The Perpetual Homelessness of College Experiences: Tensions between Home and Campus for African American Women

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As African American[1] students navigate the predominantly White, postsecondary educational world, they encounter numerous barriers in their struggle for success (Allen, 1992; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). One prominent stream of literature maintains that the educational system is arranged in a series of "pathways"—a variety of routes a student can take to obtain education. In this system, one level of education affects subsequent levels (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Pathways to College Network, 2004).

African American students in particular are more likely to disappear from the college pathways than their White peers. As a group, they are less likely to

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[1]I use "Black" and "African American" interchangeably to represent the ongoing debate, frequently articulated by the women in this study, to describe students of African, Caribbean, and/or Black Latina ancestry.

enroll in college; those who re less likely to complete their degrees (Pathways to College Network, 2004). One reason for this disparity could be negative experiences that students are having on college campuses, particularly at predominantly White institutions. A growing body of research reports that African American students often experience isolation and other burdens relative to being underrepresented on college campuses (Allen, 1992; Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, & Thompson; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Greer & Chwalisz, 2007; Walpole, 2008; Winkle-Wagner, 2008, 2009). Despite challenges, African American *women* have been relatively successful in navigating a pathway to higher educational attainment, outpacing their male peers in college enrollment and graduation (NCES, 2005).

In a study of gender differences in college outcomes, Sax (2008) indicated that the increase in the percentage of females enrolled in college can be attributed in part to the increased attendance of students, such as African American women, from historically underrepresented groups. Yet African American women still are not at parity with their White peers in terms of college enrollment or graduation (NCES, 2005); and relatively few studies specifically address the unique experiences, coping strategies, and techniques for success that African American women employ in college.[2] This study addresses this gap, examining the tension that African American women experience as they attempt to navigate new relationships at the university alongside long-standing familial or community relationships that the women are under pressure to eschew on campus.

There is considerable debate on the role of prior familial relationships for African American college students. One position is that students must sever prior relationships, at least in part, to be fully integrated and subsequently, successful on campus (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Rice, 1992; Tinto, 1993). The opposing argument maintains that African American students in particular are more successful if they maintain prior relationships (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Rice, Fitzgerald, Whaley, Gibbs, 1995; Schneider & Ward, 2003; Soucy & Larose, 2000; Strage, 1998). This study is a more nuanced analysis of how balancing relationships influences African American women's college experiences and, ultimately, their educational pathways.

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[2]For example, Harper (2006) focuses only on African American males. Allen (1992), Allen, Epps, and Haniff (1991), Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996), Fleming, (1984), Freeman (2005), Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007), Fries-Britt and Turner (2002), and Walpole (2008) study both men and women. For an example of some of the few studies that focus particularly on African American women, see Hill Collins (2000), Howard-Hamilton (2004), Winkle-Wagner (2008), and Winkle-Wagner (2009).

Review of Literature

Family relationships influence students' initial transitions into college and their continued college experiences (Wartman & Savage, 2008; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Psychologically based studies that link family relationships to the college transition process often examine students' ability to "individuate" or separate themselves from parents, primarily focusing on the first two years in college (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Rice, 1992). This ability to individuate is assumed to be a precursor to a student's successful transition into college and to a student's sense of belonging on campus in subsequent years.

Psychologically based studies are not the only tradition that asserts students' need to separate from their family to successfully transition into college. Some work suggests that the need for separation might be gendered. Using nationwide data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the University of California, Los Angeles, Sax (2008) argues that it is more important for women than men to sever ties with their families to be successful in college.

Tinto's (1993) theory of college student persistence—with its focus on students' ability to integrate, transition, or be socialized, into institutions—is arguably one of the most influential theories influencing policy, research about students' success, and practice in higher education. Through this theory, Tinto suggests that students who integrate academically and socially into college are more likely to persist through to graduation and that the ability to make the transition successfully is, in many ways, predicated on their ability to separate themselves from prior relationships. Tinto (1993) argues:

> [Students] too must separate themselves, to some degree, from past associations in order to make the transition and eventual incorporation in the life of the college. . . . In a very real sense, a person's ability to leave one setting, whether physical, social, or intellectual may be a necessary condition for subsequent persistence in another setting. (1993, p. 96; see also Krotseng, 1992)

The academic-social integration model has greatly influenced the way that students' potential for college success has been studied. For example, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ),[3] rooted in Tinto's

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[3]The SACQ was developed by Baker and Siryk (1980, 1984, 1989) as a self-report, Likert-type, nine-point scale to measure students' academic, social, personal-emotional adjustment to college, and their attachment to a particular institution. The SACQ has been most often used to understand the transition process of underrepresented students to college and to suggest options for institutional support programs for minority students (Gold, Burrell, Haynes, & Nardecchia, 1990).

model of student persistence, has been used extensively to understand students' initial transitions into college, focusing primarily on students' experiences in the first two years.

Many scholars have criticized Tinto's (1993) initial model of student persistence, particularly as it relates to students of color (Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Rendón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Taylor & Miller, 2002; Tierney, 1992, 2000). Tierney (2000) asserted that this framework calls for the assimilation of students into the mainstream, which has historically afforded privileges to those who are White, protestant, heterosexual, and from upper-middle-class backgrounds. Other scholars have built on Tierney's critique (Guiffrida, 2006).

Countering the integrationist approach, some researchers have explored how students could be encouraged to persist in higher education while remaining connected to their home cultures (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Rendón, 1994). Some studies suggest that strong parental attachment is associated with success in college and is particularly important in the academic and emotional adjustments made by students of color (Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Rice et al. 1995; Schneider & Ward, 2003; Soucy & Larose, 2000; Strage, 1998). Adan and Felner (1995), using the SACQ coupled with markers for ethnic identity, found that African American students were positively affected by a strong involvement in the African American community. Kalsner and Pistole (2003) coupled the SACQ with ethnic identity and parental attachment measures and found that college adaptation for Asian, Asian Indian, Hispanic, and Black students was likewise positively influenced by familial attachment.

Cabrera, Hagedorn, Nora, Pascarella, and Terenzini (1999) compared the adjustment of 1,454 first-year White and African American students at 18 institutions. They found that African American students were more likely to succeed if they did *not* sever ties with their families. This model was more complex than Tinto's, considering the effect of multiple variables on students' adjustments to college: students' persistence decisions, parental encouragement, precollege ability, students' perceptions of prejudice or discrimination, academic experiences, social experiences, academic and intellectual development, academic performance, goal commitment, and institutional commitment. By contrast, Tinto explored college participation and persistence rates from the High School and Beyond dataset and the American College Testing Program data, along with findings from previous literature.

In sum, two contradictory arguments emerge from the literature about students' prior relationships with families and communities. According to the first argument, students' successful transition into college is predicated on their ability to individuate or separate themselves (at least in part) from

their families, pasts, or communities so that they can become integrated socially and academically into college. Students who do are more likely to persist through their degree programs. According to the second argument, Black students are more likely to be successful if they maintain strong connections to their communities and families. Yet, these findings contradict Sax's (2008) finding that female students *should* sever ties in the interest of more successful adjustment in college.

More research, particularly qualitative work that explores how women students from underrepresented groups make meaning of this home/campus tension, is needed. This paper explores these concepts qualitatively, considering the function that Black women perceive familial relationships to have during their time in college.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The data presented here are part of a larger critical ethnographic (Carspecken, 1996) study of women's college experiences and identity. One of Carspecken's greatest contributions to critical methodology is his epistemological theory, or way of knowing, which links knowing to critical theory, thus providing a way to differentiate and analyze ontological (bodies of knowledge) claims. This research methodology also explicitly links research to social justice, attempting to uncover oppression where it exists. My primary research question for this paper was: What is the experience of African American women at a predominantly White institution related to their prior and current relationships?

Participants, Data Collection, and Research Site

The larger study included 42 African American, Latina, multiracial, and White women. (See Appendix A.) This article focuses on the study's 30 Black women, 24 of whom were first-generation college students, meaning that their parents were not college-educated. (See Appendix B for demographic information.)[4]

These 30 women include both women who self-identified "African American" or "Black" as their primary racial classification, women who are multiracial claiming "Black" as one of their racial groups, or women who are Black Latina claiming "Black" as one of their racial groups.

The research site was a large, predominantly White, public, Midwestern, Carnegie Research Extensive institution of higher education, which I am

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[4]For reasons of confidentiality, I do not identify participants' hometowns or neighborhoods in Appendix B. However, I often describe participants' hometown environment in the discussion of findings.

calling Midwest University. The institution had a relatively low minority population—approximately 9% of the total student population: 4% African American, 2% Latino, 3% Asian American.

Using purposive sampling (Creswell, 1998), I selected Black women (ages 18–22) from four groups on campus (an early intervention need-based aid program, a merit-based aid program, a mentoring program, and a living-learning community in the residence halls). I sent emails to all of the women in the four groups and consulted closely with my African American colleagues (faculty and administrators) on campus who also facilitated contact with potential participants. Their involvement was helpful in building trust with participants, who thereby felt more comfortable becoming involved, at least in the project's initial stages. The participants eventually began to recruit subsequent participants.

I chose to study women specifically because the evidence of a "chilly" institutional climate for them provides a compelling case for the further study of their experiences (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999). African American women outnumber their male counterparts 2:1 (NCES, 2005). Yet, as previously mentioned, relatively few studies focus on African American women's experiences. For example, Cabrera et al. (1999) made little mention of variations by sex. This study helps to fill this gap by elucidating African American women's unique perceptions of their time in college.

I conducted observations, individual interviews, and focus groups in the larger study. My primary source of data is eight focus groups, called Sister Circles that met bi-weekly for nine months. These circles were a good technique for gathering data related to racial issues because the group process evoked a feeling of support, and this technique allows the observation of social processes and collective discourses (Morgan, 1997). Each group determined its own size, its meeting location, and the number of times it met. Initially, I came with protocols to facilitate the first five sessions (Appendix C). After the fifth session, many of the women began to take turns facilitating the group, bringing their own questions. Or, if the women preferred, I continued to facilitate the group. I also interviewed women individually to follow up or if they seemed less comfortable in groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Researcher Role

I took seriously my position as a White woman doing research with African American women (see also Winkle-Wagner, 2009). One reason for conducting Sister Circles was an attempt to equalize power in the research process. I wanted the Sister Circles be a place where the women could feel that they were the majority and that their issues were the norm since they were the minority in many other campus settings. I therefore constructed

the groups to ensure that I was the only White woman present; any other White women who attended were invited by the participants. Consistent with critical methods (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003), in an attempt to equalize power, I involved the women in the creation of questions and consulted them frequently during the data analysis process. As Ropers-Huilman and Taliaferro (2003) put it in their dialogue about the difficulties of advocacy work across racial lines, my research and advocacy were inextricably linked.

I also struggled with cross-racial advocacy research, desiring to advocate for the women in my study without creating an unequal relationship with them or without disempowering them. I found that adapting my role throughout the project, based on the needs of each Sister Circle, helped with this issue. I played the roles of facilitator, observer, mentor, friend, and advocate. Sister Circle 4 took ownership of its own group after a few months, at which time I became an observer rather than a facilitator. I also met with many of the women informally, taking on a mentoring, advocacy, or friendship role in our conversations about graduate school, their academic work, or their personal lives.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the audio-taped Sister Circles verbatim, using pseudonyms chosen by the participants to protect confidentiality. I analyzed the data using the critical analysis techniques developed by Phil Carspecken (1996). I coded data to allow themes and subthemes to emerge. Before the coding process, I employed a variety of analysis techniques to delve deeper into the meaning within the women's statements. For example, I used meaning-field analysis, in which participants' statements are linked by "and," "or," or "and/or" clauses, to suggest that the statement may have more than one possible meaning. Next, I used reconstructive-horizon analysis, which examines the objective, subjective, normative, and identity claims that were both explicit and implicit in the statements.[5] These techniques served to deepen the

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[5]Objective claims are generally observable and have multiple access (e.g., third-person claims). Subjective claims refer to the participant's intentions, desires, or feelings. Normative claims refer to value statements, or moral/ethical judgments in a statement. Identity claims are a mix of subjective and normative claims to understand what the participant is saying about herself. Carspecken (1996) asserts that it is not possible to talk about only one of the domains (i.e., subjective, objective, normative, or identity) because all speech acts reference all of the domains simultaneously. For example, if a woman said, "I feel like I have to cut ties," the subjective category or domain might be explicit. Yet this statement also references an objective category in which one could observe whether she actually did sever relationships. Or the statement might implicitly reference a normative category in which she feels she should desire to sever relationships.

meaning of the codes and acted as a validation technique to ensure rigor in the analysis,

After completing the meaning field and reconstructive horizon analysis, I coded the data using low-level and high-level codes. The low-level codes constituted explicit categories in which the data could be classified. The high-level codes were more implicit and were linked to the meaning-field and reconstructive-horizon analyses. I next categorized the codes into a master code list. Then, I separated the codes by larger categories to create themes and sub-themes. Throughout this process, I also conducted negative case analysis, examining those aspects of the data that did not seem to fit the rest of the findings (Carspecken, 1996). Additionally, I analyzed the data using strip analysis—taking small chunks of the data, analyzing these data on their own, and comparing them to the larger findings. (For an example of full data analysis, see Appendix D.)[6]

Validation Techniques

I employed a variety of validation techniques to ensure that the data analysis was trustworthy (see also Winkle-Wagner, 2009): (a) peer debriefing, (b) member checks, (c) assessing my own biases and value orientations; and (d) rigorous data analysis. For the peer debriefing process, two African American colleagues reanalyzed significant portions of the data, and then I compared their analyses to my own. This was an important part of the process because these colleagues could check my potential bias as a White women conducting research with African American women. Given our different racialized experiences, this step was helpful in my interpretations about the significance of racial issues throughout the study.

In the member check process, participants reviewed the analyses and the transcripts throughout the study. Early on, I gave participants the opportunity to review the transcripts to ensure that they were not misquoted. As the study progressed, I gave the women the opportunity to review my interpretations of the data. When differences of opinion occurred between

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[6]This form of data analysis (meaning-field analysis, reconstructive-horizon analysis, low-level coding, and high-level coding) allows for a meaningful consideration of sometimes implicit or tacit concepts such as race and gender. For example, meaning-field analysis allows an examination of a statement's explicit and implicit aspects. When race and gender are tacitly implicated, this form of analysis allows this deeper meaning to be made more obvious. Further, concepts like race and gender may be manifested in multiple ways such as objectively (e.g., observable acts, such as discrimination), subjectively (e.g, personal experience of being of a particular race and gender), and normatively (e.g., moral or ethical issues related to race and gender or a norming process that considers some characteristics "normal" for a particular race or gender). Reconstructive-horizon analysis maintains that all of these manifestations occur concurrently within one statement.

me and the participants or the peer debriefers (a relatively rare occurrence), I would talk with the participants or peer debriefers to gain a clearer understanding of their perspective. We would either come to a consensus, or I would use the participants' interpretation rather than my own so that the women would be represented as accurately as possible.

To assess my own biases and values, I kept a researcher journal and discussed the research process at length with my peer debriefers. Finally, the data analysis itself provided a system of checks and balances, since I analyzed the data in multiple ways: meaning-field analysis, reconstructive-horizon analysis, low-level coding, high-level coding, negative case analysis, and strip analysis.

FINDINGS: THE HOMELESSNESS OF COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

The data presented here emphasize the experiences of Black women related to their navigation of relationships and the emergent tension between home and campus. In general, they experienced a sense of homelessness—as if they fit neither on campus nor at home. This sense of homelessness was evident in their general descriptions of their time at Midwest University. (a) "You don't fit here, but you can't go home," and (b) "Bringing them along or cutting ties," which women generally saw as their choices in either maintaining or disassociating from their families and communities. The women in this study described feeling compelled to grapple with both themes simultaneously. Below, I present Ryan's story in some detail as a case in point of how these women experienced those simultaneous tensions, supplemented by quotations from other participants. This approach—describing data from a few participants to present a theme, accompanied by sample quotations—is consistent with "thicker" ethnographic methods that offer naturalistic interpretations of everyday experiences and how people make meaning of those experiences (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 1998; see also Hochschild, 2003; Lareau, 2003; Newman & Chen, 2007).

"You Don't Fit Here, But You Can't Go Home"

The Black women in this study described their college experience as akin to being homeless, of "not fitting." All of the women, regardless of their parents' educational background, described feeling "alienated" or "isolated" in the predominantly White environment at some point. I did not pose questions on this issue, yet it came up again and again during the nine months that the Sister Circles met. Asked to describe their general college experience and their current feelings about their Midwest University experience, the women, both those who were first-year students and those who were upper-class students, used words such as "transition," "isolation," or "culture shock."

Ariel, a first-year, first-generation, undecided major, described her time in college as, "an experience of culture shock." Ariel's statement highlights the differences between the general culture of campus and that of her home or community, in part based on socioeconomic status and in part because of race. As a Black woman, she felt this difference as "shock." Monica, a sophomore sociology major whose parents were college educated, agreed, "I feel like the culture here is so much more different than at home," suggesting that race might be the issue. Both Ariel and Monica came from predominantly White neighborhoods and high schools. One might assume, given their backgrounds, that they would be more inclined to feel comfortable in the predominantly White environment as compared to their peers who came from predominantly Black environments. Yet the predominantly White college "culture" still seemed dramatically different than home for these women.

Claudia, a first-generation, senior psychology major who grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood, said of her general college experience, "It is such an adjustment." Even in her senior year, she used the present tense in describing her time in college as an "adjustment," indicating that, at some level, she continued to feel excluded by the campus environment. This was not due to a lack of involvement on Claudia's part. She was involved in a mentoring program and several clubs, and she reported a high grade point average. Yet as a student of color and a first-generation student, she never felt entirely adjusted to or comfortable in the predominantly White environment.

Michelle, a first-generation, senior health and recreation major, described her time in college as a continual "transition," indicating that she never felt a sense of stability in the predominantly White environment. These descriptions of college as an experience of "adjustment" or "transition" echoed the reports of many of the women.

Delving deeper into some of the reasons for feelings of culture shock or the sense that college was one long transition process was Lisa's description. Lisa, whose mother had a college degree, was a sophomore secondary education major from a predominantly Black urban area. She perceived the campus culture as excluding people like her, suggesting that she didn't fit in the "ideal campus culture." When asked what she meant by "ideal campus culture," Lisa responded, "I could say what was ideal for me. I could say what my family is like and my friends are like and what I like to do. I know that is not the majority of the campus that is considered the *ideal* culture." She continued, summarizing her sense of not belonging, "I don't know what the ideal campus culture *is*; I just know that whatever it is, I'm not a part of it." Thus, while Lisa found it difficult to explain "ideal campus culture," she sensed that she, her friends, and her family were not really included

in it or in the larger campus, as if she and her racialized group didn't fit. Noteworthy is her use of "ideal," as if she was somehow subpar—less than ideal—as a racial minority on campus. This phrase stresses the sentiment that ultimately she (and perhaps those like her—other students of color) did not fit on campus.

While the women generally felt as if they did not belong on campus, they also described the sensation of no longer fitting at home. Some women described themselves as having had changed too much to still belong in their home or community environment. Reflections about going home for the first time after being on campus for a while were emotionally charged, highlighting the multiple pressures that these women experienced. Even if the women were juniors or seniors, they still described their first-time-home experience as if it remained quite salient to them. Some women, like Ariel, felt as if they could never really go home again: "I know my first time going home . . . a lot of people called and were like, 'What are you doing here?' It's like it felt funny at home after being at school. It's like I wasn't supposed to be at home, I was supposed to stay at school." Ariel, like many of the first-generation women in this study, felt that she didn't fit in at home after being on campus—an especially traumatic experience since many of the women felt that they belonged neither on campus nor at home after attending college. Thus, both college and subsequent trips home became an experience of homelessness.Perhaps one of the reasons for the sense of homelessness was the fear expressed by many of the women that being too connected at home would be a distraction. Ryan, a sophomore first-generation biochemistry major, expressed this feeling:

> It's kind of scary to try to go back [home] and find somebody that you know is not in the same frame of mind as you as far as setting goals because there's always the fear that something they're doing is going to be appealing to you and maybe kind of slow [you] down and [you will] backtrack. Or because they say, "I'm getting paid so much money right now and I can just sleep in all this time and I'm getting ready to go on a trip to so-and-so." And I'm like, "Well, I'm struggling with some meal points right now."

Ryan became more explicit in identifying her reason for not being able to really go home: its potential of distracting her.

> So then it's just like, man, what if I just like took a year off or something? But I don't think I can do that. I'm kind of scared to go back and, like, have an intimate conversation with some people that aren't willing to learn from me because I'm afraid they're going try to make me cross over and go back to where they're at. Some of the friends I had in school . . . We only have ten people that graduated.

Ryan felt misunderstood both at home and on campus, fostering a sense of homelessness. She felt that being on campus meant that she needed to disassociate, at least in part, from her home because it could be a "distraction" from her studies. She struggled with this feeling, even wondering if she should stop-out of college for a while because of the pressure and discomfort. This trepidation was common for many first-generation women, as if remaining too connected to some people at home while in college would derail their progress.

Michelle was from a predominantly Black urban area and high school that she described as of lower socioeconomic status. Going home involved an element of physical danger: "When I went away to college and came back, there was, like, a whole lot of cocaine addicts in my high school. It was hard." Michelle felt uncomfortable going back to her home community in part because it was dangerous. In her case, the lower socioeconomic status of her neighborhood may have perpetuated issues with drugs and violence.

Many of the women described a feeling of pressure to behave differently on campus and at home. Jennifer, a senior biology major, recalled, "I felt like I had to act differently at home." One example of this behavior change was her speech patterns. Turquoise, a first-generation recreation major who graduated and began a master's degree during the study, explained:

> I think that when I got here I had [a] huge twang . . . Southern twang. And when I caught myself, I did hear it. And I think when people listened to the way I talked, they felt that I was uneducated, I was illiterate, or I was not smart or something. Because I [was] drawing out my words or I would add extra words or additives to a sentence. So literally, somehow, I guess when I came [to campus] I changed the way I talked. But when I left here, I talked real, real country. When I go home, I go back to talking, like, really country. But, now that I am here, I have lost, like, a lot of my Southern accent. So I literally had to change the way I talked because some people could literally not understand me.

Turquoise's example accentuates the sense that the women had to alter their behavior through speech patterns in this case—to fit in on campus. It seems that, in this instance, this change was not permanent but rather was a strategy for fitting in better on campus. Yet Turquoise's "family wonders, 'Where did [my accent] go[?] . . . They miss it." While Turquoise altered her speech on campus, she felt as if that somehow made it more difficult to fit in when she went back to visit her family—perhaps creating a feeling of not entirely fitting either place. Michelle related to Turquoise's depiction of changing behavior at home and on campus. She admitted, "We do assimilate. I guess, it's different faces. Like, with me at home it's kind of like me at home. But, like here, you have to conduct yourself in a professional manner. Here, at Midwest University you have to be professional. It depends on who you

are talking to and stuff." Michelle felt that she acted different at home and on campus. Her description of this need to "assimilate" indicates that she perceived herself as meaning that she had to give something up to match the already existing campus norms. Her explanation of assimilating also seems connected to race in the way she describes it as having "different faces."

Ryan concurred with the examples given by Michelle and Turquoise and noted how "I have to kind of humble myself and act like I did before I came to college so whenever I'm at home I act really homely and country—kind of just spontaneous; but then whenever I'm here at school, I'm more collected and focused and sociable." She also altered her style of dress: "Whenever I go home, I need to take my old blue jeans, T-shirts, old sweaters and hoodies but I don't need to take, like, dresses and things because I don't want to give culture shock to my home town." Much like Turquoise's example of changing her accent, Ryan made a deliberate attempt to try to fit both places but still remarked that she felt "uncomfortable" both on campus and at home.

Despite the deliberate behavioral changes that many women made when they traveled between home and campus, these primarily African American, first-generation college students underscored a simultaneous tension that left many of them feeling as if they couldn't entirely be themselves at home *or* on campus, thus creating a sense being homeless. As Ryan said, "Every time I go back, it's like I got to at least handle it for so long and then it's just like I can't keep the image going for too long. It's just not me anymore." Her statement suggests a potential disassociation from her family or from her home community.

"Bringing Them Along or Cutting Ties?"

Concurrent with the tension between the norms of campus and their home communities, the women experienced a conflict between, on the one hand, continuing to connect with and take responsibility for their families and communities or, on the other, "cutting ties." These pressures between caring for and representing their families or disassociating from them were a heavy burden that influenced their experiences on campus. The notion of bringing family along was linked to succeeding on behalf of one's family, serving as a representative of one's family, or planning to give the fruits of education back to family or community in some way. At times, the women indicated that bringing family along was really an internal sense of needing to continue to care for and think about their families while they were in college. On the other side of this dichotomy was the idea of needing to sever ties with family or community, of disassociating from prior relationships in order to start anew on campus.

Krystal, a first-year sports marketing major who was also a first-generation student, explained her sense that she needed to continue to think about and care for her family while she was in college and often talked about the

responsibility she felt for them. On her most recent trip home, "they had stacked stuff up for me to do. 'I need you to do this, need you to do that.' They wait till I get home like they don't even know how to do stuff." Turquoise also described the need to continue to care for her family while on campus: "I am responsible for my mom." She admitted that she often sent money from her work study salary home. This was not uncommon; a number of the first-generation women sent money home to their families. For instance, Mercedes, a first-year, first-generation undecided major, sent her financial aid money to her family and then had to pay for her tuition on a credit card. It was apparent that the majority of the women continued to feel an immense responsibility for their families during their time in college.

Ryan described her sense of family responsibility as a desire to bring family along by serving as a representative from her family and her town to attend college:

> I don't know if they're getting inspired or they're just saying "one of us are doing it," because that's sort of how my family works. You don't have a group that does it. You have a representative. So if one person does it, then everybody gets credit. So if you have a doctor in the family, then your whole family must be smart.

Ryan's example alludes to the importance of racial uplift or the need to be a role model to others and a "representative" of her family or community. Yet, she admitted:

> It's really pressure, so much pressure. It's kind of hard whenever you know that you're not doing well at something and you see yourself slipping and before you want anybody to find out about it you got to try to catch up and maybe you can't catch up before somebody finds out about it. Then it kind of hurts a little.

The family's expectations were often related to a "pressure" to make them proud. Because these students are representing their entire family, any failure would reflect poorly on their loved ones. This pressure makes college a lonely process for the students, as they feel unable to share the challenges they face in college with their family. Yet this pressure also was a motivating factor for many of the women, including Ryan, fostering their sense that they needed to persevere in part for themselves and in part for their families and communities.

Krystal and Mercedes, who had been friends since elementary school, also described their perceived need to represent their families while they were in college. Krystal explained, "My family is big so we have a lot of family in college. It's funny to see all of us all representing. . . . [But] I don't represent like they represented." Compared in this way to her extended family, she

suggests that she was not representing her family as well as her relatives, intimating that she felt a need to do better. There is also a subtle reference to representing one's racial group in Krystal's statement. Perhaps she felt this as a responsibility, too.

Often women described family expectations and pressures as unrealistic and lacking an understanding of the college process. Michelle discussed going home as stressful because of family expectations. She summarized her time with family as "trying to keep somebody off my case. Their expectations are crazy." She struggled because she felt that she could never meet the high expectations that her family had for her, yet she desperately wanted to make them proud. This suggests that, while the expectations were stressful, they also created a reason to persevere. In this way, Michelle is implicitly bringing her family along with her to campus through their expectation and her responses to those expectations. Indeed, a common experience among the women was the feeling that they were unable to meet the expectations of their families, leaving the women to feel caught between their familial expectations and their own.

The flip side of the familial expectations and the sense of responsibility for serving as a role model was that the expectations also appeared to provide the women with a form of encouragement to persist in their degrees. Leila, a sophomore business major whose parents were college educated, maintained that her family was vital to her success in college, "They're, like, really hard core. I mean, seriously. They are hard core for education. . . . It would be unheard of if I didn't go to college and do well." Here Leila indicates that her parents were a significant factor in her decision, not only to enroll in college but also to persist.

In addition to providing motivation to persevere, family expectations were often enhanced by a desire to use higher education as a tool for racial uplift. Ryan commented, "I've got a lot of family; and as I go on, I don't want to just leave them behind. I want to bring them along . . . if my brother still needs me, my family and my friends, too." Ryan not only desired to uplift her family and friends, but she also wanted to incorporate them into her life. Present in her statement is her perceived responsibility to care for those in her family, to "bring them along." There was a strong sense that the college degree was a gift to her loved ones, an opportunity to allow social mobility for others. This use of education for family and community uplift provided many of the women with a reason to work hard and persevere, even if they often experienced this expectation as pressure.

Contrasting with this desire to bring their family with them to campus, either in subtle or in overt ways, conversely, the women often expressed the feeling that succeeding on campus meant cutting ties with family and previous relationships. Mercedes explained these conflicting pressures,

describing her family, "At the same time they're looking at me as a role model, but then they're trying to tear me down, so I just keep doing what I'm doing regardless; 'cause the only person I have to please is myself in the end." Her comment illustrates the simultaneous pressure that some women felt—to represent or be a "role model" but simultaneously to find a way to disassociate in part from one's past.

Some women described their family relationships and responsibilities as a "distraction," increasing their sense of not fitting either on or off campus. Mercedes explained that she had started to separate herself from her family: "I don't know how to explain my family. Most of the time I don't really visit them." When asked why she felt that she didn't want to visit them, she responded, as though addressing her relatives: "I keep my distance because I don't need you to bring me down or stuff like that when I go off to college. I need the positive stuff, 'cause I have a whole new world to deal with here and you . . . did not help me." Mercedes felt unsupported by her family while she was in college, although she continued to feel responsible for them in many ways. Additionally, she perceived herself as trying to adjust to a "whole new world" on campus, highlighting the difference she feels between home and campus and suggesting her need to separate herself from her past. She did not indicate whether this was a temporary disassociation or whether she wanted it to be permanent.

The tension around whether to disassociate from one's family was a heavy burden for many of the women. Lisa felt conflicted about the pressure she felt to distance herself from her family. She offered an argument for trying to maintain family and community ties:

> I think that people who saw their parents progressing to the point they are at right now—they still have values. Like, they didn't forget where . . . they always remember where they came from . . . and I am hopeful I never forget where I came from. My parents know what it's like to work for what they get.

It is noteworthy that Lisa suggested that maintaining a connection to one's family or community is linked to having values. It is as if Lisa is arguing for the importance of continuing to associate in some way with one's roots, even if one leaves one's home community. Monica agreed with Lisa, highlighting the difficulty of trying to maintain familial ties, "I think that each person has to not want to forget. And you have to make an effort to hold onto it. But . . . it's hard sometimes, because it is so subtle, and it is a gradual thing." Monica suggested that the women may have disassociated from family in subtle ways during college, almost without fully realizing what they are doing. She stressed the importance of deliberately attempting not to lose connections with one's family or past.

Many of the women described a similar tension between family relationships and new campus norms. For example, Sheree, a first-year, first-generation undecided major, confided:

> Family is not going right for me. Having a sister, and my sister has a little kid and she's younger than me. It's kind of hard to even work with that. And then, my mom and I don't get along. So, as of right now, it's kind of a negative. It's a downfall. So, they're not helping me at all. It's kind of hard with the family, even though I'm independent.

While Sheree spent a great deal of time trying to help her family who live in the predominantly White neighborhood in the midsize city where she grew up, she didn't feel that they supported her educational goals. Tina, from an urban area that was predominantly Black, listened supportively to Sheree and shared her own story. She encouraged her to take care of herself and, if needed, to have less contact with her family in order to be successful on campus. Like many of the first-generation women in her Sister Circle, Tina did not have much financial or emotional support from family:

> Like, with family [to Sheree], you can't let your family get you down. Just, like you said, you *are* related. Right now I don't even discuss stuff with my family at the moment because they'll get on my nerves. And sometimes, in life, you gotta cut your ties. Even if they is your family.

Tina's encouragement for Sheree to "cut ties" with her family was common among many of the first-generation African American women in this study. As peers, they created a supportive environment for making the decision to separate oneself from one's family. It was as if the pressure of caring for family became too distracting and burdensome. "Cutting ties" was one way to alleviate this pressure. It was not clear whether the women meant this disassociation from family to be a temporarily reduced interaction, a momentary solution to ensure success during their college years, or total disassociation, a permanent severance. Either way, the women clearly encouraged each other to take the necessary steps to be successful in college. This peer encouragement to "cut ties" emphasizes simultaneous, conflicting pressures: to maintain family/community ties and or to sever them.

There was a tension between wanting to represent family well by earning higher education and the realization that family didn't understand the challenges of college—or that family was a distraction from being successful on campus. Tina continued to explain her frustration as if she were speaking to her family:

> I've been here for four years and no one has paid me a dollar. Like I have worked for everything I have, scholarships and everything. So if my cell phone ain't on, don't worry about it. I'll get it on. It'll come on. Because I am

a student. Don't worry about me. Then, when I come home and I say, "I'm gonna do something," and I take a job, you all are gonna be, like, "You did it without me." So really they don't pick me up. That's how I always think of it. I feel like I am on scholarship to do what I have to do since high school because you ain't [helping]. But I'll make it. I didn't make it this far just for you. Because they don't . . . they don't get it.

Tina was hurt by her family's failure to provide financial and emotional support during college. Many of the women echoed Tina's sentiment that their family members "don't get it." First-generation Black women whose families could not afford to help financially with college often felt pain when they saw other students on campus receive financial assistance from their parents. But it was the lack of emotional support, perhaps because their parents did not have experience with college that caused the most pain for these women.

Michelle agreed with Tina, sharing frustration at not being financially or emotionally supported by her family or friends, "Like, you know, people, they say, 'I'm going to go to your [college] graduation party.' But you didn't help me out with school, so . . ." Michelle's frustration with people who expressed an intention to attend a graduation party in her honor highlights the continued tension she felt between people from her home community and people she knew on campus. She elaborated that many people from her background didn't understand what it is like to be a college student. One example of this lack of understanding on the part of those from her home community was the length of time it took to earn a degree. Michelle explained, "I been hearing forever, 'You have been there forever; do you have a graduation date?' Girl, sometimes I'll be, like, 'You all didn't even make it to college so leave me alone.'" As she neared her graduation day, Michelle demonstrated her own happiness at having made it, even without much support from her family or community, "So . . . it's here. Graduation in May. I seriously am, like, 'Oh, my God!' I have been working hard for that. I can't believe it's happening. I'll see you walk across the stage (makes a waving gesture) and they'll be like, 'Oh.' Michelle felt proud that she had successfully completed her degree. She said that it almost felt "surreal" to her. Part of her pride was that she had completed this goal independently, without emotional or financial support from her family. Like many of the women, Michelle emphasized the importance of being independent—of doing the degree on her own, even without familial support or understanding. The fierce independence could also be an indication of the women's desire to, at least in part, disassociate from family during college.

Tina agreed with Michelle, relating to what it was like to accomplish educational goals with little help or understanding from family. She encouraged the women in her Sister Circle to surround themselves only with people

who supported them, "Around your family, I think, too, you are stronger than that. You don't want to be around family that is gonna say something against you or get your hopes down. So you always got to continue on." Tina explicitly encouraged her peers to cut ties with family and those who did not understand the process of being in college.

Isis, a senior non-profit management major, who grew up in a predominantly Black urban area, agreed with the other women in her Sister Circle, admitting to the pain of struggling to find support in college as a first-generation college student:

> I think it hurts along the way, if you don't have support. But when you are independent and walking across the stage, and you got everything yourself, it feels good to know that you wouldn't let them put you down and put up with stuff like that. Then, you know you did it yourself—that you actually could make it through four years of college.

Isis reflected the strong sense of pride that many of the first-generation women in this study articulated about their ability to complete their college degrees independently—without the help or support of family. Working toward and receiving a college degree was empowering for the women. The fact that they had struggled against difficult obstacles to get their degrees made finishing that much sweeter. But the reference to independence may also be an indication of at least some disassociation from their previous families or communities.

Semea, a first-generation, senior exercise science major from a mid-size predominantly White city and a long-time close friend of Sheree's, encouraged the women to use each other as support during college. She also made sense of the lack of familial support by encouraging empowerment through doing it alone:

> It can really hurt, because I've known Sheree forever [gets teary]. You can look to yourself and you know that you have gone far . . . very, very far. And that you are doing good. So look to that when you are talking to [your mom]. I'm always here, you know. We've had our ups and downs, but they were ups and downs and that's it. You have gone very far. You will be extra happy that you have done this yourself. [Sheree is teary, too.]

Many times during the months that the Sister Circles met, the women offered each other hope and encouragement to keep working toward their goal of graduating college. The tension between family and campus came up repeatedly, and the women often used the Sister Circle time as an opportunity to process their feelings of loneliness and their lack of familial support. The perceived lack of family support could stem in part from the fact that many of the women were first-generation students; thus, their families had

no experience with the struggles the women faced in college. The women often underlined their pride at "doing it alone" or "being independent" from family. At times, this pride seemed to be a coping strategy to help the women deal with the pain of a perception of lacking familial support. Ultimately, they received some of the familial support that was otherwise lacking from each other during the bi-weekly Sister Circle meetings. It was as if the Sister Circles became a surrogate for family. In these groups, they created a sister-hood that empowered them all to succeed. The family-type relations that they made in this group influenced their success in college and, at times, filled the loss that women felt as they felt pressured to "cut ties."

In Sister Circle 4 to which Sheree and Semea belonged, not one woman decided to leave college. Three of the women went on to graduate school, and two of the women applied for semester-long internships. This level of success in meeting higher education goals was emblematic of the support fostered within the eight Sister Circles.

Burdened by familial pressures to succeed and the inability to fit in either on campus or at home, the women found that one way to cope was to alleviate one of the sources of pressure. Thus, in an often painful process, some of the women began to disassociate from their families and communities, either as an effort at self-preservation (e.g., to avoid distraction, to alleviate pressure), or because they saw it as one way to be successful (e.g., due to peers' encouragement to cut ties, subtle campus pressures, or their own desire to be independent). While such disassociation may have been a solution for some women, it was not clear if they saw it as temporary or permanent. If temporary, it was not clear how they saw themselves as reinitiating ties with family and community in the future. What was clear was that the women experienced a significant amount of pain associated with the tensions between home and campus.

DISCUSSION

The debate continues about whether African American students are more successful if they do or do not sever ties with their families or communities (Cabrera, Hagedorn, Nora, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1999; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Rice et. al., 1995; Schneider & Ward, 2003; Soucy & Larose, 2000; Strage, 1998). This study helps to explain *why* African American students, in particular, women, struggle with family relationships alongside their sense of belonging on campus. In other words, whether a student should sever ties with her family is not a simple, dichotomous decision. Rather, it was a complicated, nuanced, commonly occurring, and often painful process. The decision to sever ties, even if only as a temporary coping strategy, or to hang on to them, was influenced concurrently by family, community, peer, and campus pressures and expectations.

The women grappled with immense expectations from their families or home communities to succeed in college. In part, these expectations stemmed from the fact that most of the women were first-generation students. Yet the way in which their families/communities put their communal hopes in the women to represent them and, in some cases, to uplift them suggests that these expectations were perhaps unique for African American students. Regardless of the reason for these expectations, the women experienced them as an almost crushing "pressure" and, simultaneously, as a motivation to lift up their families and to care for them even while they were away. While this pressure could at times be a negative influence, it often provided a motivation to persevere, complicating the tension between home and campus even more.

The homelessness that the women described—not fitting on campus or in their home communities and families—related in many ways to their own experience of being different on campus based on their race, gender, or socioeconomic background. This perception of not fitting in may help to partially explain the alienation that many African American students report on predominantly White campuses (Allen, 1992; Feagin et al., 1996; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). It also provides insight into some of the nuances in and outcomes of the feelings of difference. The sense of difference led some of the women to feel as if they did not fit into the "ideal campus culture" as Lisa put it. The feeling of no longer fitting at home was augmented by the fact that many of the women were the first in their families to have attended college. Thus, when they returned home, their families often did not understand the experiences that they were having in college. Michelle provided a good example of this chasm between home and campus, explaining that she would have to encounter cocaine addicts when she returned home. Another example of this is Turquoise's use of different speech patterns at home and on campus.

The demographic composition of the women's high schools did not seem to affect the women's descriptions of homelessness or their sense of "culture shock" on campus. It was not that surprising that students like Michelle and Claudia, who had attended predominantly Black high schools, described a sense of "culture shock" on the predominantly White campus. Yet even Ryan and Ariel, who had attended from predominantly White high schools, described their adjustment similarly as an experience of "culture shock." This description could suggest that the campus is not welcoming to students of color more generally.

The enormous family expectations that the women identified created the sense of "pressure" that Ryan described or the "expectations" that Mercedes discussed. At times, the women indicated that they felt as if the health of their families and communities was in their hands. They carried the bur-

den of needing to represent their families/communities well. They felt a responsibility for "bringing them along." Some of the women described a desire to bring their families with them (e.g., Ryan), as if their success made others in their families successful. Others indicated that they felt compelled to spend vast amounts of time and energy caring for their families, even from a distance (e.g., Sheree). Hence, the way that the women described bringing their families with them was both an internal "bringing along" of family—thinking about them, succeeding on their behalf—and a more literal "bringing along" in that the women felt an expectation in many cases that they would give their education back to their families in some way (e.g., by sending money home, by moving back to their neighborhoods to work, by being a role model for others etc.).

Concomitantly, the women faced their own individual and peer expectations to succeed and, at times, peer encouragement to "cut ties" with family. These conflicts were complicated by the sense of loss that many of the women expressed at noticing that their families were unable to support them emotionally or financially in the way that they saw some of their White peers receiving support. This is not to say that all families were unsupportive. Leila and Lisa, for instance, both described their families as a vital support network. Compounding the issue of navigating familial relationships even more was the women's own expressions of desiring to succeed on campus without the potential distractions of their home communities.

Lisa and Ariel eventually left college, in part because of these continual pressures between home and campus and in part because of the sense of "shock" that they felt as women of color on a White campus. Both women experienced significant, and sometimes contradictory, pressures. For example, Lisa felt intense pressures to represent her family well and to care for her niece and sister. She also described her family as supportive yet concurrently felt that she should cut her ties with her family to be successful. Lisa explained the source of this pressure to cut ties as coming from campus programs; she was in the honors program, for example. The contradiction, between experiencing family as a vital support network and feeling pressured to disassociate from them, was extremely painful for Lisa. She also indicated that she was "sick of teaching" about racial issues on campus, meaning that other students looked to her to explain "the African American" position on issues. Lisa indicated that she found the environment unwelcoming to her as a student of color.

Ariel, in contrast, was disconnected from her family and her peers on campus. She no longer communicated much with her family but also reported being "lonely" on campus. She left, largely because she could not find a place where she felt that she belonged—either on campus or at home. When Ariel left college, she planned to move in with her boyfriend in another state.

While Ariel and Lisa found the contradictory pressures too intense to let them stay in college, the other 28 women persisted. One reason for this achievement could be the motivating factors described above. Although family/community expectations, a desire to care for family and community, and a hope to give one's education back to one's community created pressures for the women, these factors also gave the women a very meaningful reason to persevere. Thus, many of the women indicated that failure (i.e., defined here by the women as leaving college) was not an option; they had to complete their degrees, if not for themselves, then for their families and communities.

Despite the evidence suggesting that the transition process is temporary and occurs in the first one or two years of college (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2007; Tinto, 1993), the transition process never ended, according to these women, some of whom were seniors. They felt constantly pushed and pulled between home and campus, adrift, and homeless. They were simultaneously caught between two worlds—their home/family/past and their campus/friends/professors/present.

This feeling of being caught between two worlds is not new for African Americans in the United States. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/2003) described a perceived need for African Americans to act one way among White people and a different way among African Americans. According to the data in my study, this sense of navigating two worlds continues (see also Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Ultimately, this sense of homelessness greatly influenced the college experience for the women—at times becoming a roadblock in their educational pathway.

Gender was always present, even if implicitly, in many of the women's stories about attempting to navigate familial roles and student roles simultaneously. The women may have experienced more pressure than male students to care for their families (e.g., Sheree's sense that she had to care for her younger sister) because of their gendered roles as caregivers. Perhaps it was seen as less acceptable for them than for male peers that they had left their communities and families to attend college. These conflicting pressures were confusing for the women—pressure to succeed on campus and pressure to care for their families, even if it distracted them from their studies. Tina's encouragement to her peers to "cut ties" with families might suggest resistance to a gendered role that a woman must care for her family at all costs.

In her work on Black feminist thought, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) described how the sense of being the "first" or "only one" expands and contracts one's world simultaneously—creating tensions between prior familial relationships and new relationships. Here, as the women met together, they encouraged independence and strength within each other, a sense that it was

important to do things on one's own. Semea's encouragement of Sheree, for example, was a common occurrence in the Sister Circles. This supportiveness suggests that the women were in some ways resisting either the norms of campus or the norms of their families and communities. The sense of sister-hood that the women experienced in the Sister Circles suggests a communal aspect of womanhood—the importance of women helping other women.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

More research is needed to further clarify the complexities of prior rela-tionships and the way that these relationships continue to influence students, particularly African American students, throughout their time in college. Additional work is also necessary to better understand the reasons behind the women's experience of perpetual culture shock. It would be useful to use a pathway perspective to study early (first-year) experiences with the transition process in concert with the way that these experiences influence the continued (second, third, and fourth year) transitions that students make throughout their time in college. Work that highlights the responsibilities of institutions to make campuses more inclusive for underrepresented students is also necessary.

Since the majority of racially underrepresented groups have been as-sociated with greater attachment to families than their White counterparts (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003), more scholarship is needed to understand ways to better serve students as they navigate these relation-ships and the pressures that emerge from these relationships. For example, programmatic efforts could focus on ways to balance familial expectations to succeed and communal expectations of uplift with the expectations of academic success on campus. But perhaps students could also be given tools for successfully navigating their family responsibilities. More research is needed to understand how students successfully navigate this balancing act to tease out ways to alleviate the family/campus tensions.

Perhaps studies could focus on ways that students use their education to give something back to their communities, thus emphasizing the importance of prior communities and relationships. For example, the research conducted at the César E. Chávez Institute (http://www.cesarechavezinstitute.org/), part of San Francisco State University's College of Ethnic Studies, provides an example of one way that education can foster a connection with one's community and one's past: helping students transition back into their home communities so that these communities could benefit from their members' educations.

Intraracial peer mentoring (i.e., matching students with those from their own racial group), may be another line of beneficial research. Centered on

fostering a connection with one's past, home, culture, or community, such peer mentoring is another campus-based example of such efforts (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007). Future research should also consider the ways that African American women's connections and sense of responsibility for community and family may provide motivation to persist in college.

Predominantly White postsecondary campuses would benefit from encouraging programs that foster the inclusion of parents and families, particularly when students first arrive on campus. Some campuses have incorporated parents into campus activities, asking them to serve on advisory boards or to serve as volunteers for campus events (Wartman & Savage, 2008). For example, campuses could offer parent training sessions where parents could learn more about the norms of campuses. Yet campuses should also undertake seriously the responsibility of understanding the communities from which students come. More work is needed on developing culturally sensitive and community sensitive campus environments so that students of color do not have to feel the extreme tensions between two disparate worlds that the women described here.

Service learning activities both in and out of the classroom could foster a sense of connection to one's home community, potentially filling the chasm between campus and home that often exists, particularly for students of color. If these efforts are implemented, they need to be carefully evaluated to ensure that they do indeed meet the intended result of making connections between home and campus.

Implicit in this study were implications for female friendships. As Ana M. Martínez Alemán (1997, 2000) found in her longitudinal work on female friendships in college, the women in this study played an integral role in one another's success. As the women bonded in the Sister Circles over the nine months, they began to support one another in their academic and social endeavors. These groups also provided a safe place for the women to grapple with the tensions that they experienced in navigating familial and campus expectations. Scholarship studying the impact of female friendships would be beneficial, particularly to better understand how these relationships may fill the void that some students feel relative to missing familial support during college. In addition, these friendships may help students to feel a better sense of belonging on campus.

Conclusion

Two diverging streams of literature flow from the quest to understand factors that contribute to the success of African American college students. One stream argues that these students should integrate themselves into campus by cutting ties with their families. This stream is supported by

research suggesting that those students who sever, at least in part, their ties with prior familial relationships are more likely to succeed in college. The second stream, supported by an equally well-developed body of literature, maintains that African American students in particular are more successful in college if they sustain their family ties. The data presented here provide evidence supporting and challenging both streams of literature.

In essence, the issue is more nuanced than either position suggests. The African American female students who were part of this study consistently expressed strong pressures to cut or limit familial ties to be successful at the university while simultaneously reporting stressful and confusing pressures to keep family close, provide them with ongoing support, and bring their family along on their road to academic success.

While the Black women desired to fit in on campus, they often felt as if they did not—as if they were mismatched or not the "ideal" within the predominantly White environment. Yet after being in college, they felt as if they no longer fit within their families/communities either. Perhaps this sense of not fitting was related to the multiple pressures that the women experienced during their time in college. They experienced familial and community pressures to represent their family and group—to be successful on behalf of others. They also experienced pressures to give their education back to their communities or families in some way and to care for family members.

Yet they also felt strong pressures to reduce or even sever ties with their family as an act of self preservation—meaning that they did not feel they could be successful in college otherwise. At times, these conflicting pressures were so great that the women had to alleviate them in some way—sometimes disassociating with family, sometimes disassociating with the campus, and nearly always feeling pulled in multiple directions at once. However, rather than making a clear decision to either sever family ties or maintain them, the women attempted to fit on campus and to somehow still fit within their families or home communities simultaneously, resulting in an experience of a perpetual state of homelessness. Is there a way to help Black women feel more at home on predominantly White campuses while maintaining family relationships? Can the simultaneous pressures from families and peers/others on campus be alleviated in some way? Can better connections between campus and home be made? These questions continue to linger.

APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE FULL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

		Number of Participants
Race/Ethnicity		
	African American	25
	Black Latina	3
	Multiracial	2
	White	11
Year in College		
	First-year	8
	Sophomore	10
	Junior	11
	Senior	12
	First-year graduate	1
Major by College		
	Arts and sciences	18
	Education	7
	University division/undecided	5
	Journalism	1
	Business and marketing	7
	Health and recreation	3
	Public policy/environmental affairs	1
First-Generation Student		
	Students who were first generation	30
	Parent(s) had college degree(s)	12

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Pseudonym	Group	Race/Ethnicity	Year in College	Major	First-Generation Status
Lisa	1	Dominican/Multiracial/Afro-Latina	Sophomore	Secondary education	No
Brandi	1	African American	Sophomore	Bio-chemistry	No
Monica	1	African American	Sophomore	Sociology	No
Ariel*	1/5	African American	Freshman	Undecided	Yes
Mercedes	2	African American	Freshman	Criminal justice	Yes
Krystal	2	African American	Freshman	Sports marketing	Yes
Serena	2	African American	Freshman	Education	Yes
Leila	3	African American	Sophomore	Business	No
Camiya	3	African American	Sophomore	Undecided	Yes
Tracey	3	African American	Sophomore	Business	Yes
Turquoise	4	African American	Senior	Recreation	Yes
Renee	4	Multiracial/Black	Senior	Art history	No
Michelle	4	African American	Senior	Health and recreation	Yes
Keisha	4	African American	Sophomore	Business	Yes

Pseudonym	Group	Race/Ethnicity	Year in College	Major	First-Generation Status
LaShara	4	African American	Junior	Legal studies	Yes
Sheree	4	African American	Freshman	Undecided	Yes
Maria	4	Black Latina	Freshman	Undecided	Yes
Claudia*	4/7	Puerto Rican/ Afro-Latina	Senior/Alum	Psychology	Yes
Tina*	4/7	African American	Senior	Psychology	Yes
Isis*	4/7	African American	Senior	Non-profit management	Yes
Semea*	4/7	African American	Senior	Exercise science	Yes
Ryan	5	African American	Sophomore	Biochemistry/pre-med	Yes
Jennifer	7	African American	Senior	Biology	Yes
Jarena	7	African American	Senior	Apparel merchandise	Yes
Maya	7	African American	Junior	Marketing	Yes
Camille	7	African American	Junior	Biology	No
Semea*	7	African American	Senior	Exercise science	Yes
Carmen	7	Black Latina	Junior	Public policy	Yes
Elaine	9	African American	Senior	Early childhood education	Yes
Daphene	9	African American	Junior	Elementary education	Yes

* Participant was involved in more than one focus group.
**Focus Group 8 was comprised of all White women and therefore was not included in this study.

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Topic Domain: Transition into Midwest University and general college experiences

Covert Categories of Interest: college choice decision-making, identity changes, identity dissonance, support networks, racial climate, gender climate, general campus environment, belongingness, friendship decisions

Guiding Questions:
1. Tell me about the process that you underwent in your decision to attend Midwest University?
    a. What did you expect Midwest University to be like?
    b. Describe the top three factors in your decision-making process.
    c. What role did your family play in your decision-making process?
    d. What role did your friends play in your decision-making process?
    e. How did finances play a role in your decision-making process?
    f. Did you have a mentor or someone who influenced you greatly in your decision? If so, describe that person's role and the way that he/she influenced you.

2. Describe your adjustment at Midwest University.
    a. Describe your very first class. How did you feel? What were you thinking about?
    b. What feelings did you experience?
    c. In what ways was the campus the same as you had expected?
    d. In what ways was the experience different than you had anticipated?
    e. Did you feel as if the campus fit you?
    f. In what ways did you act differently than you would act with your family/friends?
    g. In what ways did you act the same?
    h. In what ways did you feel different than you did before coming to Midwest University?
    i. In what ways did you feel the same?
    j. Talk about the initial friendships that you made.
    k. What type of support system did you form?
    l. How did you get through that first day of class?

3. Describe your current feelings about your time at Midwest University.

APPENDIX D
EXAMPLES OF DATA ANALYSIS

Note: The examples below are excerpts from a focus group discussing the participants' transition into the campus environment.

MICHELLE: *I think that a lot of people have this picture of how it will be, that it will be all of us together and we will be hanging out with everybody. You know, it was just all White people, you know. . . . it wasn't really a lot of— you know. I think that my freshmen year I would say I'm acting for a degree.*

Codes: Campus culture-All White people, acting for a degree

Meaning field: I have to act differently to get the degree AND I am not being myself while getting this degree AND/OR I am acting like White people to get this degree AND There are more White people here than Black people AND I feel like a minority here

Reconstructive Horizon:
Highly Foregrounded
   Objective: There are a lot of White people here.
   Subjective: I feel like I am different than the White people here.
   Normative: People should act a certain way here.
   Identity: I am different than White people.

Foregrounded
   Objective: Black people are in the minority.
   Subjective: I feel alone.
   Normative: White people are the normal people here.
   Identity: I act the same as those around me.

Backgrounded
   Objective: Black people act different than White people.
   Subjective: I feel like an outsider.
   Normative: It is not okay to act different from the majority of the people.
   Identity: I have to act a certain way here.

Highly Backgrounded
   Objective: White people are the norm here.
   Subjective: I am a different person than who they think I am.
   Normative: People should act like White people here.
   Identity: I have to act White to get my degree.

RENEE: *I remember my mom tried to get me to have a Black friend when I was in, like, third grade. She invited me over one time. She, like, made people be friends with*

her. Like [my boss] said when I came in—she said that I was a White girl and that I was her project to make me Black. I think that is not a good attitude to have.

Codes: Too White/not Black enough, background experiences

Imposed identity code: Changing self to be Black

<u>Meaning field:</u> I was not Black enough AND I was too White AND It made me uncomfortable to have my boss try to change me AND/OR I struggle with my racial identity AND/OR I did not have many Black friends growing up AND/OR I have not been around Black people much

<u>Reconstructive Horizon:</u>
Highly Foregrounded
      Objective: I am her project.
      Subjective: I am culturally White.
      Normative: People should be changed.
      Identity: I am multiracial.
Foregrounded
      Objective: She wants to change me.
      Subjective: I don't feel comfortable
      Normative: People should be Black.
      Identity: I am both Black and White.
Backgrounded
      Objective: She doesn't accept me.
      Subjective: I don't want to be told who I should be.
      Normative: People should fit into their group.
      Identity: I am culturally White.
Highly Backgrounded
      Objective: She doesn't see me as Black.
      Subjective: I am not Black enough.
      Normative: Only certain people can be Black.
      Identity: I don't want to be Black.

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