questions aimed to gather specific data regarding each participant’s undergraduate and graduate experiences with adjustment and their reflections about the meaning of these experiences.

These questions represented the essence of the study, asking participants to reveal and reflect upon past and present lived experiences. The final question was designed to give research participants agency to share any additional information about their social experiences that may not have been covered during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview process each participant was thanked for his/her participation in the study, and asked if he/she would be willing to participate in a shorter follow up interview if necessary. Possible dates and times for a

follow up interview would be established at a later time; however, follow up interviews were not necessary. Finally, participants were asked for referrals for other potential research participants.

### *Demographic Questionnaire*

Prior to the final selection of participants, potential research participants were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) that was emailed to them with the initial invitation to participate. They were asked to email the completed questionnaire back to the primary investigator with their affirmative response to participate in the study. Those not requesting to participate did not need to complete the questionnaire. This extant line of questioning was collected before the interview, which encouraged participants to become actively involved in providing descriptive information immediately instead of becoming conditioned to provide short answers and routine responses (Patton, 2002). The purpose of the demographic questionnaire was to gather information and characteristics about each potential participant to assist the primary investigator in selecting a diverse group of participants. As well, the demographic questionnaire was used later to analyze data from the study. Charmaz (2006) stated that extant texts provide sources of information that are independent from first-hand data collected, and may trigger ideas and evidence for the researcher's intuitions.

### Role and Reflexivity of the Researcher

I am currently a doctoral student in the Counselor Education department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. After 14 years working in public school education, holding positions as a special educator and minority education specialist, and three years as a counseling therapist working with adolescents and families, I made a career decision to pursue a doctoral degree in counselor education where a combination of my past work skills and experiences could be utilized to serve a diverse student population in higher education. Between

August 2007 and January 2011 I have held three graduate assistantship positions; one in the counselor education program, another with the Multicultural Advancement Opportunities Program, and one currently in the Graduate Office of Recruitment and Diversity Initiatives. In each of these positions I was able to interact on various levels with students and faculty in a higher education environment.

Throughout each of these experiences I have had the opportunity to work with students ranging from age four through adulthood, and in many academic settings. My career responsibilities have ranged from seeking appropriate resources for students with special needs, creating and implementing academic achievement programs for low achieving African American middle school students, to planning and implementing therapeutic counseling programs for youth, adolescent and adult clients experiencing mental illness. A majority of my career has been spent working with and advocating for minority populations, mostly African Americans. During this time I have noticed that many of my students and clients experienced stress, anxiety, and other dysfunction in their social and academic environments. I have witnessed these experiences first hand, and have heard many stories about “not fitting in, feeling different and not feeling accepted” by students and clients. Their shared perceptions of their social and academic worlds, where they were the minority population, gave me the desire to gain further insight into such experiences because many of these students and clients were transferred from immersion a monocultural world (e.g. Black neighborhoods, Black churches) in which they lived into a multicultural academic setting in which they were the minority.

Hearing some of the social experiences of past students and clients in their social and academic settings may have influenced how I perceived and understood the adjustment experiences of participants in this study. From the perception of a counselor and educator, my

understanding of each participant's experiences might have been understood within the context of a professional in the helping professions. However, I was aware that my current role was that of a researcher and not that of a helping professional, and of the necessity of phenomenological reduction to minimize the affect that my multiple roles played in the research process. Patton (2002) stated that in phenomenological reduction "the researcher 'brackets out' the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusions", (p. 485). Further, being aware that my past experiences may have caused unintentional bias in interpretation, I engaged in researcher epoche due to possible assumptions that could be made unconsciously. Epoche "is a process that the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of, prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation" (Katz, 1987:36-37, as cited in Patton, 2002).

#### Selection Process

For this study, informal gatekeepers were needed to gain access to potential participants. Access was sought by contacting individuals at the university site who were able to assist in gaining access to participants, which required only email contacts. A program director in the graduate school was contacted for assistance. Current affiliation with this graduate school program director allowed the researcher easy access to participants. Access was gained through email during initial recruiting and later by phone during the research process. Once a potential list of participants had been secured, they were contacted via email listservs.

This research study was focused on the social adjustment experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending a Southern PWU graduate school. It was projected that a maximum of 20 participants would be interviewed for this study. Eleven participants were selected and interviewed. The researcher's decision to stop interviewing participants occurred

when research categories had been saturated across all narratives and cases and no new data was being revealed. Charmaz (2006) stated that “Categories are ‘saturated’ when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (p. 113). Though participants were representatives from only the female population of African American graduate students at the university site used for the study, they were from a variety of cultural backgrounds, different undergraduate HBCUs, and a number of fields of graduate study. Seidman (2006) discussed the importance of satisfying the “sufficiency” criteria of participant selection so that there is a representative participant group that represents various sites in order that other populations that are not part of the sites are able to make a connection to the experiences of the research participants.

Because of the specific nature of this study, participants were selected using purposeful sampling. This selection strategy was designed to enhance understandings of selected individual’s or groups’ experiences, or for developing theories and concepts, and researchers seek to accomplish this goal by selecting information rich cases with the anticipated aim that chosen participants provide the greatest insight into the research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Participants chosen for participation in this study met a specific set of selection criteria that accomplished the task of collecting rich and in-depth information that helped to provide insight into the research phenomenon of the adjustment experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending a Southern PWU graduate school. The identification of selected participants was kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms or code names. Notifications of potential participants selected for participation in this study were by email. Specific selection criteria are described in the *Participants* section of this chapter.

## Setting

Participants in this study were African American graduate students enrolled at a Southern PWU. One university site in Southern Appalachia was selected for the study and was a top ranking state supported land grant institution of higher education. The selected university offered undergraduate bachelor's degrees, graduate and professional degrees (e.g. master's, doctorate, medical) and was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (sacsoc.org). The student university body represented some racial diversity (i.e. 3.6% African American, 0.2% Native American, 7.1% Asian, 3.5% Hispanic, 72% White, 1.5% two or more races, 4.6% not reported and 7.5% non-resident alien) with 15.9% of its student population being racial minorities, but a majority consisted of White students. According to the university's web site, it recruited African Americans for undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Though specifics about the recruitment of African Americans for their graduate programs were not available, it is probable that HBCU campuses were a common recruiting site.

Interviews with respondents took place on the campus of the university chosen for this study. Since state supported universities are public places open to the general public, physical entry onto the campus was not problematic. However, the researcher was aware that access to this particular student population might be difficult if the university felt the study might have caused its institution reputational harm. Gaining access to the research participation population will be discussed in the *Gaining Access and Entry* section later in this chapter.

The universities' physical sites such as student unions and offices of minority student affairs where observations were made revealing human interactions and relationships that were relevant to the study provided the researcher some contextual information about the general university climate. What occurs in a particular environment has a relationship with the physical

setting of that environment (Patton, 2002). Such observations were recorded as field notes, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Campus programs for locating prospective participants for this study were offices of admissions, multicultural affairs, diversity initiatives, minority recruitment, African American student organizations, and programs that served African American students. My position as an African American graduate student and as a graduate research assistant in the University's graduate school's department of Diversity Initiatives was helpful for gaining access to students on the university campus because my supervisor had access to such information for direct contact. As well, the researcher's presence on the campus was helpful in negotiating the campus setting to seek participants, and eventually to interview them for the study.

### Participants

Specification of a qualitative research design requires the researcher to comprehend and consider the unique characteristics of research participants and the environments in which they are located (Devers & Frankel, 2000). In essence, the researcher must make the design more concrete and holistic by developing a sampling frame, which would include criteria for selecting subjects capable of answering the research question(s), identifying such participants, and securing their participation in the study. The selection process can be streamlined via purposeful sampling. This strategy was designed to enhance understandings of selected individual's or groups' experiences or for developing theories and concepts. Researchers seek to accomplish this goal by selecting information rich cases, with the anticipated aim that chosen participants provide the greatest insight into the research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

Because this study addressed a phenomenon involving a specific population and site, the adjustment of African American HBCU graduate attending a Southern PWU graduate school,

maximum variation sampling was used as the method of purposeful sampling to select participants. Maximum variation sampling is the most efficient approach for participant selection for studies requiring interviews and increases the likelihood that a wide range of readers will be able to identify with the study they are reading (Seidman, 2006). This purposeful sampling process ensures that the selection process is fair due to the range of people and sites from which the sample is chosen (Siedman). Participants for this study were selected from one Southern PWU and included 11 women studying in a variety of academic fields. When selecting participants, two things were considered. First, the researcher recognizes that for various reasons African Americans have been reluctant to participate in research studies in the past (Hatchett, Holmes, Duran & Davis, 2000). With this in mind, the researcher encouraged potential participants, but was careful not to coerce their involvement if they expressed reluctance or opposition. Siedman (2006) explained that the research interviewer should find a balance between accepting a potential participant's rejection to be involved in a study and convincing a hesitant potential participant to participate.

#### Selection Criteria

Participants for this study were a purposeful sample of graduate students who identified as African American, were enrolled full time and in good standing as defined by their university, and were attending a Southern PWU graduate school. For the purpose of this study, graduate student referred to any student enrolled in a graduate or professional degree granting program. The participants graduated with an undergraduate degree from a private or public HBCU. Participants were women between the ages of 22 and 30, did not have more than a five year time lapse between their undergraduate graduation and initial matriculation in graduate school, and had completed a minimum of one semester of graduate school in good standing in their current

program of study. Potential participants were recruited directly via email using a recruitment letter script (see Appendix D), or through soliciting assistance via a university contact (see Appendix E). Within the body of the email was a detailed description of the study and instructions about how to respond if they wished to request participation in the study including response deadlines. All responding parties were notified by email or phone of their participation selection status. Potential participants who were not selected were notified by email of their participation status as well.

#### Informed Consent and Permission Process

Ethical conduct of research requires that researchers secure the informed consent of research participants, and demands that all participants have full disclosure about the purpose of the study, its intended audience, what their agreement to participate involves, their willingness to participate fully, and their right to exclude themselves from the study at any point (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The seven essential components to be included in the informed consent are the initial invitation to participate in the study, potential participant risks, participant rights to refuse participation without penalty, possible benefits for the participant, confidentiality of participant identity and the limitations of this confidentiality, the intended use of the study results, and contact information for the researcher and the Institutional Review Board should a participant have questions regarding their rights (Seidman, 2006).

Securing informed consent for this study was an ongoing process beginning with a written form (see Appendix F). It was assumed that because the participants proposed for the study were graduate students, their level of reading and comprehension surpassed the recommended eighth grade level recommended by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979). As well, the selection

criteria required all participants to be 18 years of age or older, eliminating the need to secure consent or assent for the participation of minors. Necessary documentation for this study, including the interview protocol, was submitted to the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval, and approved individual informed consent was received from each potential participant. Once the selection process began, each potential study participant was emailed the written informed consent paperwork and demographic questionnaire in sufficient time for them to review and complete the forms, ask questions for clarification to the researcher and/or IRB about procedures, risks, and benefits of the intended research. Participants were able to make inquiries about the informed consent and demographic questionnaire by phone or email. During the interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent with the participant and answered any questions that were not addressed previously. Next, the researcher secured each participant's signature and provided the participant with a copy of the informed consent for her records.

### *Confidentiality*

Because a qualitative researchers' goal is to understand and make meaning of the experiences of participants they interview, they must be certain to explain that confidentiality refers to confidentiality of participants' identity, including records, tapes, interview transcripts and any other material that can identify the participant or third parties (Seidman, 2006). Steps were taken from the onset of the study to maintain confidentiality for research participants by coding identities and storing all research material that could be traced back to participants or third parties in a secure, locked location. Seidman stated that original records including informed consent forms, audio tapes, demographic information sheets, and any other records that can identify a research participant should be kept in a secure location. The identities of all

participants for this study were masked through the use of pseudonyms and other anonymous identifiers to decrease the possibility of breaching the confidentiality agreement. Because this study utilized a university campus site, the name and specific location of the university was not disclosed in publications other than the dissertation, but was referred to using generic identifiers. Rossman and Rallis (2003) cautioned researchers to be careful with participant and organization identities because written reports such as research studies and dissertations can be used in ways well beyond the control of the researcher or its participants. For these reasons, every effort was made to mask the identities of participants, third parties, sites and any other identifiers in this study through extensive review of transcripts to eliminate any details that might lead to such identification.

#### Gaining Access and Entry

Seidman (2006) commented that in order to gain access to research participants, researchers must often face gatekeepers, both valid and self-declared. Researchers studying the experience of participants in particular settings such as schools, churches and other organizations might have to gain access to these participants through those responsible for these sites (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seidman, 2006). This study examined the experiences of participants at one site, and is specific to that one site. Gaining access through a university official was necessary. Seidman stated that researching an experience in various sites may not require access to the site through an authority if the research is not specific to that site. However, because I was researching the experiences of a specific population, African American HBCU graduates attending a Southern PWU where I was attending graduate school, informal gatekeepers were not problematic and did not believe that the research was harmful to the university

## Field Notes

Field notes are descriptive, dated and recorded information that detail observations of settings, physical descriptions of the settings, participants present in those settings and social interactions that occur within those settings, as well as the observer's reflections of what they observe (Patton, 2002). Field notes are documented perceptions of what researchers observe in the field (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). They provide descriptive information that permits the researcher to recapture the essence of the observation when analyzing research data and also helps the reader experience the details of the observation when reading research studies and reports (Patton). Field notes are typically taken in two parts, the running record in which the observer records exactly what he/she sees in the physical environment and interactions within that environment, and observer comments, where the researcher records his/her emotional interaction with the observation environment, analytical insights and other thoughts that might impact the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

As a part of this study process field notes were taken from the point of initial contact with anyone critical to the study once IRB approval had been secured. Specifically, field notes were taken in a bound notebook during or immediately after contact with study participants or observations in the field and eventually transferred to a digital recording device that was for the specific use of recording field notes. These notes were about the researcher's observation of the interview site and surrounding environment, the interviewee's reactions and interactions, and the interactions of others that were recorded to provide rich and thick descriptions about each observation. They also helped to contextualize observations when analyzing the data. Rossman and Rallis (2003) state, "thick descriptions present details, emotions, and textures of social

relationships” (p. 197). Field notes from observations were kept in a locked and secured location to protect the identities of participants and locations.

### Data Quality

Qualitative researchers should consider the trustworthiness of their studies based on four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1981).

#### *Credibility and Rigor*

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) suggested five strategies that augment the credibility and rigor of qualitative research: triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checks, peer debriefing and critical sustained discussion with valued colleagues. Of these strategies, three strategies, triangulation, member checks and peer debriefing, were used to increase credibility and rigor in this study.

Triangulation of data involves comparing multiple sources of data to substantiate evidence of a researcher’s conclusion about a perspective (Rossmann & Rallis, 2003). Patton (2002) further explains that triangulation means:

1. A comparison of participant interviews with researcher’s observations;
2. A comparison of what people disclose publicly as opposed to privately;
3. A comparison of different persons’ viewpoints about data interpretation;
4. A comparison of people’s perspective over time (p.559).

In the present study three forms of data were utilized in data analysis: field notes, interviews and demographic questionnaires. Data from these three sources were compared and analyzed for consistency of data and to enhance data interpretation. Comparing field notes to corresponding interviews allowed the researcher to scrutinize any incongruent behaviors that conflicted with

what a participant disclosed in an interview and observations of her actions and emotions during the interview. Such information was reported in the study results.

To increase participant validation, member checks of interview transcripts and final data analysis were included as a method of substantiating credibility. Through the use of interview transcripts provided by the researcher, participants were able to examine emerging perspectives of the interview and add further detail, extend perspectives or correct any misconceptions in the researcher's analysis of data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). "Researchers...can learn...about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded" (p. 560). Each participant was provided a copy of the transcript from the interview in which she participated to check its accuracy and to clarify any information that was recorded incorrectly during the interview. Additionally, once findings were formulated, participants were emailed findings to confirm the accuracy of the contents. Participants were given an adequate amount of time to review transcripts and provide feedback.

Peer debriefing was the final form of triangulation utilized in this study. Peer debriefing, as stated in Rossman and Rallis (2003), is a person or persons who necessarily scrutinizes or corroborates any decisions made regarding research design methodology, developing analytical interpretations, and building explanations for the phenomenon being studied. Creswell (1998) commented that peer briefing provides external checks for the researcher and increases the integrity of the researcher as well. The researcher's doctoral chairperson served as the peer debriefer for this research as she had the most continual access to the research methodology, interpretation and analysis. Such consistency in scrutinizing the research process was important in further establishing credibility.

### *Transferability*

Guba and Lincoln (1981, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 62), proposed the concepts of transferability and fittingness for the generalization of qualitative findings. Shenton (2004) stated that to allow transferability, researchers should show evidence of sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork for a reader to substantiate whether the prevailing environment was similar to another situation with which he or she was familiar, and whether the findings could justifiably be applied to the other setting. The researcher reported the following information, thus helping promote transferability:

1. A general description of the ongoing organizations that too part in the study
2. any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data;
3. the number of participants who were involved in the fieldwork;
4. the data collection methods that were employed;
5. the number and length of the data collection sessions; and
6. the time period over which the data was collected (Shenton, 2004).

### *Dependability*

The researcher showed dependability by creating an audit trail that other researchers will be able to follow as a road map for accuracy in future studies. The audit trail for this study included descriptions of research methodology and decisions in altering methodology made by the researcher over the course of the study. The researcher used a code and re-code strategy when analyzing the research data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). In order to create the dependability for this research, interview transcripts were coded and recoded, until prominent themes were derived and supported by the research data. Participants' identities were masked during the coding process to ensure the most accurate themes were being derived without bias.

Finally, to enhance dependability, peer briefing and triangulation of data was utilized during the analysis of data.

### *Confirmability*

The strategy that was employed by the researcher to maintain confirmability in the research was reflexivity. Reflexivity is an understanding by researchers that they should not engage their emotions, personal world views, or prior knowledge in the research (Mays & Pope, 2000). Through the use of field notes and a constant examination of the research analysis, the researcher was careful to scrutinize his emotions, world views and prior knowledge about the participants and phenomenon in such a way that these factors did not affect or limit the interpretation of research data. The researcher also explored and was aware to the best of his ability how his personal experiences with the research phenomenon and participant group might have affected research outcomes. The researcher also utilized bracketing by continually asking how his own experiences with adjustment to higher education at a Southern PWU might be explored and intentionally bracketed. The analysis began with the bracketing of personal experiences and prior thoughts of the researcher. Eaves and Kahn (2000) recommended that researchers critically reflect upon assumptions, preconceptions and prejudices prior to and during the study. The bracketing of these critical reflections is an important continual process throughout analysis (Creswell, 1998).

Journal notes were kept throughout the research process to recognize personal projections during analysis of data. Open dialogue about personal experiences related to the research and its participants was implemented through the use of peer debriefing and dissertation committee member meetings with the researcher throughout the research process to eliminate as much as possible any confusion about the data being received through participant interviews. Because the

researcher had an ethnic identity similar to the research participants, there were ongoing discussions with a dissertation committee member about personal and cultural beliefs and perceptions of the interpretation of the research data related to the issue of African Americans adjustment in higher education.

### Data Management

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) stressed the importance of having good data management skills to keep data organized and accessible because good management skills facilitate analysis of data at any stage of research. A system for maintaining accessible participant information such as copied informed consent forms, labeled interview audio tapes, interview transcripts, detailed field notes and audit trails all stored in a secure location was emphasized by Seidman (2006). Data for this study were in the form of interview transcripts, field notes, and demographic questionnaires. This section describes methods for organizing and maintaining data with accuracy and security, as well as steps utilized in data analysis.

#### *Data Organization and Security*

Seidman (2006) commented that there is no one correct method of organizing research procedures or the materials derived from research, and that researchers should spend an adequate amount of time organizing, labeling, filing and documenting at the onset of the research process to decrease the possibility of frustration later in the process. During the process of this study, the researcher managed files for organizing data by creating separate file folders in which to store participant written and documented verbal communication (e.g. emails, phone conversations, text messages), participant research procedure paperwork (e.g. signed informed consent forms, IRB forms), participant research data (e.g. demographic questionnaire, original interview transcripts, artifacts, interview audio tapes), and researcher analytical information (e.g. field notes, audit

trail, analytical memos, coding procedures). Pocket files with clasp closures were used to prevent the possibility of loose materials falling out of the files. All filed research materials were secured in locked file cabinets in the researcher's private residence and the dissertation committee chairperson's office with a keyed locked door to which only the researcher and chairperson have access.

### *Transcribing Audio Tapes*

Transcribing interview audio tapes can be timely, exhausting and expensive (Seidman, 2006). "The ideal solution is for the researcher to hire a transcriber"(Seidman, 2006, p. 117). Due to the number of anticipated interviews, the researcher prepared financially to employ the services of a transcriber to produce interview transcripts from interview audio tapes. This allowed more time to be dedicated to the actual analysis and interpretation of research data. Transcribing text in its entirety was important to identify verbal affectations that were important in data interpretation and for triangulation of data sources (e.g. hesitations such as pauses, reluctant utterances such as "ums" and "hms", and nervous laughter that may be compared to interview notes). Transcripts were labeled with interview dates, participant pseudonyms or identifier maskers, and page and line numbers for organized reference back to text.

### Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, data gathered for this study were in the form of interview transcripts, field notes and demographic questionnaires. Data were analyzed by the researcher with no preconceived intent in mind, thus allowing the research data to guide the direction of what came into view as important and interesting from interview transcripts. "The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117).

Upon receipt of each transcription, the researcher began analyzing and coding for possible theme categories. The use of open coding was effective for categorizing information. Siedman (2006) asserted that one of the strategies of analyzing phenomenological interview data was meaning categorization. During this process the researcher will code interview information into categories (Seidman, 2006). Upon completion of the coding and re-coding process, prominent recurring themes were decided upon as being specific to the purpose of the study. A coding iteration table was developed (see Appendix A) to display the coding process to give the reader a transparent understanding of how each theme was derived. Three iterations were utilized during this process, a first iteration for surface analysis of interview content and to divide data into manageable categories, a second iteration also called the constant comparative method to seek out initial codes from recurring patterns, and a final iteration that formed a hypothesis or theory relative to the research problem context (Anfara et al., 2002). From this information themes emerged that guided the results, discussion and conclusion sections of the study and other supporting information from prior research to enhance research findings.

### Summary

The researcher utilized a phenomenological approach to study the adjustment experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending a Southern PWU graduate school. Study participants were 11 female graduate students from large land grant state university in the South who met the established criteria developed by the researcher. Data were collected through audio taped participant interviews, demographic questionnaires and field notes, and triangulation of data was utilized to confirm data interpretation and analysis. Participant narratives as well as other patterns of information gathered through intense interviewing were examined for

prominent themes that emerged across all participants' interviews about their adjustment experiences.

Current and past studies on African American student adjustment to college utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods, with most being qualitative. No research on graduate student adjustment was found that used African American HBCU graduates attending a Southern PWU graduate school as participants, so results of this study provided insight into this phenomenon. Such information could enhance strategies and approaches for addressing the adjustment issues past researchers have discovered regarding African American students attending PWUs.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Article 1

Students in Transition: Adjustment Experiences of HBCU Graduates Attending Graduate  
School at a Southern Predominantly White University

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## **ABSTRACT**

A phenomenological study design was used to examine the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Study participants were enrolled full time in graduate or professional programs . Interview transcripts and demographic questionnaires were analyzed and eight prominent themes emerged to describe participants' experiences.

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study was to examine the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) who were attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). Semi-structured interviews, demographic questionnaires and field notes were used to give meaning to the lived experiences of study participants through qualitative analysis, with the goal of revealing prominent themes that depicted individual and collective participant experiences.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

African American and Latino/a college students are more likely not to graduate from a PWU than their White counterparts (Harvey, 2001; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2001, Shin, 2010). The retention of graduate students of color is a very complex and multifaceted issue. Past research has focused on psychological, emotional and intellectual deficiencies as reasons given by faculty for the low retention rates of minority students (Shin, 2010). Some researchers have challenged the single notion that inadequate academic preparation was the main reason for the low retention rate of African American students at PWUs (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010, Sedlacek, 1987). Other non-cognitive variables such as relationships with family, friends and faculty should be considered (Shin, 2010).

Research has indicated that African American students at PWUs with strong connections to faculty, friends and family and Black student organization tend to have more successful college experiences at (Astin, 1999; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Guiffrida (2005) conducted a study that revealed that though an African American family's strong connection can be an asset, such connections can be a hindrance to African American college student success as

well. Researchers have suggested that though African American student relationships with faculty are significant to their success, other studies have shown an inability of African American students to form a bond with PWU White faculty (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Fleming, 1984; Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995; Schwitzer, Griffen, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Much of the disconnection between African American students and White faculty at PWUs is socio-cultural and is significant of a larger problem where improvement is needed within the PWU community for African American students.

Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) proposed that improvement was needed in the area of counselors' preparation for and support of African American students for college. College counselors and student affairs personnel (e.g. academic advisors, student retention support officers) are in a position to be strong advocates for the success of African American students at PWUs (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Though counselors have been active in the areas of client advocacy, multicultural education and racial/ethnic connections in general mental health, a scant amount of counseling research has been focused on the African American student experience in higher education at PWUs, particularly graduate education. Further, an exhaustive search of the literature revealed no research has focused specifically on the adjustment experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending a Southern PWU. This study was designed to speak to this gap in the literature.

## **METHODS**

A phenomenological research study design was selected for this study. Phenomenological research examines the lived experiences of participants and how they bring the meaning of these experiences into reality (Creswell, 2006). Participant narratives from semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for qualitative analysis. To promote authenticity

and accuracy in the reporting of participant narratives, participants were given access to interview transcripts and data analysis for review and the opportunity to correct any misinterpretation or misrepresentation of their experiences.

### *Participants*

Participants were 11 African American female graduates of HBCUs enrolled in full time graduate or professional studies at a Southern PWU with no more than 5 years between their HBCU graduation date and initial PWU graduate school enrollment. Participants were between the ages of 22 and 30 years, in good academic standing with the university after completing at least one semester of graduate studies, and represented a variety of masters, doctoral and professional academic programs.

### *Data Analysis*

Semi-structured interview transcripts, demographic questionnaires and researcher field notes were used as sources of data. Data were analyzed using a coding and recoding strategy to determine final themes. Triangulation of data sources was used to confirm data analysis. The primary researcher utilized member checks and peer debriefing to control for potential bias in data interpretation. A bracketing exercise in the form of the researcher's personal narrative was used to minimize the possibility of researcher bias. The primary researcher was an African American doctoral student attending a Southern PWU who had earned an undergraduate and two graduate degrees from two Southern PWUs. The primary researcher constantly checked the analysis of data for personal bias associated with his higher education experience and background.

## **RESULTS**

Data analysis resulted in the emergence of 8 prominent themes that described the

experiences of participants' adjustment to attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. These themes: support systems, emotional reactions, distrust, academic frustration, socialization, lack of African American presence, non-cohesive African American community, and racial microaggressions are evidenced below through direct quotes from the interview transcripts of participants narratives.

### ***Theme 1: Support Systems***

Participants highlighted the importance of having or establishing support systems within and outside the university setting to help with transition and adjustment to life at a PWU. Family and friends tended to be the support system that was important across all participants (n=11). Other significant support systems included mentors, romantic relationship partners, clergy and previous HBCU faculty. One participant shared why her personal support system was important in her adjustment experience, commenting,

Finding that support system was a HUGE thing because it's like if I'm stressed out about my personal life...if I'm stressed out about school, if I'm frustrated about anything, if I just need to ping-pong ideas of off somebody I can call those support individuals here or back home. If I'm just stressed out and I'm like "[friend], I need you to come over here." She's over there in a heartbeat. Honestly, if you have a lack of support system, that's what makes everything else traumatic...it's a domino-effect, this will make every else fall part.

### ***Theme 2: Negative Emotionality***

Several participants (n=8) discussed having negative emotional reactions to their adjustment experience at a Southern PWU. Feeling depressed moods (e.g. loneliness, isolated) and isolation/alienation were the most profound emotional reactions, though several others were discussed. An example of feeling a depressed mood [loneliness, rejection] was affirmed by one participant, disclosing:

There's only one other minority student and then the rest of the students are White. I felt like I really wasn't just comfortable yet. And they all seemed like they formed cliques and so I was like

“Hmm, I don’t want to deal with the cliques.” And so I was always gone during the first semester because I really kind of hated it. I really didn’t like being here.

Other participants shared stories about feelings of isolation and exclusion at different periods during their adjustment to graduate school at Southern PWU. These feelings were experienced in and out of the immediate academic environment and were followed often by depressed moods according to participants. One participant, a first year master’s student in a liberal arts curriculum said the following about her experience,

Like my undergrad experience [HBCU] I had a really good time; then I came here [PWU], it’s such a difference. And even like the summer program I did here; I had like a positive experience with all the people there, and it’s kind of ... I want to say “misleading,” but now I am at the XXX School [within the PWU], and it’s mostly White, and I’m kind of excluded in that environment now. It’s a lot different.

Another participant expressed her anger and disappointment with being excluded by other students from invitations to social activities within her academic department. Further, she felt that her advisor further isolated her with his reaction when she confided her problem to him, she disclosed:

And so I went to him about these things that were going on, and basically he told me, “As Department Head there’s nothing I will do, nothing I can do, nothing I should do. I really can’t step in on these personal issues that you’re having.” I lost confidence in my advisor and in my department head. You’re my advisor; you’re my department head, and I’m telling you these things are happening—I’m CRYING to you...telling you about how they’re going to eat on Thursdays without me, and then I find out you’re going with them. You know what I mean?

### ***Theme3: Distrust***

Distrust emerged as a strong theme among many participants (n=7) on two levels. On the macro level participants discussed feeling betrayed by the Southern PWU, asserting that summer recruitment programs aimed at encouraging HBCU undergraduates to attend PWU graduate schools led them to believe that the diversity represented in the summer program would be

similar to diversity experienced in Southern PWU graduate programs. Participants' experience at their current Southern PWU reflected just the opposite. One participant, a third year doctoral student in a science research field, provided specific feedback regarding her feelings of distrust. She expressed feeling betrayed by the process used to recruit her to graduate school at a Southern PWU, stating

It was an environment [summer recruitment program at PWU] that catered toward embracing diversity and everybody was open and friendly with each other. It was a diverse group of students and they were all interested in each other. And now [professional school] most everybody –it's not very diverse at all. It's mostly female, White females-like 80% female. They tend to hang with each other and they're not as open. Just a lot different.

In addition to distrusting the recruiting process on the macro level, participants discussed negative interactions at the micro level with White people in their academic departments. One participant, who was the only African American in her doctoral program, shared a story about a negative experience in a course taken outside of her department that led her to distrust colleagues in her cohort, stating,

I will never forget the day I actually cried in the class because we [departmental doctoral cohort] had said we're all going to meet, work with each other on a project. You know what I mean? It would just make sense; we're all from the same department; it's six of us in one class [outside of department]. Three on three. And the teacher came to me during break and said to me, "[student name], your name is not on any of the papers." And I said, "What are you talking about? I'm working with those dudes." It didn't matter what I said. They had put someone else's name down. So I had to go around and figure out, ask someone if I could work with them.

#### ***Theme 4: Academic Frustration***

A number of participants expressed that they were academically frustrated. Though most participants (n=9) excelled academically with grade point averages of 3.2 or greater, they talked about their dissatisfaction with the lack of verbal and written feedback received on assignments on which they received below average grades. There were other examples that surfaced as well

included in the discussion section. One participant expressed her irritation with trying to make improvements on a writing assignment, commenting,

And it's like one my classes... Oh I despise that class. It was just... you know, you're supposed to do a 2-3 page paper, 3-5 page paper and one professor is like... I had to deal with two professors that taught the class. One professor would completely butcher your paper and the other professor wouldn't say anything on your paper. And then it's like you had to get up to a 5. I'm getting like 2s, then 2.5. I was like, "Wait... you can't get Cs in grad school." And then I asked, "Well how do I improve the paper?" And you re-write the paper and they still give you a 2.5. "Well what are the things I need to change on that paper? Why did you not like the paper?...noooo feedback!

### ***Theme 5: Socialization***

Numerous concerns were discussed by all participants regarding limited socialization opportunities for African Americans on the PWU campus. Several comments highlighted significant differences in socialization patterns on the PWU campus than they were accustomed to from their HBCU experience. They expressed how this negatively affected their adjustment experience in terms of making friends, needing to belong and selecting social activities. These differences will be elaborated in further detail in the discussion section. Social networking and socialization patterns received the most attention from participants. Every participant made specific comments about alcohol consumption and its connection to socialization on the PWU campus, and how they experienced social use of alcohol differently than their White peers. One participant remarked specifically about her dismay with socialization patterns:

They [White students at PWU] drink, drink and drink and talk and talk. We [African American students] drink and chill...we just drink, you have... the music going... You're good to go, but you don't be talking [laughing]. I'm like "Oh my god... talking." I want to chill. I don't want to talk.

Other participants talked about opportunities for social networking, but expressed difficulty with making this happen. Though they felt there were opportunities for social networking with other African American students, they cited obstacles like time constraints and coordinating their schedule with social events. One participant shared:

When I first got here I went to the [Black student organization] meetings. And I did a couple of their events, like the cookout this year and last year. So that was nice networking and meeting the students. However, I can't commit to a whole lot of stuff with my friends here who are Black graduate students because their programs are a little different than mine. So it's kind of hard sometimes to connect. I can't really hang out with them as much because I'm taking like 10 classes a semester.

***Theme 6: Lack of African American Presence***

The topic of minimal African American presence on the Southern PWU campus was mentioned by all participants in the study. This lack of presence ranged from the student body population to the townspeople. For many participants this created a sense of invisibility because they rarely had the opportunity to interact with a significant number of African Americans, unlike their experience at the HBCU they attended for undergraduate studies. Their experience with this lack of African American presence was evident in the following participant's comment:

We haven't had an African-American admitted since I've been here in the program. No he [African American classmate in her cohort] hasn't graduated, but he's gone [no longer at PWU]. I think he's writing from afar. He was here that one year and then he rolled. He said "I can't take it. I can't do it." So it's just me left.

***Theme 7: Non-cohesive African American Community***

Several participants lamented over the issue of experiencing an African American community on the PWU campus that was non-cohesive with many internal communication and collaboration conflicts. Some of the experiences were related directly to an avoidant communication style they observed between African American students on campus, citing incidents where African American students avoided eye contact with each other and deliberately avoided situations of intentional communication in public. This appeared problematic for participants because they expressed being accustomed to a "community-like" atmosphere

between African American students on the HBCU campus they attended for undergraduate studies. Further, participants talked about the lack of cohesion between the undergraduate and graduate African American population on campus. Most expressed discontent with this matter because they perceived the African American representation on the PWU to be almost non-existent; therefore, they felt that both communities should have pulled together for a more dominant presence. The remarks of two participants showed confirmation of their observations and experiences. One participant, a fourth year doctoral student in a social science field, commented about her perception of communication patterns between African American students:

I feel like on campus, I feel like people don't speak to each other. I'm used to speaking to people regardless of their race. It kind of feels weird to me ... maybe I get kind of taken back, especially when I speak to my own race and they'll like put their heads down and not even speak back to me. Like "I acknowledge you; you should acknowledge me."

Another participant shared her observation with the lack of cohesion and continuity in the African American student community. She stated:

I guess before I came here the relationship between Black undergrads and grads [at the HBCU] was more together...here [PWU] you've got undergraduate Black student organizations and graduate Black student organizations, all for the same purpose, but they never do anything together. It's no wonder the Black graduate population is so scarce around here.

### ***Theme 8: Racial Microaggressions***

Racial microaggressions were experienced by 10 of participants in this study. Participants described incidents with White peers and faculty they [participants] perceived to be subtle hints of racism. They often framed these racial microaggressions as the ignorance or lack of awareness of the White population they encountered. Such experiences with racial microaggressions on the Southern PWU campus led many participants to withdraw socially and avoid interaction within the environments where the experience occurred. Both verbal and

nonverbal incidents of racial microaggressions were discussed by participants. One participant, a first year student in a graduate professional school, talked about an incident that occurred during a departmental diversity orientation during her first week of school.

Like during orientation week we'd have little diversity things and they'd talk about how the [graduate department] is so un-diverse. And people just made comments on why they thought it wasn't diverse. ...they were talking about how they should start targeting people [minorities] like when they're in middle school and high school and I remember one [White] girl saying, "I don't think they should target them in middle school because by then they've got kids and they're pregnant." She said "them." I'm assuming minorities. So just ignorant stuff like that. I didn't know what to say. It was like our Orientation Week. I didn't know anybody and it was a room-full of 90-some students.

A second participant recalled an incident in her class of 90+ students where she was the only African American. She experienced what she perceived to be an example of a nonverbal racial microaggression, remarking,

Different things kind of seem like ... there's kind of some tension. Like there's like 95 seats in the classroom and I [African American] might sit in one and nobody [White] sits in the one next to me, but there's like 92 students. Like that.

## **DISCUSSION**

This qualitative study examined the adjustment experiences of 11 African American graduates of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). Prominent themes that emerged from qualitative analysis of participant narratives revealed the need for strong support systems (e.g. family, friends, mentors, and partners) for these students. More importantly, themes provided information about the need for PWUs to give specific attention to issues of diversity and inclusion on their campuses, in particular for the African American student population, and specifically those recruited from HBCUs. There was a clear indication that little attention was

given to the transitional experiences of this population on the Southern PWU campus where this study was conducted regarding personal, academic and social adjustment.

### ***Personal Adjustment***

Participants in this study emphasized the importance of knowing someone prior to arriving at the PWU for classes. Personal adjustment was reported to be less traumatic for students transitioning from an HBCU to a Southern PWU for graduate school if they knew someone on the PWU campus prior to arrival. They expressed feeling a more immediate connection to the campus and were able to access resources sooner and with greater ease than those who did not have prior acquaintances. Further, participants asserted that knowing an African American at the PWU upon arrival created direct social networking opportunities that connected them with other African American students, building a sense of community for them on campus.

Overall, personal adjustment was difficult for most of the study participants because they felt thrust into a foreign environment without necessary resources to adjust. Participants cited significant differences between the African American community at the HBCU they attended for undergraduate studies and PWU they were attending for graduate school. Examples included a lack of cohesiveness, avoidant communication patterns, and a lack of African American presence in the student body, faculty and administration. Participants explained how these experiences often caused them to feel isolated, alone, disconnected, rejected, confused, excluded, invisible, discouraged and in some cases depressed in the PWU environment.

Participants described having these negative feelings and emotions at various points during their graduate school experience, but also commented that having a strong support system (e.g. family, friends, partners, and mentors) was imperative in helping them deal with and

overcome their problematic adjustment. They expressed disappointment with the PWU's lack of attention with providing culturally centered support (e.g. multicultural counseling, more African American academic advisors) and were discouraged by available cultural resources on campus, stating that college counselors proved to lack competence, awareness, understanding and empathy about the experience of African American students on a PWU campus. Personal adjustment was problematic for the participants in this study, but social and academic adjustment tended to further exacerbate the personal experience.

### *Academic Adjustment*

Study participants expressed that though social and academic adjustment were separate tenets in the scheme of their adjustment experience, they often converge, creating multiple problematic issues. Academically, participants thrived, even when faced with adversity in the classroom setting. Many discussed the lack of academic support in the PWU classroom to which they were accustomed at the HBCU they attended. Examples included the lack of personable relationships with professors, classmates and academic advisors. Recent studies (e.g. Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010) have revealed that strong connections between African American students attending PWUs and their professors is critical in the students' academic success.

Students in the study talked about the difficulty they experienced in the academic environment due to its emphasis on the individual, which was different from the "community" emphasis they were used to at an HBCU. This often presented problems for African American students by not having immediate access to information about academic opportunities (e.g. assistantships, research participation) as did their White peers.

In the classroom, several research participants felt academically unprepared because they had not been exposed to certain course material as HBCU undergraduates as were their

White peers who attended undergraduate PWUs, citing a lack of monetary resources at HBCUs and sometimes the lack of diverse knowledge of HBCU faculty in their academic field. Further they felt as if their contributions to group discussions in class were devalued and that they constantly had to prove themselves. Many said these feelings of cognitive inadequacy often challenged their academic self efficacy to complete a graduate program at a PWU, which eventually affected their self esteem negatively. These feelings of inadequacy were exacerbated more when they received a poor grade on an assignment or when a professor or classmate reacted in a manner (e.g. laughter, rude comments, and negative facial expressions) that made them feel academically inferior to their White counterparts in class. This happened to several participants when they asked questions or commented about their lack of knowledge about particular academic skills or technology to which they had not been exposed. However, most participants persevered through these negative experiences, learned and mastered skills in areas of deficiency, and thrived to perform at or above the standards of their White peers.

Impacting these experiences in the academic environment was the issue of distrust that research participants felt toward their White peers and faculty. A number of research participants stated they did not trust their White professors and classmates because of incidents that occurred in and out of the classroom. They often felt alienated and rejected because sometimes, as the only African American in their cohort, they were excluded from cohort activities (e.g. lunches, study groups) with their White peers. Whether intentional or not, they commented that their White peers created an atmosphere that perpetuated a lack of racial inclusivity and separatism in and out of the academic environment. Distrust for the faculty (e.g. professors and academic advisors) was asserted by study participants when they attempted to discuss their experiences of exclusion with faculty and were either patronized or disregarded altogether. Many participants

decided not to address any issues, academic or otherwise, with the faculty in their departments after these experiences. A majority of the participants reported that these were experiences with White faculty and that they seemed to lack understanding about and sensitivity to the experience of African American students in their department. Though adjustment issues created challenging situations for study participants, they reported that social adjustment was less challenging, but different.

### ***Social Adjustment***

On the social front, many participants focused on the socialization patterns they experienced that were different from those at the HBCU they attended. A larger number centered on the lack of diversity in social activities available for students of all backgrounds. Many reported that they were accustomed to social functions at dance clubs and lounges that provided an atmosphere with diverse music selections, opportunities to dance, and an environment that encouraged conversation, card games and relaxation. However, participants reported that their experience with socialization opportunities at the Southern PWU they were attending for graduate school emphasized bars, vast amounts of alcohol consumption, loud talking and no opportunity to dance. Though some reported that this, too, was a small part of the experience at HBCUs, HBCUs offered a variety of other experiences that were attractive to African American students. These conflicting social patterns caused participants to disengage in most of the mainstream social scenes at the Southern PWU. As a result, they felt socially paralyzed because the lack of cohesiveness in the African American community often left them with little to do. Most reported that Black groups on campus held social events, but that these events were not coordinated well and often took place at the same time, dividing even more an African American community that lacked cohesiveness. Social networking was difficult for many of the study

participants. They reported lack of opportunity as the main cause, stating that they were often the only African American student in their academic department, which limited social networking in the academic environment. Though Black student organizations often advertised social events, scheduling conflicts with class or work made it difficult for some participants to attend. Many expressed the need for some form of an organized orientation program for African American graduate students prior to the beginning of classes that would allow for social networking opportunities before the demands of graduate school (e.g. studying, assistantships) were imposed upon them. Such an opportunity, they remarked, would give them an opportunity to establish important support systems, bonds and relationships as an African American community before being thrust into a predominantly White academic community of a Southern PWU. Many participants sought out social networking opportunities through religious organizations, Black Greek organizations and Black student organizations. Though these proved to be somewhat culturally different from what was experienced at the HBCU, participants were familiar with them and they provided a sense of community on a micro level as well as opportunities for further social networking. Finally, participants praised the efforts of the graduate school in providing numerous activities which challenged them [participants] to delve into new and unfamiliar areas of entertainment. Some examples included regional cultural activities such as hiking excursions, tubing, and Bluegrass festivals. Though not their activities of choice, participants appreciated the chance to be introduced to something they might not have experienced otherwise.

### **LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY**

A limitation to this study included the qualitative interview process whereby the research relied on the self reporting of participant experiences. Because all study participants

were female, gender bias may have been inherent in participant experiences and data analysis. The results of this study should not be generalized across populations because they are not representative of experiences across all African American student populations at Southern or other PWUs.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING**

There was evidence in this study of the many problematic systemic issues that face African American students attending a Southern PWU. Many issues pointed to a need for extensive multicultural education and social justice advocacy on PWU campuses that recruit HBCU graduates for graduate school. Because retention of African American students in higher education is problematic on several levels, it is time for a sustained and comprehensive approach to promote and create awareness about issues of diversity and inclusion through the implementation of educational and other programs for this population at PWUs.

College counselors and counselor educators have an opportunity to play a major role in this transformative process by accepting the charge of the American Counseling Association to be active agents of change for multicultural education and social justice advocacy for minority and other oppressed groups on the PWU campus. Advocating in the student, school/community, and public arenas, counselors could impart valuable advocacy skills to the African American student population as well as create awareness throughout the campus and surrounding community about the importance of diversity and social justice.

Finally, college counselors and counselor educators can form partnerships with the PWU faculty, staff and administration to provide collaboration with and consultation for programs that address adjustment needs for African American graduate students, particularly those recruited from HBCUs. Bridging the areas of family, friends, faculty and university organizational support

for African American college students on a PWU campus is another area counselors can provide invaluable guidance through multicultural education, community collaboration and systemic advocacy to facilitate positive adjustment experiences for African American students.

Additionally, counselors should be aware of the implications for African American student adjustment at a PWU and initiate outreach programs that offer non-traditional, culturally based models of counseling and support for this population. This should include accessing all support systems in African American students' lives to create a multi-systemic, multidimensional approach to addressing their personal, social, academic and social justice needs.

### **FUTURE STUDIES**

Future studies might focus on examining the adjustment experiences of African American students, especially those in good academic standing, transitioning from an HBCU to a PWU for graduate school in other geographic areas of the United States. Researchers may want to investigate this experience based on variables like gender and marital status for this population as well. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine the adjustment experiences of this population who end up leaving the PWU graduate school before graduation. Finally, replicating this study for other domestic racial minorities might give light to parallel issues related to the adjustment experiences of minority populations attending graduate school at a PWU.

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Article 2

Personal and Emotional Adjustment Experiences of African American HBCU Graduates

Attending Graduate School at a Southern PWU

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## **ABSTRACT**

A phenomenological study design was used to examine the personal/emotional adjustment experiences of 11 African American graduates of historically Black college or universities (HBCUs) who were attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). The researcher utilized semi structured interview transcripts, field notes and demographic questionnaires to investigate participants' adjustment experiences. Analysis of results revealed three prominent themes across participants: 1) support systems, 2) negative emotionality and 3) prior acquaintances. According to participants in the study these three factors seemed to have the most impact on their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU. Two of the themes, support systems and negative emotions had subthemes as well that further defined participant experiences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Because predominantly White universities (PWUs) greatly outnumber historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs), a large number of African Americans are enrolling in PWUs due to accessibility (Fleming, 1984; Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton & Wilson, 1999; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). However, African American student retention at these PWUs is problematic, with only a 40% graduation rate for African American students as compared to 61% of their White counterparts over a six year period (Cross & Slater, 2004). Several researchers have attributed lower African American college student retention rates at PWUs to inadequate academic preparation (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Levin & Levin, 1991). However, this conception has been disputed by other researchers who have asserted that other non-cognitive variables play a significant role in the low retention rates of African American students at PWUs (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Sedlacek, 1987).

Even with these lower graduation rates from undergraduate PWUs, the enrollment of African American students in graduate degree programs in the United States increased significantly between 1997-2007 (NCES, 2010). In 2008, 7% of all master's degrees and 4.5% of all doctoral degrees were awarded to Black recipients (NCES, 2010). Even with the increase of African Americans seeking graduate degrees over the 10 year period between 1997-2007 (NCES, 2010), the percentage awarded master's and doctoral degrees still lags far behind their White peers, a trend that shows even greater disparity in African American graduate degree attainment than their attainment of bachelors degrees.

Much of the research in higher education and student affairs has given attention to recruitment and retention difficulties of African American students at PWUs, but most has been

focused on the single cognitive variable of inadequate academic preparation for African American students (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Though PWU graduate schools recruit heavily at HBCUs, a scant amount of literature has focused on African American graduates' of HBCUs experiences at a PWU graduate school, specifically, issues surrounding transition and personal/emotional adjustment.

Ancis, Sedlacek and Mohr ( 2000) suggest that African American students experience the stressor of being a racial minority in a PWU setting, and such stress has an impact on their adjustment process (Anderson, 1988; Edmunds, 1984; Henderson, 1988; Prillerman, Meyers & Smedley, 1989). Neville, Heppner, Ji and Thye (2004) conducted a study in which they concluded that African American students not only reported racial issues, but that these issues were more stressful than other college-related stressors. Other studies (e.g. Bartle-Haring, Rosen & Stith, 2002; Beasley, Thompson & Davidson, 2003) confirmed the relationship between perceived stress and psychological distress in college students, further validating Neville, et al. and their assertion that race-related experiences caused psychological distress. Neville, et al. suggested that PWUs should implement programs related to reducing African American psychological distress related to male/female relationships, feelings of isolation, loneliness and self esteem. They stated that enhanced race-related stressors might be associated with racial dimensions of personal and environmental adjustment. According to Baker, McNeil and Siryk (1985) personal-emotional adjustment referred to students' need to deal with and control his/her own emotional and personal health. Mackay and Kuh (1994) suggested that college students who experienced warm and supportive college climates experienced more positive adjustment to their environment and persisted through graduation. Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) asserted that a major feat for African American college students on a PWU campus was the ability to be aware of and

deal with negative social issues such as racial microaggressions and that they often perceived faculty and support services to be unwelcoming and unsupportive on PWU campuses. Such perceptions, as well as other negative encounters African American college students at a PWU might experience, could have a profound impact on their personal-emotional adjustment. Social, academic and personal/emotional adjustments are three areas currently used to frame adjustment experiences for college students. For students transitioning from a predominantly Black environment like an HBCU, where the campus environment might have been more welcoming and supportive, stressors related to being an African American attending a PWU can have negative implications for person-emotional adjustment.

### **PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to examine the personal and emotional adjustment experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Through semi structured interviews, field notes, demographic questionnaires and qualitative analysis of participants' narratives, the aim was to divulge important prevailing themes about participants' personal/emotional adjustment experiences.

### **METHOD**

#### *Data Collection*

This study used a phenomenological framework. Creswell (2006) stated that the phenomenological approach to research focuses on the exploration of human experiences and how their perceptions of these experiences are translated into reality. This study was designed to examine the personal and emotional adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending a Southern PWU for graduate school. Two research questions framed this

study. In each research question listed, graduate students refers to African American graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a Southern PWU.

- What are the experiences of students attending graduate school at a Southern PWU?
- How do students experience their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?

The research questions were piloted with non-participants of the study to ensure that they revealed information consistent with the intent of the research.

### *Participants*

Participants were recruited and selected through purposeful and snowball sampling (Berg, 2001) with the intent of choosing those who met a set of predetermined selection criteria. Selected participants were full time African American graduate students who had completed at least one semester of graduate studies in a degree program at a Southern PWU who graduated from a HBCU, and who had no more than 5 years between undergraduate graduation and graduate school enrollment, and who were between the ages of 22-30. A total of 15 participants were selected, but only 11 participated in the audio taped interview conducted by the researcher. The other four selected participants did not follow through with scheduled interviews. Interviews lasted 90 minutes on average. Follow up interviews were requested during the recruitment process, but none were needed after the initial interviews were concluded due to the breadth of information obtained from participants.

At the end of each interview participants were asked to forward the researcher's contact information to others who fit the participant criteria. Though both male and female participants were recruited, only female participants actually followed through with the interview process.

Participants represented graduates from 8 different HBCUs between the Northeast and the Deep South, with academic majors spanning across a variety of fields of study.

### *Verification*

Bracketing was used to minimize any researcher bias that would potentially interfere with data analysis. Creswell (2006) indicated that such verification processes are necessary to augment research credibility, and often through a disclosed narrative about a researcher's background. For this study, the primary researcher was an African American full time doctoral student currently attending a Southern PWU. Contrary to study participants, the primary researcher attained an undergraduate and two graduate degrees from two different Southern predominantly White universities and had a former career in education and counseling, working directly with oppressed African American populations. The use of interview transcripts, field notes, demographic questionnaires, peer debriefers, member checks and an audit trail ensured that multiple sources of information were used for triangulation of data.

### *Data Analysis*

Each participant was interviewed separately in a location of her choosing. Interviews were conducted over a four month period until data saturation was reached. The primary researcher paid for professional transcription of participant interviews, requiring the transcriptionist to sign a confidentiality agreement to protect the identities of research participants. Interview transcripts were read for initial individual coding. After initial coding, the primary researcher re-coded interview texts twice for more specific categorization, combining initial codes into more focused ones upon the final review.

Next, the researcher provided peer debriefers with coding information and samples of text used to determine the coding, re-coding and focused coding categories. Final codes were determined from which three major themes emerged, some of which had subthemes.

## **RESULTS**

Analysis of the data resulted in the recognition of three prominent themes that emerged from the personal/emotional adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs who were attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Support systems, negative emotionality and prior acquaintances were these themes. Subthemes were derived also from the themes support systems and negative emotionality.

### **Theme 1: Support Systems**

All participants interviewed for this study discussed the importance of having or establishing various types of support systems to persist through their different periods of adjustment. Three critical support systems surfaced from analysis of participant transcripts: 1) mentors, 2) family and friends, and 3) romantic relationships. Aspects of these support systems were highlighted, with participants giving specific rationale for the importance of each. Participants reported the significance of having someone “familiar” with whom to talk when faced with adversity. Adversity for participants appeared to take place in both the academic and social settings and directly affected them personally and/or emotionally. Some participants revealed they needed a “sounding board” to help them process negative adjustment experiences. They reported feeling uncomfortable with or unaware of campus resources to assist them with their personal/emotional adjustment. The value of having a strong support system outside of the PWU setting and establishing a strong support system within played a critical role in the personal/emotional adjustment for study participants. These are discussed below.

### *Subtheme 1:1Mentor Support*

Participants who were connected with either a faculty or peer mentor prior to arriving at the PWU campus for graduate school reported more positive experiences with adjustment to their new environment than did those who did not have a mentor. Many noted that adjustment to the academic and social environment was easier because mentors provided them needed support and gave them access to someone they could trust in the academic environment. The two participants below had better experiences with mentors than did the third participant. One participant, a first year graduate student, talked about her experience meeting and working with her faculty mentor:

When I came for my interview, they had already arranged for me to meet four faculty members based on my field interest. So she [mentor] was actually the first person I met and once again, I got a really good vibe from her. I felt like she would probably be a good mentor. I met other people and they all had good research, but like I said, the personality is what drew me to her, and I was happy with my decision...I think this made my entry into research easier and definitely I had a better experience with this than some of my other Black friends. They are still trying to get a professor to let them do research with them.

For some participants, faculty mentors provided significant positive reinforcement in the academic setting, while for others a lack of faculty mentor support presented challenges and barriers. Two participants shared their experiences with positive and negative support from mentors in the academic environment. A participant talked about her positive experience:

As far as other people...or the other person that's a good support person for me is my mentor who I work for. She is very understanding. So let's say if I make a mistake in the lab so it causes the experiment to not work properly. She doesn't get upset. And she just kind of says, "OK, well, next time you know that this step is very crucial. You have to add this ingredient or something. So we'll just do it again"... But then like I said, someone like her [mentor] she's just completely supportive and understanding even when you make mistakes because, we're human and I'm still learning. Mistakes are kind of bound to happen sometimes...

Alternately, another participant had a negative experience, citing a lack of faculty mentor support

in her academic program. She shared the following story:

Like this one professor was like “I’m really hesitant of working with you.” He like outright said that. I’m not going to put him on the spot and say his name, but I was like “Wow. He really just said that to my face.” He’s like “I’m really hesitant because why do you want to work in [field of study]?” I’m like “Because I had an undergraduate senior project that was related to it and I have an interest in it, and I would like to pursue it.” And he’s like “Oh because most of my students, they have far more experience than you.” And I’m like “OK, well I don’t.” And I told him—I was like “I’m willing to work in your lab for free. You don’t have to pay me. I just want to get experience.”

### ***Subtheme 1:2 Family and Friendship Support***

For each research participant distant friends and family seemed to be the “backbone” of their support system. Most talked about feeling encouraged, empowered and relieved after experiencing the support of family and friends during difficult periods of adjustment. The importance of family and friendship support converged upon all areas of adjustment for these participants, but resonated highly in the area of personal/emotional adjustment. Participants discussed the importance of having this connection to vent about adverse experiences and for encouragement. A third year doctoral student talked about her family and friends as a support system:

My parents, my friends... we’re still in touch... like once every week or once every other week. And I might visit them... so that really helps when I go home. Just to kind of vent. It’s always good to be able to talk to some people that kind of understand.

A second semester master’s student spoke about the importance of family support from her mother at times when she felt academic discouragement. She commented:

I didn’t do as well as I wanted to academically last semester. I didn’t get a 3.0; it was close but it wasn’t a 3.0. And I was actually like really upset about that. So to come from always being at least honor roll and graduating Magna Cum Laude—for me to not have a 3.0 was like a shock to my system. And my mom was like “Oh that’s still

good, you did your best.” She’s always like that, even if I feel like... “Man I did really bad on this test.” She still says “Well you did your best.” And she’s always very supportive. And I usually get off the phone feeling a lot better after talking to her.

Though the support of family and friends did contribute to positive personal/emotional adjustment, one participant reported that a lack of understanding and empathy about her experience exacerbated her adjustment difficulties. She noted the following experience with her family’s lack of understanding.

But my family—they don’t really understand because they don’t have... I know they try to understand, but they don’t REALLY understand because they don’t have a degree. They didn’t go through college. It’s hard for them when I’m explaining to them what I’m going through. They’re like “You can do it.” I mean I understand that they’re trying to encourage me, but ...they didn’t go through it, so it’s kind of hard for them to really understand.

### ***Subtheme 1:3 Romantic Relationships***

Equally as important for participants in this study was the support of their romantic partners. Those engaged in romantic relationships talked about the significance of empathy and understanding conveyed by their partners, many of whom were currently in graduate school at an HBCU. A participant commented about using her romantic partner for support when she felt her mother might have overreacted to a situation:

Um, it doesn’t affect me that much emotionally because I do have a boyfriend. Not on campus. Long distance. So we talk every day. So between him and my mom I always have someone to kind of vent to if I have to. Or just talk about something that may have bothered me, so that I don’t have anything really building up on me. Yeah...I can’t mention names because then you’ll know who it is. But one of the professors had said something to me that really upset me. Basically, he was like “Leave if you want to.” Or something like that. And it was over something too trivial I thought. And so I’m like... I am not about to call my parents to drive up from Georgia to pack up my stuff for something that was so stupid. So I talked to him [boyfriend] about it...I didn’t tell my mom because she’d be...”Oh that’s \_\_my baby.” So I just told my boyfriend about it and he was like “Don’t worry about it, just do your best there.” He just supported me and helped me kind of let go of it.

Likewise, a participant reported that having a romantic partner in a similar situation [graduate

school] helped create empathy in terms of support from her romantic relationship. She stated:

But I have a boyfriend that I talk to a lot... he's at [HBCU]. He's doing a Master's there. Yeah, he understands. My boyfriend—he's also in the same major as me, so I talk to him a lot. He pushes me "Don't give up, keep going."

## **Theme 2: Negative Emotionality**

Participants in the study expressed a variety of negative emotions and feelings related to their personal/emotional adjustment to life at a Southern PWU. The most prevalent of these were isolation/alienation, disconnection, discouragement, confusion/betrayal, and depressed moods. These emotions and feelings surfaced at various points during periods of difficult adjustment for participants and persisted over time.

### ***Subtheme 2:1 Isolation/Alienation***

One participant shared her story about initial feelings of isolation and alienation on the first day of classes in the professional school to which she had been admitted. She commented:

Different things kind of seem like ... there's kind of some tension. Like there's like 95 seats in the classroom and I might sit in one and nobody sits in the one next to me, but there's like 92 students. Like that. I'd say the main hardest thing for me was to be at the [professional school] in and of itself, because it's separate from the main campus. I think it's hard enough coming here as a Black grad student... It's not like I really had somebody I could sit down and talk to, who kept me situated. It would be nice to have somebody directly in the school for that, but there was one other [Black student]... Well, when I got here there were a couple other Black students in the [professional school], so I kind of talked to them every now and then. But they weren't in my class—we don't get much time to interact or anything.

### ***Subtheme 2:2 Disconnection***

For some participants there were feelings of being disconnected from campus itself. A participant reported her experience with the large physical size of the campus that created a dynamic of disconnectedness and dissonance for her, stating,

This campus is so big. I could probably pass the same person every day and not really notice it. So I don't know how people...like the student body in general, I don't know how they really interact with one another. I don't know if there's cliques or if people

kind of stay to themselves. Like I said, I feel disconnected. I don't really know how the campus as a whole really lives.

Similarly, a second year doctoral student reported feeling isolated due to the unfriendly communication patterns present in the African American student body, acknowledging that African American communication patterns were much friendlier at the HBCU she attended. She Commented:

I feel like on campus, I feel like people [African Americans] don't speak to each other. I'm used to speaking to people regardless of their race. It kind of feels weird to me ... maybe I get kind of taken back, especially when I speak to my own race and they'll like put their heads down and not even speak back to me. Like "I acknowledge you; you should acknowledge me." It's crazy, right so I guess I kind of like don't speak to people anymore, so I'm kind of changing.

### *Subtheme 2:3 Discouragement*

Being discouraged was a prominent feeling that spanned across all study participants.

One student shared a story about her relationship with an academic advisor that left her feeling hopeless and dejected. She asserted that this sort of incident had occurred in more than one situation during her graduate school experience. She reported that her HBCU experience with professors were more supportive and positive. Sharing her story, she stated:

And then my first advisor that I came in with, that I was assigned to. It was a female. She's being very like helpful because I came in as a provisional student and so she was very encouraging. When I first came in she was like "Yeah, yeah, get your grades together and once you get over that 3.0 you can start doing research and blah, blah, blah., and I'll try to have funding for you" and all this. And I was like "Oh great!" All right I'm focused on coursework, trying to get my grades up. I did. And the next semester she was like "Oh, OK..." Like I don't know if she seemed surprised that I got my grades up and that I made it off provisional student status. She seemed kind of surprised. I got that feeling that she seemed kind of surprised. She was like, "Oh, um, my proposal didn't go through so I think you should start with this other faculty." And then she even said to me, she's like "You should go the non-thesis route." Because I told her I want to get my Ph.D., but I came in as a Master's student. I was like, "I want to get my Ph.D." She was like. "Well that won't hurt you in terms of pursuing a Ph.D." And I was like "Yeah, but I won't have any research experience so that would hurt me." She was like "No that won't hurt you so you should just go for the non-thesis route and just take courses and do a project at the end." I was like "OK, thank you." And I left. And also, when I came in, I didn't know, but I was told from her that I wasn't eligible for any TAs or any type of assistantship. And then when I talked to

the associate dean of my department...our department head, sorry—she was like “Who told you that?” And I was like “Uh, somebody...” I didn’t want to put her on the spot. She’s like “Yeah you could have... And your advisor should have signed you up for a TA, filled out the application.” And I was like “Oh, OK.”

### ***Subtheme 2:4 Betrayal/Confusion***

Many research participants reported feelings of betrayal and confusion once they arrived at the PWU for graduate school. They talked about the emphasis that had been placed on recruiting programs geared toward targeting African Americans from HBCUs to attend graduate school at PWUs, and how the diverse composition of the recruiting program participants was not reflective of the diversity experience on the campus. Participants expressed feelings of confusion and betrayal because the university had not given an accurate depiction of the true diversity composition on the PWU campus. One participant remarked:

It was an environment [summer recruitment program] that catered toward embracing diversity and everybody was open and friendly with each other. It was a diverse group of students and they were all interested in each other. And now in my [professional school] most everybody –it’s not very diverse at all. It’s mostly female, White females-like 80% female. They tend to hang with each other and they’re not as open. Just a lot different.

A third year master’s student expressed a parallel experience of feeling betrayed when she recalled the interview portion of the application process. She stated:

I kind of feel like in a way I was misinformed about [Southern PWU town] when I first came for my interview. Like I was made to believe that the townspeople are like overly-nice to other students. And the person who was talking to me about it made it seem like everywhere you go it’s like open-arms...”Oh we love you, you’re associated with [PWU name].” And that hasn’t really happened.

### ***Subtheme 2:5 Feeling Depressed***

Being in a depressed mood during periods where they experienced negative adjustment was articulated by a majority of the study participants. They spoke about having extended periods of crying and solemn moods that often lasted for weeks. One study participant stated it best, describing her initial experience trying to adjust to her new environment.

In the beginning it was hard, kind of depressing, being here is so different from my undergrad experience. Because I'm a real cheerful person, and being here, being like sad [depressing sound], nobody likes being around people who are unhappy, so I might as well suck it up and stop crying everyday.

Another participant conveyed a similar story about her mood once she began school at the PWU.

She shared her thoughts, commenting

I really wanted to go home. Everything was just really different. I just felt like nobody was really nice... I felt like people were kind of mean, like nobody was really willing to help or... I don't know, I just didn't feel welcome here. It was depressing for a long time.

### **Theme 3: Prior Acquaintances**

A majority of the study participants emphasized the importance of knowing someone on the PWU campus prior to arriving. Participants who had established prior acquaintances on campus, whether faculty or friends, expressed greater ease with transitioning into and adjusting personally and emotionally to the climate of the Southern PWU graduate school. A participant articulated clearly when she remarked:

I'm glad that I had one [Black] friend here when I got here that also did the program [summer enrichment] with me. We weren't that close before we came here, but it really just helped knowing somebody. It definitely plays a big role.

Finally, a fourth year doctoral candidate talked positively about knowing a faculty member from a previous summer program prior to arriving. She commented:

And then there's a professor who was the director of the summer program I did. And he and his wife offered...they actually took me to church the first weekend after school started. And they were very welcoming as well to see me back here in Blacksburg with them. So that really helped my transition.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the personal/emotional adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs who were attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Three prominent themes, support systems, negative emotionality and prior acquaintances, emerged

from qualitative analysis of participants' personal narratives. The personal/emotional adjustment experiences of each participant affected them in both positive and negative ways, thus having an impact on their graduate school experience at a Southern PWU graduate school.

### *Mentors*

Many participants expressed their gratitude about having a mentor (e.g. faculty, administrator). Mentors were seen as persons who were able to guide participants through unfamiliar procedures in the academic environment and served as vehicles for networking. Such networking often led participants to receive more information about funding, research opportunities and Black student organizations. In the end, participants who had positive experiences with mentors expressed positive experiences with adjustment to the academic environment, while those who did not have a mentor or who had negative experiences with a mentor reported having initial and ongoing problems adjusting to graduate school at a Southern PWU. Though a majority of the participants reported positive perceptions of their mentor experience, a few reported negative experiences such as being given inaccurate information about the availability of assistantships and being discouraged from pursuing advanced research opportunities that might have increased their chances of entering a doctoral program later. Such negative experiences caused participants to feel discouraged, and eventually to seek out mentors who were more encouraging and supportive. Of the 11 participants, nine had faculty mentors, six non-African American and three African American.

Of the participants who had negative mentor experiences, two reported having an African American mentor. Mentors were the support system discussed by participants that was within the university setting. However, the support system that appeared to be the most significant across all study participants was that of family and friends.

### *Family and Friends*

Participants placed a strong emphasis on family and friends as a means of continual support throughout their adjustment at the Southern PWU they were attending for graduate school. During times of distress (e.g. poor test performance, discrimination) participants relied on their friends and family members to reaffirm their self efficacy and ability to overcome problematic issues related to attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. A number of study participants indicated that contact with family members for support often reversed negative emotions and feelings experienced such as discouragement, discontent, and hopelessness.

Some participants reported this to be different from their undergraduate HBCU experience because at their undergraduate HBCU the faculty, administration and staff often served as surrogate family members and provided needed support within the university community. Though participants shared they depended on their family relationship back home for support while attending their undergraduate HBCU, the frequency of accessing that support system was not as regular as it was at the Southern PWU they were attending for graduate school. Participants reported that their relationship with Southern PWU faculty, administration and staff was not strong enough to foster the development of a surrogate family for similar support.

In addition to discussing their reliance on family support, a small number of participants shared that though their families provided important support, they often lacked empathy and understanding because they had either not attended a Southern PWU or had not attended graduate school. This often caused disconnection from and tension between participants and their families due to the family's inability to identify with and understand participant adjustment issues.

However, participants praised their friends for the empathy and understanding they were able to show when approached for support. A majority of their friends were in graduate school with them at their current PWU or at the HBCU they attended as undergraduate students. In either case, friends offered an empathic system of support because they shared similar experiences that were inherent in attending graduate school whether at a PWU or HBCU. Participants commented that they depended on African American friends at the PWU for support. They clarified that having similar adjustment experiences made for more genuine and meaningful support. Participants also placed a high value on the support they received from friends outside of their PWU community and felt that these friends provided a different type of support. Though less empathic, this support served the purpose of enhancing self efficacy to overcome obstacles to success. Both friends and family provided participants with necessary support at various times for different reasons. However, participants reported that negative emotions about their adjustment experiences persisted even after having positive contact with family and friends for support.

#### *Romantic Relationships*

A majority of the study participants disclosed that they depended on partners in their romantic relationships for support during times of psychological distress due to adjustment difficulties at the Southern PWU they were attending for graduate studies. Though most romantic partners were in a different location, a number of them were in graduate school and provided a sense of empathic support, understanding and compassion for participants' experiences. A number of participants remarked that their romantic partners expressed a realistic sense of their personal adjustment struggles because they, too, were graduate students with similar experiences. This support was similar to that of participants' African American friends at the PWU they were

attending for graduate school. Though participants' partners experienced different graduate school related stressors, they could conceptualize and understand how being an African American graduate student from an HBCU on a predominantly White campus introduced additional layers of stress. Most participant partners were enrolled as full time graduate students at an HBCU; hence, participants commented that their partner's stressors were different and more related to the general graduate school experience.

Participants whose romantic partners were not enrolled in graduate school at the time of the study commented that their partners expressed less empathy and understanding about their personal and emotional adjustment experiences. Sometimes this lack of understanding created dissonance and stress in the relationship, often resulting in the termination of the relationship and, thus, a needed support system. Because participants expressed dependence on romantic relationship partner support, especially when other support systems were inaccessible, they perceived this loss of support as the most problematic to replace and the most traumatic to endure.

None of the participants felt enough comfort with university resources (e.g. counseling center, advisors) to seek support, which compounded the loss of support even more. Participants expressed a monolithic view of White university employees (e.g. counselors, professors, deans) and found them to be untrustworthy resources. All in all, participants relied upon their romantic relationship partners for ongoing support throughout their adjustment to life at a Southern PWU. Many, however, expressed that this support had been more stable while both partners were attending an HBCU where they shared similar experiences with adjustment.

### *Negative Emotionality*

The expression of negative emotions and feelings resonated across all participant narratives that described experiences with adjusting to attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Some of the most discussed negative emotions and feelings experienced were depressed moods, betrayal, isolation and alienation, disconnectedness, and discouragement. Such emotionality weighed heavily upon each participant and had a negative impact on her graduate school experience. Participants experienced long periods where they felt depressed (e.g. crying, loneliness, fatigue, worry) due to the environmental factors associated with attending graduate school at a predominantly White university (e.g. unfriendly classmates, racial micro aggressions, unwelcoming campus). They talked about how these depressed moods decreased their motivation and self efficacy. Often, participants questioned their ability to adjust to their new environment, citing loneliness and unfamiliarity with a White campus as two main concerns. When asked how they coped with their negative feelings, participants often referred to family or friendship support, or said they relied on strategies used with similar past experiences. Some remained silent and never responded.

Few participants sought help from professional resources on campus or in the surrounding community. Two participants reported seeking counseling through the university's counseling center, but reported that the experience made them feel even more isolated, alienated and invisible because they perceived a lack of understanding from counselors about the experience of African Americans at a PWU. Participants described this as a discouraging disconnection in the client-counselor relationship; therefore, they never returned to counseling.

Additionally, these African American graduate students disclosed that they were

often the only minority student in their academic department, which made them reluctant to report problematic adjustment issues to White professors, advisors or other university personnel for fear of being perceived as weak or not prepared for the rigor of graduate work at a PWU.

Overall, though all participants were thriving academically at this Southern PWU, many expressed feelings of personal and emotional unhappiness due to negative experiences in that environment. In the face of adversity, many relied heavily upon family and friends, romantic relationships and mentors for support through their personal/emotional periods of adjustment. Another factor that weighed in on their adjustment experience was having acquaintances at the university prior to arriving.

#### *Prior Acquaintances*

Those participants who knew someone at the Southern PWU prior to arriving on campus expressed quicker and more positive adjustment to the university environment, which was manifested often in the academic and/or social arenas. Most reported that having a personal friend, mentor, classmate or indirect relationship (e.g. HBCU advisor's colleague, family friend) was helpful in the adjustment process because it allowed them access and opportunity. Prior acquaintances were able to assist them with navigating the campus and surrounding town, familiarize them with appropriate resources, and introduce them to colleagues, creating an initial system of academic and social networking. In most cases, prior acquaintances were African Americans. Participants expressed that they were grateful to have another African American with whom to talk and share experiences. This often decreased any negative emotions or feelings they experienced, at least for a period of time. A majority of the participants also disclosed that it had been very difficult transitioning from an HBCU where African Americans were the majority population to a PWU where they were a definite minority, but the transition was made easier by

knowing another African American upon arriving in the new environment.

Not all participants had similar experiences, as some did not know anyone prior to arriving on campus and reported feeling isolated, invisible and lost for the first few months of school. Some reported total disengagement in the PWU environment and only attended class and no other activities. For some participants this was distressing and they reported feeling a loss of identity because at their undergraduate HBCU they were very involved in academic and social activities. This group stated that not knowing someone prior to arrival on the PWU campus made social networking difficult because they experienced little to no contact with other African American students.

They frequently were the only African American student in their academic department. This created dissonance for them on campus as well as they reported that when they saw other African American students on campus, interpersonal contact (e.g. speaking, waving) was often avoided (e.g. African American students avoided eye contact with each other, African American students did not congregate on campus). This left participants feeling lonely, disconnected and discouraged and what they described as a lack of cohesion within African American community on the Southern PWU campus. This lack of cohesion was disconcerting to them because they reported being accustomed to a strong community-like atmosphere amongst African American students on the campus of their undergraduate HBCU.

Students in this study expressed the importance of being acquainted with someone on the PWU campus prior to arriving so that networking opportunities were available. Those participants who had prior acquaintances at the PWU described having a much more positive initial adjustment experience than did those who knew no one prior to arrival. In some cases, knowing just one other person seemed to have a large impact on how adjustment experiences

were perceived by participants.

### **Implications for College Counseling**

This study represents one of the initial examinations of the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Though access to and opportunities at PWU graduate schools are available for African Americans, attrition rates are high, and personal and emotional adjustment are problematic. Because African Americans typically access mental health services as a last resort after exhausting community resources such as family, friends and religious leaders (Whitaker, 2000), college counselors could explore creative and non-traditional methods to provide services to this population that offer alternatives to the traditional models of individual or group counseling.

PWU counselors can be assistance in the area of retention through exploring roles of counseling that take them outside of the traditional counseling center setting and into the environment experienced by African American students on a PWU campus. By implementing strategic service delivery models that include collaboration, outreach, and consultation, PWU college counselors and counseling personnel might better assist the African American college student with adjustment life at a PWU.

Additionally, HBCU college counselors could expand their roles to help African American students they serve transition more fluidly into a PWU campus environment. HBCU college counselors could provide services such as information sharing, educating their African American students about the differences and similarities that exist between a PWU and HBCU campus environment. Further, by collaborating with PWU college counselors, HBCU college counselors could teach coping strategies to African American students in transition to help them combat common adjustment issues experienced during this transition.

### *Collaboration*

Though counselor collaboration with offices on the PWU campus (e.g. admissions, Graduate School, Office of Diversity and Inclusion) could provide valuable knowledge, participants in this study asserted that the PWU college counselors they experienced on the campus where this study took place lacked education on diversity and inclusion, multicultural and advocacy competencies, and information about the African American on a PWU campus. Emphasizing a more multicultural approach to services provided to African American students (e.g. academic support programs, minority student orientations, mentor programs) and direct involvement in the planning and implementation of these services could be an avenue for creating awareness about the necessity of diversity and multicultural perspectives in counseling service delivery for these African American students.

Collaboration between counseling centers on PWU and HBCU campuses about student transition and adjustment could be beneficial in helping African American graduates of HBCUs transition more smoothly into the PWU campus environment. By providing collaborative services (e.g. pre-orientation programs, resource fairs, mentor training) while these students are still on the HBCU campus, counselors can model effective collaboration, demonstrating a sense of cohesive effort that might encourage African American students to access counseling services at a PWU once they arrive to address adjustment difficulties as they arise.

Further, because study participants emphasized the importance of family support during this transitional period, HBCU and PWU college counselors could offer orientation programs for the families of incoming African American students as a means to educate them about what they might experience in a PWU campus environment . Such preventative

programming would serve to provide strategies for adjustment in which family connections and expectations could be implemented to provide needed support. Other forms of collaboration might include working with local African American churches, Black Greek organizations and Black student organizations to develop and deliver programming related to adjustment difficulties of African American students attending a PWU. Such programming could be utilized as vehicles to establish mentor relationships with African American students. Current students could use their prior acquaintances on the campus and in the community to help new African American students network and establish meaningful relationships that could be helpful with adjustment to the PWU campus.

#### *Outreach*

Outreach programming is another way in which college counselors could provide non-traditional services to the African American community on a PWU campus. Sponsoring and/or attending already established events (e.g., forum discussions, brown bag lunch sessions, diversity celebrations) at locations where African American students feel safe and comfortable (e.g. Black Cultural Center, Multicultural Center, Black Greek organization meetings) on campus to discuss adjustment issues and other topics related to being a minority at a PWU would be valuable. This type of interaction might serve to break down barriers of distrust and alienation between African American students on PWU campuses and services that would be of benefit to help their adjustment. As well, barriers between campus mental health care service providers and the African American student might be removed as a result of such involvement.

#### *Consultation/Education*

Finally, college counselors can educate themselves about their role as consultant (e.g. multicultural/diversity educators) to faculty, staff and administration on PWU campuses,

providing information (e.g., research, best practices for diversity and inclusion, mentoring advice) about ways to help African American students adjust to and be successful on a PWU campus, especially those transitioning from the HBCU college experience. Often it is assumed that those holding advanced degrees (e.g. counselors, administrators, professors) and working at institutions of higher learning are multiculturally competent and sensitive. The lived experiences of the participants in this study challenge this notion. The need is evident for counselor competence and application of skills in the area of consultation and collaboration on the behalf of the African American college student community they serve.

### **Limitations to Study**

Readers of this article should be cognizant of limitations to this study. Though both male and female participants were recruited for participation, only female respondents actually followed through in scheduling interviews. Therefore, some experiences revealed were gender specific, though race and culture issues are evident in the discussion section.

Because interviews relied on the responses of each participant, results were formed from participants' self reported experiences. Some participants may have been reluctant to report detailed information due to the possibility of identification disclosure. Participants were selected from one particular university located in the rural Southern region of Appalachia. Readers should be cognizant of generalizing results across other Southern geographic regions as well as other regions of the United States where African American graduates of HBCUs attend graduate school.

Though bracketing exercises were utilized by the primary investigator during the interpretation of results, this investigator has an African American graduate student identity like the study participants. This might lend itself to some forms of unintentional bias and

interpretation of results, though his undergraduate and graduate student experiences were all at a Southern PWUs.

### **Conclusions**

This researcher investigated the personal and emotional adjustment experiences of graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Participant experiences revealed important information about the value and importance these students placed on establishing support systems and knowing prior acquaintances during the transition from an HBCU to a PWU for graduate school. Additionally, participants disclosed their experiences with having negative emotions and feelings resulting from racial microaggressions and other unconstructive incidents experienced during their transition and adjustment to life at a PWU. Future studies might be conducted with a larger group of participants, other racial/ethnic minority groups, and could be gender specific. As well, replicating this study for the same population across the various geographic regions of the United States may reveal a pattern in the experiences of HBCU graduates attending PWUs for graduate school. Though both qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted about the adjustment experiences of undergraduate African American students attending PWUs, a mixed methods study combining the two research paradigms may reveal evidence about these experiences for the population of this study.

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Article 3

We Will Prevail: Resilience in African American HBCU Graduates Attending Graduate School  
at a Southern PWU

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## **ABSTRACT**

The researcher conducted a phenomenological study that examined the resilience factors of 11 African American graduates of historically Black colleges and universities who were attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university. Through qualitative analysis, factors of resilience emerged across all participants, revealing characteristics and past experiences that assisted in their ability to thrive in a Southern PWU campus environment that often presented challenge and adversity for African American graduate students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well known that the retention of African Americans at predominantly White universities (PWUs) is a problematic issue facing higher education. Several studies have suggested inadequate academic preparation, lack of financial resources, and psychological and social maladjustment as reasons for the low retention rates. Some of these issues have been addressed by PWUs with programs focused on the financial and academic needs of African American students, but few programs have centered on encouraging and cultivating coping strategies for these students to foster positive psychological and interpersonal adjustment.

Study results have revealed the psychological impact faced by African American students attending college at predominantly White universities. Neville, Heppner, Ji and Thye (2004) reported that racial stress was related directly to psychological distress for African American students attending PWUs. Results from research in higher education have revealed the impact of the role of noncognitive variables such as alienation and isolation on college adjustment for African students attending PWUs (Neville, et al., 2004). Edmunds (1984) identified six main stressors for African American college students: financial, academic, environmental, personal, interpersonal and career. Neville, et al., later conceptualized Edmund's domains into three categories, race-related stressors, psychological/interpersonal stressors and academic stressors.

Decreasing such stressors among African American students at PWUs has been problematic for many colleges and universities across the nation. Neville, et al., suggested that PWUs should focus on programs that address relationships associated with stress such as male/female relationships, and stress related to feelings of isolation, alienation and self esteem for the African American college student attending a PWU.

Studies have shown that African American students attending HBCUs showed higher levels of involvement in campus life (e.g. student organizations, campus activities) and had higher grade point averages (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004). Greer (2003) explained that one reason for such outcomes was because African American college students attending HBCUs did not experience the extent of campus environmental racial stress and conflict as did their colleagues attending PWUs. However, few empirical studies have been completed to confirm this notion.

Allen (1992) suggested that not all African American college students who are subjected to high levels of academic and racial stress at a PWU experience poor academic performance. Some African American students were able to engage learned coping skills and strategies that fostered success in an academic environment where stress related factors created adverse situations. Cooper, Mahler and Whitt (1994) identified a number of coping strategies (e.g. mental distraction, spirituality, social support) used by African American college students to deal with stress at PWUs. Hence, resilience among African American students attending a PWU appeared to be a major function of their will to thrive and persevere when faced with stress related factors that often lead to low retention rates.

A great deal of literature concentrates on reasons why African American students have been difficult to retain at PWUs (e.g. Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Smith, 2005) Little has focused on coping mechanisms and strategies used by members of this population who persevere and survive at PWUs. Many African American college students have shown tremendous resilience in the face of adversity on PWU campuses and have managed to deal with adjustment issues to realize successful academic, social and personal adjustment experiences.

## *Resilience*

Masten and Powell (2003) defined resilience as “patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant risk or adversity” (p.4). Resilience factors have been categorized as compensatory, challenging or protective (Garmezy, Masten & Tellegen, 1984; Hagar, 2004, O’Leary, 1998). Compensatory factors of resilience (e.g. internal focus of control, faith and positive attitudes) are parts of an individual or environment that tend to neutralize risk exposure (Garmezy, et al., 1984; Luthar & Ziglar, 1991). Challenging factors are those that enhance resilience for individuals when the risk is controllable, and serve to enhance an individual’s ability to adapt over time, acting as a booster against future crisis (Chong, 2000; Garmezy, et al.,; Rutter, 1987). Protective factors interact with risk factors to reduce the potential for negative outcomes and are seen as targeting specific risks and mechanisms for growth (Gramezy, et al.). These contextual categories of resilience are used as the framework for reporting the results of the following study.

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the resilience of African American graduates of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) who were attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). Through qualitative analysis of demographic questionnaires, researcher field notes and participant personal narratives shared in interviews, resilience factors resonated across all study participants as critical to helping them thrive in an academic environment that often presented personal, social and academic challenge and adversity.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### *Data Collection*

Creswell (2006) asserted that phenomenological research focused on exploring the human experience and the ways in which perceptions of these experiences were transformed into reality. This study examined the resilience of African American graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. The focus of the study centered on the following research question:

- How do African American graduates of HBCUs cope with their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?

This was one of three research questions used in a larger study where the researcher examined the adjustment experiences of study participants. Prior to scheduling interviews with participants, the researcher conducted a pilot study to interview other graduate students not involved in the study for the purpose of assessing whether the interview questions revealed experiences that were consistent with the purpose of the current study. After completion of the pilot study, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected study participants that lasted an average of 90 minutes each. Interviews were recorded digitally and later transcribed to written format for analysis. Demographic questionnaires and researcher field notes were also used in the final analysis of data.

### *Participants*

Purposeful sampling and the snowball effect were used to recruit study participants. Berg (2001) stated that this methodology should be utilized for the purpose of selecting those who met a specific set of predetermined criteria. Participants were recruited via email through a listserv of all African American graduates of HBCUs enrolled in full time graduate studies at a Southern PWU. Interested potential study participants contacted the researcher via email and submitted a

completed demographic questionnaire with their request for participation. Participants who were determined to be the best fit for the study were selected using the following criteria:

- Identify as African American
- Ages 22 to 30
- HBCU graduate currently attending at Southern PWU for graduate studies
- Full time graduate student status
- Complete a minimum of one semester of graduate studies in good academic standing
- Not more than 5 years between their HBCU graduation and enrollment at PWU for graduate school

Eleven female and four male participants meeting the selection criteria were selected for the study, representing eight HBCUs throughout the Eastern United States. Though both male and female participants were selected to participate in the study, none of the male participants followed through with interviews; hence, participation was limited to the 11 selected female participants who represented a variety of HBCUs.

#### *Date Analysis and Verification*

The researcher used a coding and recoding strategy to analyze participant narrative transcripts from the semi-structured interviews. Four iterations of coding were completed before final codes were determined. The researcher used a personal narrative bracketing exercise to reduce potential bias in the interpretation of data. Further, triangulation of data sources, debriefing, and member checks were utilized to minimize the possibility of misinterpreting data. Seven overarching themes of resilience emerged from this process.

## RESULTS

Analysis of data resulted in the emergence of seven resiliency themes among study participants about their adjustment experiences. These themes represented both individual and collective experiences and are reported categorically as protective, compensatory, and challenge resilience. Participants revealed their experiences through direct quotes cited in this section.

### ***Theme 1: Personal Involvement (Protective Resilience)***

Many of the study participants relied heavily upon involvement and participation in campus organizations and events as a way to overcome personal adversity (e.g. challenging academics, racial microaggressions, and failed relationships) at the Southern PWU they were attending graduate school. They selected diverse activities that were meaningful to them personally, academically and socially. Some examples included membership in Black Greek organizations, Black student government and social events centered on the African American community (e.g. hip hop dance classes, Black cultural center seminars and talk series). Many reported that participation in such activities often relieved them of the daily stress of being an African American student at a PWU and gave them a sense of cultural pride. One participant reported:

I think since I've gotten more involved within my sorority being on a committee and doing different community-service projects and just engaging with the different women in the sorority has helped me survive here. And then the undergrad chapter—just getting to know other people's experiences in [PWU town] or their life experiences outside of [PWU]. Just getting to know people on a deeper level I guess, so it's made it more like a connection, like a family away from my family. It's comforting and I feel like I can do this!

### ***Theme 2: Familial Legacies and Expectations (Protective Resilience)***

Based on information gathered from participant demographic questionnaires, past familial legacies in higher education achievement played a major part in their tenacity and

resilience. All of the participants had parents who completed at least a bachelor's degree, with a majority having attained a graduate degree as well. Participants spoke about the importance that was placed on securing a college degree, which was exemplified through the completion of higher education degrees by various family members (e.g. parents, uncles, siblings) who were influential in their lives. When faced with adverse adjustment experiences at their graduate PWU, participants commented that the support of family was critical and that this was manifested often with expectations of survival and success. One participant vividly described familial expectation conveyed by her father. She commented:

After you cry a lot...especially when you come across adversity or things of that nature...like my Dad always tells me: "I know you want to cry now, so cry it out, handle it, but after that no more crying because you just have to finish this one step, and then after you finish this next step, go to the next one." He's like "I know there's times where you feel like you're just completely overwhelmed and it's just like everything is just coming down on you at one time. I know that feeling. I know that it sucks. But you have to just say suck it up and pull yourself up by your bootstraps and say OK, all right, fix this one problem. Is this one problem fixed? OK. Good. Go to the next problem. Fix that. And then just keep doing it until all your problems are gone.

### ***Theme 3: Positive Thinking and Reflection (Compensatory Resilience)***

When asked how they coped on a daily basis with their adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU a number of participants explained that they engaged in a great deal of positive thinking and reflection. They asserted that past experiences like being the only African American in an advanced high school course and other similar situations taught them the power of positivity and that the concept became a part of who they were in situations where they faced adversity. They relied on their past history with success as a driving force to remind them that they were capable of the same achievements in graduate school at a Southern PWU. One participant reflected how she dealt with academic adversity. She stated:

Just feeling that I know that I CAN do better than what I have been. Just based on my track record, based on my history. Because it's not like undergrad was a breeze. I had some classes that I struggled with. Like some course material may have been more difficult than others, but I was able to find a way to get through it. So I feel like I just need to re-ground myself. Like I said, once I ground myself again, and kind of get re-focused, then I'll be able to get back where I was academically.

***Theme 4: Inner Drive and Determination (Compensatory Resilience)***

Most of the study participants commented that internal drive and determination helped them to persevere and thrive. They described this quality as something that has always been a part of who they were and that it was often reinforced by accomplishing difficult tasks in the face of adversity. One participant recalled a situation in high school where she attended school all day, worked several hours after school for family financial survival, arriving home late at night only to work on and complete homework and home chores. She talked about pushing herself to succeed on deprived sleep and credited her inner drive and determination as reasons for her success. She reflected on how past situations like the one described are mirrored in her present experience. She remarked:

I don't know...I have like strong, strong, drive. That's one thing about me. When I have a goal to achieve, I will push myself to the hardest to do it.

***Theme 5: Religion/Spirituality (Compensatory Resilience)***

Each of the study participants talked about being connected in some manner to a specific religion or form of spirituality. This connection assisted many of them in coping with their adjustment to graduate school at a PWU. Participants disclosed that they often depended on their religious/faith beliefs and spirituality to give them inner strength to overcome adversity and move forward toward positive outcomes. Reliance upon a central religious figure (e.g. Jesus Christ, Allah), spiritual/religious belief (e.g. becoming one with nature, embracing enemies) or a

particular religious/spiritual practice (e.g. Bible study, meditation) was central to participants' self efficacy in every part of their adjustment experience. Though some participants reported "falling away" from their religious and spiritual backgrounds at the PWU, all asserted that they depended upon them at some point to persevere through negative and stressful experiences. One participant stated:

I also attend Bible study at [church name]. So that's a once-a-week event. And that helps. I frequently go on Sundays, and this helps when I'm dealing with an internal issue of being in this place. I feel like I can go on after being with my church family.

***Theme 6: Open Mindedness (Compensatory Resilience)***

The ability to be open minded and inviting to new and foreign experiences was critical for most participants when it came to the social atmosphere at their graduate PWU. Though a number of participants lamented about missing the social activities to which they were accustomed at their undergraduate HBCU (e.g. parties, card games, clubs, dancing), being open to new social experiences helped them to overcome feelings of disdain with the social activities available to them at the PWU. Further, they declared that their African American colleagues from HBCUs who were closed to engaging in new social activities often complained about their current social environment. Open mindedness helped one participant adjust to several new social situations. She remarked:

We go to [bar/grill] and play pool. I think I just have to get used to a different kind of fun. And I'm just trying to adjust myself to that. Here people like to go walking on the trail or biking or outdoor stuff. I just have to get used to that. I did go on a hike. First semester I went on that bike trail. I forgot the name of that trail. Oh they were positive [new social activity experiences]. I mean I wouldn't normally do something like that, so I guess in a sense that's good that I'm exposing myself to different things. So that's good.

***Theme 7: Reframing the Experience (Challenge Resilience)***

A final theme of "reframing the experience" emerged when participants were asked a

question related to what kept them from leaving their graduate PWU in the face of adverse adjustment experiences. Many expressed financially they did not have a choice to leave and talked about their ability to extract positive meaning from their experience. Reframing appeared to be a key coping skill in all areas of adjustment for these students and often facilitated the emergence of new found strength and resilience. From the experience of one participant:

I think coming here [current PWU] will really impact me in a better way because I have to realize that the road is not Chocolate City [all Black]. That most of the parts of the world aren't multicultural. Most of the parts of the world... well, speaking to America—are predominantly White. So if those are going to be my colleagues, then I need to deal with it, be able to interact with them in grad school. I guess it's been my social drive that allowed me to be able to step out of my comfort zone and interact with them...socially and academically. I guess it's kind of hard when you feel like you can't really connect with them [White students] when you're talking about different...don't know. I guess I'm just going to have to...find the positive in this experience and rely on it to get me through.

## **DISCUSSION**

In this qualitative examination about resilience in African American graduates of HBCUs attending a Southern PWU for graduate school, participants exhibited strong compensatory, protective and challenge resilience factors. Though faced with issues of adversity ranging from adjustment difficulties to racial microaggressions on the PWU campus, all participants managed to overcome problematic issues and moved toward positive outcomes for their graduate school experience. Many manifested compensatory resilience such as drive, determination, positive thinking and reflection as means to persevere through negative situations; others showed protective resilience factors like familial legacies/expectations and personal involvement on the PWU campus as vehicles to potential academic and personal success on the PWU campus. Finally, the challenge resilience factor was evident in all participants with their ability to reframe adverse experiences as mechanisms for personal growth and development and

as a means to address similar situations in the future in a way that would be proactive and productive.

### **LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

Because qualitative interviewing was used to collect data, a general limitation to this study was the self reporting of experiences by participants. Though the intended participant pool was more heterogeneous (e.g. males, females), only female participants followed through with interviews; hence, gender bias may be inherent in the points of view of participants. Readers should be cautioned not to generalize study results across all African American graduates of HBCUs attending a Southern PWU for graduate school because all research participants in this study attended the same PWU for graduate school, which was located in a rural geographic location within a very specific culture. Finally, there may be some bias inherent in the primary researcher's interpretation of results because he was an African American graduate student attending the same Southern PWU as the research participants, though his undergraduate and graduate experiences were at a Southern PWU.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING**

In working with African American college students on a PWU campus, college counselors and personnel should be aware that as a minority group, most African Americans have utilized resilience as a matter of survival in different aspects of their personal, academic and social lives. Providing counseling services for these students who may experience personal, social and academic adversity in their transition from an HBCU to a PWU should focus on the strengths inherent in their resilience. Approaches to counseling and advocacy might be focused on African American resilience in their personal lives and those factors that have assisted them in overcoming adversity. Strength based counseling, which emphasizes clients' strengths

(Baskin, Wampold, Quintanna & Enright, 2010), and culture centered counseling, which offers the view point of inclusive cultural empathy (Pedersen, 1997), are two approaches that depart from the traditional models of counseling that may be more successful in working with African American graduate students. In summary, college counselors should be prepared to infuse multicultural and advocacy counseling strategies in their counseling methods to work with the African American college student attending a PWU, focusing on non-traditional models of counseling that emphasize cultural awareness, sensitivity, empathy and client strength.

HBCU college counselors can assist African American students attending their institutions who anticipate attending a Southern PWU by helping these students identify and utilize strengths that can foster positive adjustment to and high retention. Additionally, helping these students become aware of their weaknesses that may inhibit their success at a PWU, and working to strengthen these weaknesses can be beneficial. With the emphasis that has been placed on “community” and networking to foster academic success established on HBCU campuses amongst its student body, and with the importance placed on familial expectations for survival discussed by participants in this study, the research suggests that HBCU counselors help its students preparing to attend a Southern PWU graduate school identify and utilize family and friends and community as a support network. Such networking can assist these students with any adjustment difficulties they may encounter when making this transition.

Participants emphasized the importance of religion and spirituality in their personal/emotional adjustment to life on a Southern PWU campus, sometimes depending on a strong relationship with a religious deity or higher spiritual being, or an established set of practices (e.g. Bible study, religious/spiritual services). Results of counseling research (e.g. Walker, Gorsuch and Tan, 2004) has shown that though counselors are religious or spiritual in

their personal lives, they rarely incorporate religion/spirituality as a part of their practice to help clients overcome adversity in their lives. With this in mind, counselors can educate and equip themselves with knowledge about ways to integrate religion and spirituality into their practices to help clients who are dependent upon these cultural values for support.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The scope of this study was limited to African American female graduates of HBCUs attending graduate school at a Southern PWU in a unique geographical area. Future studies might utilize a more heterogeneous participant pool that is more representative of the African American graduate student population and those attending a PWU graduate school in various geographic regions of the United States. Researching individual factors of resilience may add more depth to understanding why one factor may be utilized more than another. As well, a mixed method approach to this research may provide a link between participants' view of their self efficacy through quantitative surveying and the self reporting of resilience factors through qualitative interviewing when transitioning from an HBCU to a PWU for graduate school.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the adjustment experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending a Southern PWU for graduate school. Qualitative research methods were used to analyze participants' personal narratives about their experiences, which were recorded from semi-structured interviews conducted by the primary investigator. Overall conclusions, implications for future studies, and thoughts about preparing journal articles for publication will be discussed in this chapter.

#### **Data Analysis Conclusions**

Participants discussed several stories about their experiences adjusting to, navigating through and negotiating within the academic and social environment of graduate school on a Southern PWU campus. Such experiences had both negative and positive implications for participants' personal/emotional and social adjustment. Though research participants talked about negative experiences, they spoke of positive ones as well and often reframed both positive and negative experiences as opportunities for personal growth and development. Results of participants' experiences are presented in three research articles prepared for submission to refereed and peer reviewed journals for counseling and higher education. The first research question, "What are the experiences of African American HBCU graduates attending graduate school at a Southern PWU?" is addressed in the research article entitled *Students in Transition: Adjustment Experiences of HBCU Graduates Attending Graduate School at a Southern Predominantly White University* which gives an overview of participants' adjustment experiences. The second research question, "How do African American HBCU graduates experience adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?" reveals participants' personal

and emotional adjustment. This research question is addressed in the article entitled *Personal and Emotional Adjustment of African American HBCU Graduates Attending Graduate School at a PWU*. The third research question, “How do African American HBCU graduates cope with adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU?” is answered in the final article, *We Will Prevail: Resilience in African American HBCU Graduates Attending Graduate School at a Southern PWU*. Below are conclusions derived from the three research articles that best summarize participants’ experiences with adjustment to graduate school at a Southern PWU.

### ***Conclusion 1-Personal and Emotional Adjustment***

Research participants discussed difficulty with personal and emotional adjustment. They expressed a number of negative emotions and feelings experienced while attending a Southern PWU for graduate school. Emotions like sadness, and loneliness were among those that emerged across all participants in the data, as well as feelings of depressed moods, distrust and betrayal. Further, participants revealed that personal and emotional distress often stemmed from negative interactions with White peers, professors, counselors and advisors in the academic setting, racial microaggressions across campus, and lack of community amongst the African American student population. They felt constantly reminded that they were on a campus that appeared to be culturally unaware and insensitive to their needs, unlike the HBCU campus where they attained their undergraduate degrees. Of all adjustment experiences, personal and emotional adjustment appeared to prevail more negatively than did social and academic adjustment for research participants.

### ***Conclusion 2-Social Adjustment***

Most participants conveyed that the social climate at the PWU either assisted or hindered their adjustment experience, particularly in the academic and social networking arenas. Social

activities were different and unfamiliar for research participants on the PWU campus than what they experienced on the HBCU campus. Participants had two different reactions to such differences, either total disengagement or total immersion. Those who chose to immerse with an open mind tended to have more positive adjustment experiences than those who disengaged. The social environment in the academic setting presented particular adversity, with research participants often feeling excluded, alienated and isolated due to the individuation of White classmates. This was significantly different from their experience at an HBCU where collectivity and community were stressed among students. Such disparity in the social climate between the HBCU and PWU presented difficulties (e.g. stress, depressed moods, and missed academic opportunities) for research participants, who fought to negotiate and engage this environment for academic and personal survival.

### ***Conclusion 3-Support Systems***

Each participant expressed the importance of having and/or establishing a strong and diverse support system before and during the transition from an HBCU to a Southern PWU for graduate school. Mentors, family and friends, and romantic partners were the three support systems participants depended upon the most frequently. Participants relied on each of the three support systems for different reasons and these reasons were not consistent across the participants. A number of participants expressed feelings of validation, strong self efficacy and positive self esteem after accessing support systems to discuss problems adjusting to graduate school at a PWU. However, a few summarized that sometimes there was a lack of empathy and understanding from their support systems about their experience because members of their support systems had neither attended a Southern PWU or graduate school. Therefore, support systems often could not contextualize participants' experiences. This frequently caused some

distress, but participants turned to trustworthy support systems within the PWU community for support (e.g. African American classmates, clergy, mentors).

#### ***Conclusion 4-Resilience***

Resilience was evident across all research participants and facilitated their ability to adjust to life at a Southern PWU on a continual basis. A number of participants demonstrated compensatory resilience such as intrinsic drive, determination, spirituality, positive thinking and open mindedness to deal with socialization disparities, foster positive self efficacy, overcome academic inequity and minimize feelings of aloneness and invisibility associated with being a minority at a Southern PWU. Other factors of resilience that were in place for participants prior to attending a Southern PWU included familial expectations about and legacies in higher education that dictated an unspoken mantra that survival was the only option. Remembering how they thrived in other academic environments (e.g. advanced courses, honor societies) where they were one of few African Americans also resonated with participants and they utilized past coping skills learned in these environments to help them adjust to their current situation. All in all, these protective resilience factors (e.g. personal strengths, coping mechanisms, and family development) assisted participants in making positive adjustments to graduate school at a Southern PWU. Finally, challenge resilience (e.g. reframing experiences, open mindedness, flexibility) aided participants to reframe adjustment adversity as a means to grow personally and professionally.

#### ***Conclusion 5-Participant Recommendation***

Mutual communication between research participants, their HBCU affiliations (e.g. academic advisors, professors) and acquaintances at the Southern PWU (e.g. program directors, mentors, friends) helped to bridge the transitional gap from HBCU to PWU and provided a level

of reassurance with networking that was unavailable for their counterparts who did not maintain a connection. A number of participants found it advantageous to have known someone on the PWU campus prior to arriving for class and expressed that having even the slightest relationship with another African American student helped to ease transitional difficulties.

### **Implications for Counseling**

Outreach in the form of social justice advocacy, collaboration and consultation are ways in which college counselors and administrative personnel holding counselor education degrees can assist African American graduates of HBCUs adjust to graduate school at a PWU. It is evident from the narratives of research participants that they perceived some of their experiences at the PWU as forms of social injustice that existed in both the academic and social environment. Counseling personnel have been charged by the American Counseling Association to promote social change in the form of advocacy through empowering students or acting on behalf of these students, seeking to educate other college personnel about the probable experiences African American graduate students might experience, and facilitate social change at the societal level, for example, by attending campus, town and state events to support African American and other marginalized college students attending PWUs. As well, college counselors providing services for racial and ethnic minorities on a PWU campus should explore models of counseling that reach beyond traditional models, most of which were developed based upon dominant culture norms and values. Because most minorities in the United States have experienced discrimination and marginalization due to their minority status, these groups have established resilience as a coping strategy to overcome adversity. Inherent in resilience is strength; therefore strength based counseling, which focuses on client strengths, not deficits, would be an appropriate counseling theoretical framework from which to work with racial and ethnic minority college students.

Culture centered counseling should be considered as well when working with marginalized populations like participants of this study. Understanding the cultural implications of their adjustment experiences could lead to a more empathic and comprehensive understanding of issues presented that deal with client adjustment difficulties as they move from one culture (HBCU) to another culture (PWU). Finally, counselors could employ more comprehensive models like the Respectful Counseling model that is an integrative and multi-dimensional approach that makes the assumption that the paramount goal of counseling is a client's development and that there are many complex and unique dimensions to human development.

### **Implications for Future Study**

Because there are so many more PWUs than HBCUs in the United States, making them more accessible, African American graduates of HBCUs are choosing to attend PWUs at increasing rates. However, many of these students are not having successful experiences at PWUs and retention is a significant problem. Of the few studies that address graduate school transition for any student, most are based on assumptions and theoretical frameworks that are parallel to student transitions from secondary school to college. Hence, there is a dire need for future studies that deal specifically with the transition of students from undergraduate to graduate school, and more specifically for ethnic and minority groups. Understanding how this transition affects ethnic and minority groups is essential to help undergraduate universities (HBCUs and PWUs) prepare these groups for graduate life at a PWU and to help graduate schools provide necessary resources to assist with transition difficulties these groups may encounter.

Participants in this study presented an even more challenging problem because they were transitioning from the monocultural environment of an HBCU campus to a Southern PWU

campus that appeared to be unaware of and insensitive to their cultural, social, academic and personal needs. Future studies should focus on transitional adjustment issues for ethnic and minority groups moving from various undergraduate environments (e.g. minority serving institutions, PWUs, conservatories) to graduate school at PWUs. Information about such transitions could provide important information to both undergraduate and graduate institutions and could inform programming for ethnic and minority populations on these campuses. Because this study took place at a Southern university that was encapsulated within a specific culture, replication of this study in a number of different geographic and cultural settings would provide more information about participant experiences that may be parallel or different across geographical and cultural lines as well as across ethnic and minority groups. Finally, future studies might consider other population identifiers (e.g. religion, age, and ability) than ethnic and minority groups to understand their experience with transitions into a dominant culture institution of higher learning.

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Appendix A  
**Coding Iteration Process**

**1. Support Systems**

A. Mentor Support

- 1) Academic Advisor Support
  - Personal Tours
  - Weekly Meetings
  - Occasional Check Ins
  - Education about Surviving in PWI Academic Community
- 2) Community Member Support
  - A) Religious/Spiritual Counselors
  - B) Sorority Sister Involvement/Fellowship
- 3) Research Professor Support
  - Professor Instruction
  - Knowledge of Research Opportunities from Professors
  - Research Professor Patience

B. Family/Friends Support

- 1) Weekly Conversations with Family/Friends
  - Discussions about Academic Performance
  - Discussions about Social Environment
  - Discussions about Negative Feelings/Experiences
- 2) Understanding and Empathy from Family/Friends
  - Encouragement from Family/Friends
  - Problem Solving with Family/Friends
- 3) Scheduled Visits for Mental Respite
  - Road Trips to See Family on Regular Basis
  - Road Trips to See Friends at School
  - Family/Friends Coming to Visit at PWI
- 4) Empathy from Friends in Other Graduate Schools
  - Acknowledgement of Feelings Due to Similar Experiences
  - Encouragement from Friends to Persevere

C. Romantic Relationships

- 1) Empathetic Ear about Troubled Experiences
  - Good Listening Skills by Romantic Partners
  - Reflection of Feelings by Romantic Partners
  - Boyfriends' Conversations about Similar Graduate School Experiences
- 2) Lack of Understanding about Experiences
  - Romantic Partners Lack Familiarity with Experiences
  - Romantic Partners Impatience with Continual Conversations

**2. Negative Emotionality**

A. Feeling Excluded

- 1) Last chosen for research groups
- 2) Not included in study groups
- 3) No social activity invitations by White peers

- B. Feeling Isolated/Alienated
  - 1) Difficulty connecting with Black peers due to scheduling
  - 2) Often only Black student in class/program/department
  - 3) Feeling Disconnected
    - Unfriendly interaction with Black peers on general campus
    - Lack of cohesive Black student community
    - Large university physical setting intimidating
- C. Feeling Discouraged
  - 1) Poor academic performance
  - 2) Lack of encouragement from professors
  - 3) Feeling pushed aside by advisor/professor
- D) Feeling Betrayed/Confused
  - 1) Misleading recruiting information
  - 2) Misleading recruitment programs
  - 3) Critical incidents with White classmate/Falsely accused
- E) Feeling Depressed
  - 1) Loneliness
  - 2) Long periods of sadness
  - 3) Disengagement in activities/friends/class
  - 4) Periods of crying
- 3. Distrust**
  - A) Misleading Recruitment Information
  - B) Misleading Recruitment Programs
  - C) False Accusations (Peers)
  - D) Uncaring Professors
  - E) Being Left Out Purposefully (Peers)
- 4. Academic Frustration**
  - A) Not Being Heard In Class
  - B) Different Grading System
  - C) Vague Comments for Poor Grades
  - D) Lack of Exposure to Programs at HBCU
  - E) Higher Academic Expectations
- 5. Socialization**
  - A) Lack of White Peer Acceptance
  - B) No Social Gather Places for Blacks
  - C) Different Social/Recreational Activities
  - D) Disjointed Black Social Community
- 6. Lack of African American Presence**
  - A) Few African American Professors/Administrators
  - B) Few African American Students on Campus
  - C) Few African American Classmates
  - D) Few African American Towns People
- 7. Non-cohesive African American Community**
  - A) Avoidant Behavior by African Americans on Campus

- B) Lack of Coordination between Undergraduate and Graduate Black Student Organizations
- C) Unproductive Black Students Organizations
- 8. Racial Microaggressions**
  - A) False Accusations with Implication of Race
  - B) Devaluation of HBCU Education by White Peers
  - C) Purposeful Proximity Control by White Peers
  - D) Exclusion from Groups for Class Assignments
  - E) Lack of Acknowledgement of Classroom Contributions
- 9. Prior Acquaintances**
  - A) Triangulation between HBCU and PWI
  - B) Knowing Someone on PWI Campus
  - C) Summer Enrichment Program Peers
- 10. Resilience**
  - A) Protective Resilience
    - 1. Personal Involvement
      - Taking Responsibility to be Active in Campus Activities
      - Seeking Out Opportunities for Involvement
      - Engaging in Unfamiliar Activities/Courses/Community Things
    - 2. Family Legacies/Familial Expectation
      - Parents with Graduate Degrees
      - Relatives with Graduate Degrees
      - No Excuses for Failure
      - Learning to Deal with Racial Conflict
      - No Option to Quit
  - B) Compensatory Resilience
    - 1. Positive Thinking/Self Reflection
      - Meditation
      - Finding Good Things in Bad Experience
      - Self Examination in Adversarial Situations
      - Remembering Purpose of Graduate School
      - Determining what is Worth Attention
    - 2. Inner Drive/Determination
      - Self Talk to Persevere
      - Remembering Personal and Academic Goals
      - Remembering Prior Situations and Relying on Past Coping Strategies
      - Never Giving Up
      - Self Discipline
    - 3. Religious/Spiritual Beliefs
      - Reliance on Religious Readings
      - Bible Study Groups
      - Reliance on Religious Services
      - Prayer/Meditation
      - Understanding Who I am
      - Making Peace with Adversarial Situations

Meditation

- 4. Open Mindedness
  - Accepting New Experiences
  - Allowing Oneself to Learn Different Things without Judgment
  - Determining how New Things Can Increase Personal Knowledge
- C) Challenge Resilience
  - 1. Reframing Experiences
    - Opportunity for Personal Growth
    - Learning to Deal with White World
    - Opportunity to Learn New Experiences
    - Rationalizing Reason for Experiences Positively

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

1. Tell me your name to make sure I have it correct for my records.
2. Tell me about your home town.
3. Why were you interested in being interviewed for my study?
4. How did you decide to attend graduate school here?
5. Tell me about your friends and support system here.
6. Tell me what social environment means to you. (e.g. general meaning as it relates to various part of your world; home, school, social activities)
7. Tell me your meaning of adjustment. (e.g. general meaning, specific to your experience in higher education, specific to family and culture, specific to higher education)
8. Give me an idea of what adjustment was like for you as you transitioned from your high school to the college or university where you did your undergraduate work? (e.g. contact with undergraduate college prior to entrance, leaving home, entering undergraduate college environment, negotiating and maintaining old friendships and relationships, negotiating and securing new friends and relationships, leaving or maintaining high school dating situations, religious affiliation, personal, cultural and familial values)
9. Share some stories with me about your adjustment experiences during your undergraduate years. (e.g. memorable episodes, though-provoking episodes)
10. Discuss some critical factors that affected how you adjusted to your undergraduate college environment. (e.g. school-based programs, social organizations, friendships, mentorships, academic exposure, specific relationships, campus resources)

11. Tell me what some of the critical factors that were challenging about your adjustment to your undergraduate college. (e.g. memorable incidents, campus events, friendships, mentorships, specific relationships, campus environment)
12. What was your perception of the campus environment at your undergraduate school? (e.g. cultural diversity, classmate relationships, classroom experiences, inclusion or exclusion, race relations)
13. Describe the environment of the community surrounding your undergraduate school. (e.g. cultural diversity, cultural inclusion/exclusion, community involvement, economy and merchants)
14. What was it like to transition from your undergraduate college environment to your current college environment? (e.g. contact with graduate school prior to entrance, leaving undergraduate experience, entering graduate school environment, negotiating and maintaining old friendships and relationships, negotiating and securing new friends and relationships, leaving or maintaining undergraduate dating situations, religious affiliation, personal, cultural and familial values)
15. Tell me some stories about what it has been like to adjust to the current PWCU where you are doing your graduate work. (e.g. campus climate, classmate relationships, professor relationships, surrounding community, family relationships, friendships, dating, race relations, cultural diversity, cultural inclusion or exclusion, recreation)
16. Share with me some critical factors that have helped you to adjust to the school you are attending currently. (e.g. positive interactions, negative interactions, though-provoking interactions, campus-based programs, community-based programs, cultural programs, campus-based resources, specific relationships).

17. What are some of the critical factors that were challenging about your adjustment to the school you are attending currently? (e.g. specific interactions, campus-based programs, community-based programs, specific relationships, cultural interactions)
18. Describe the campus environment at the school you are attending currently. (e.g. peer interactions, cultural observations and interactions, faculty interactions, race relations)
19. Tell me about the environment of the community surrounding your current school. (e.g. specific interactions, cultural climate, race relations)
20. Tell me about other aspects of your life that you believe have been impacted by your experience with social adjustment in graduate school.

## Appendix C

### Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Name (Psuedonym):

Gender Identity:

Age:

Racial Identity:

Hometown and State:

Description of Hometown Area: Urban      Suburban      Rural

Relationship Status: single    married      partnered      (circle one)

Do you have children? (circle one)

Yes    No

If yes, how many?

Do your children reside with you here?

If not, where do they live?

Undergraduate University:

Date of Undergraduate Graduation:

Undergraduate Degree:

Undergraduate Organizations:

Current Graduate School:

Type of Degree Seeking (e.g. master's, PhD):

Graduate Major:

Graduate School Organizations:

Other degrees conferred:

Current Semester in Graduate School:

Where do you live currently? On-Campus    Off-Campus

On average how many hours do you spend on campus each week?

## Appendix D

### Participant Recruitment Letter

Potential Research Study Participants,

My name is Quentin Alexander, a doctoral student in Counselor Education at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, VA. I am requesting your help with a research study for my dissertation. This is a qualitative study about the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs) attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU). By sharing your experiences, you will provide helpful information for my study. Your story will help others in your situation and will help counselors and other higher education personnel at HBCUs and PWUs provide useful resources and services for students making this transition.

Potential study participants are African American graduates of HBCUs between the ages of 22-30 who are enrolled full time in a graduate degree program at a Southern PWU. Participants must have completed at least one full semester of graduate studies in good standing at the PWU they are attending and should not have more than a 5 year time lapse between their undergraduate graduation and initial matriculation in graduate school. If you meet these criteria please continue to read.

If you wish to participate in this study, please contact me by January 30, 2010 at [qrt6205@vt.edu](mailto:qrt6205@vt.edu) or call my phone at 919-201-5184. An interview time and location of your choice will be scheduled. The interview will last no longer than 90 minutes. An interview location that is fairly quiet and where you feel most comfortable is suggested. I will travel to this site at the time indicated and upon arrival will ask you to sign the attached informed consent form which explains the study. You may ask any questions needed prior to signing the form. I

will ask you to respond to a number of questions about your undergraduate and graduate social adjustment experiences during the interview, which will be audio recorded.

Everything you tell me during the interview will be kept confidential and your identity will not be revealed in the study. You may choose a pseudonym for me to use in the final written document to protect your identity. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the questions or interview situation, you may choose not to answer the question(s) or you may choose to discontinue participation in the study. The recorded interview will be transcribed into written form, which will be available for you to read and make corrections.

If you are willing to participate in my study please contact me at the email address above and arrange a time for us to meet. Feel free to contact me if you have further questions. Thank you very much and I look forward to your participation in my study.

Thank you,

Quentin Alexander

## Appendix E

### University Recruitment Letter

Dear (University Official's Name),

My name is Quentin Alexander and I am a doctoral student in Counselor Education at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, VA. I am requesting your help with contacting potential research participant for my dissertation. I am conducting a qualitative study about the adjustment experiences of African American graduates of historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs) attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university (PWU) . I hope that you will be able to provide assistance in my search for appropriate research participants.

I am looking for African American graduate graduates of HBCUs between the ages of 22-30 who are enrolled full time in a graduate degree program at a Southern PWU. Participants must have completed at least one full semester of graduate studies in good standing at the PWU they are attending and should not have more than a 5 year time lapse between their undergraduate graduation and initial matriculation in graduate school.

If you are willing to help me reach potential research participants for this study, please contact me by January 15, 2010 at [qrt6205@vt.edu](mailto:qrt6205@vt.edu) or call my phone at 919-201-5184. As well, you may forward this email to others who may be of help also. I can set up a time and place of your choosing to meet with you to answer further questions you may have about the study.

Everything participants disclose to me during the interview will be kept confidential, and your identity as well as theirs and that of your university will not be revealed in the study.

Attached is a copy of the Informed Consent from Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board, as well as their letter of approval. If further documentation is needed please let me know.

If you are willing to participate in helping me find potential participants for this study, please contact me at the email address above to discuss times you will be available to meet. Feel free to contact me if you have further questions. Thank you very much and I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Thank you,

Quentin Alexander

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Informed Consent for Participants**

**in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

**Title of the Project:** The Social Adjustment Experiences of African American Graduate Students Attending Southern Predominantly White Colleges or Universities Who Attained Undergraduate Degrees from Historically Black Colleges or Universities

**Investigators from Dept. of Education, Research, and Evaluation:** Dr. Nancy Bodenhorn, Dr. Penny Burge, Quentin Alexander, Dr. Joan Hirt, Dr. Norma Day-Vines

**I. Purpose of the Study**

We are conducting a series of interviews involving African American graduate students who received undergraduate degrees from a historically Black college or university (HBCU) and are now attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White University (PWU). The study will develop a description of the adjustment experiences of these students. Participants involved in the study include full time graduate students currently enrolled at a Southern PWU. Participants between the ages of 22 and 30 who have not had more than a 5 year time lapse between their undergraduate graduation and graduate school matriculation will be included. A maximum of 20 participants will be involved in the study.

**II. Procedures**

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed about your experiences and perceptions about social adjustment at your undergraduate and graduate institutions of learning. No preparation is necessary to participate. The interview will last no longer than 90 minutes. A taped audio recording (participants initials\_\_\_\_) will be used during the interview to provide an accurate record of your experiences. Written notes will be taken during the interview. Before the interview date, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire. Every effort will be made to keep the information obtained from your interview and questionnaire completely confidential. The investigator may contact you via phone, email or in-person for a follow-up interview of approximately 30-45 minutes. Your total time commitment will be approximately 2 hours. The interview will be held at a time and place convenient and agreeable to both the participant and the investigator. The interviewer may ask you for referrals for others who may be beneficial research participants as well. Interview transcripts and study results will be shared with you.

**III. Risks**

There is no more than minimal risk associated with participation in this study. The atmosphere of conversation will be informal and relaxed.

**IV. Benefits of this Research**

This research will be used to further understand the use and implications of adjustment of African American graduate students attending graduate school at a Southern PWU. Information

gathered from this study will be examined for common themes among participants about their experiences. There is no promise or guarantee that there will be any direct or indirect benefits to the participant. Ideally, the information gleaned from this study will benefit university staff and faculty as well as future African American graduate students.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Participants' names and all identifiers will be masked to make every effort to protect your confidentiality. You will only be identifiable to the investigator conducting the interview. Other members of the research team, the researcher's dissertation committee and peer reviewer, will have access to the data after the identity of the participant has been masked. Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes, as they are responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research. The audio files of the interview will be stored on the personal computer of the investigator conducting the interview and will be password protected. Written transcription of the interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. This is the only person that will have access to the audio file. The data will be transcribed from the audio file by an online transcription service and will be reviewed by the research team. The data will be destroyed after all reports and presentations are concluded, or kept for at least five years after the conclusion of the study. Field notes taken by the researcher during the study will be kept in a secure, locked file separate from the other folders.

**VI. Compensation**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, without stating a reason for your withdrawal. You are free not to respond to any question or questions during the interview.

**VIII. Your Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study as described above.

**IX. Your Permission**

I have read this Consent Form and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my consent:

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Printed Name

\*\*Please see below page for contact information for the research team and the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board.

### **Contact Information for Investigators**

If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact one of the investigators:

**Nancy Bodenhorn      Quentin R Alexander**

School of Education      Counselor Education

[nanboden@vt.edu](mailto:nanboden@vt.edu)      [qrt6205@vt.edu](mailto:qrt6205@vt.edu)

540-231-9704      919-201-5184

**Penny L. Burge**

School of Education

[burge@vt.edu](mailto:burge@vt.edu)

(540) 231-9730

### **Institutional Review Board Contact**

If you have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, please contact:

**Dr. David Moore, Chair**

Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review

Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Office of Research Compliance

2000 Kraft drive, Suite 2000 (0497)

Blacksburg, VA 24060

540.231.4991 / [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)

**[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]**

## Appendix G

### IRB Approval Letter

*Invent the Future*  
**Office of Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
1880 Pratt Drive (0497)  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4991 Fax: 540/231-0959  
E-mail: moored@vt.edu  
[www.irb.vt.edu](http://www.irb.vt.edu)

DATE: December 21, 2009

FWA00000572( expires 1/20/2010)  
IRB # is IRB00000667

#### MEMORANDUM

TO: Nancy E. Bodenhorn  
Quentin Alexander  
Penny L. Burge

Approval Date: 12/21/2009  
Continuing Review Date 12/06/2010  
Expiration Date 12/10/2010

FROM: David M. Moore

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Adjustment Experiences of African American Graduate Students Attending Southern Predominantly White Colleges or Universities Who Attained Undergraduate Degrees from Historically Black Colleges of Universities" ,  
IRB # 09-1071

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective December 21, 2009.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

**Important:**

If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB applicaton.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY AND STATE UNIVERSITY

**SUBJECT:**

cc: File

IRB # is IRB00000667

**Office of Research Compliance**

Institutional Review Board

2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959

e-mail moored@vt.edu

[www.irb.vt.edu](http://www.irb.vt.edu)

Approval date:

Continuing Review Due Date:

Expiration Date:

12/21/2009

12/20/2010