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How Do They Stay: An exploration of the factors contributing to college completion amongst African-American Women at the University of Mississippi in the 21st century.

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HOW DO THEY STAY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING
TO COLLEGE COMPLETION AMONGST AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

By
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the factors that help increase the chances of black women continuing their studies at the University of Mississippi. Using a snowball method to contact participants and a video camera to record participants, findings showed that the black women who perceived their time at the University of Mississippi positively had previous contact with the University of Mississippi and clear academic goals within the university. Overall, the findings, while mostly consistent with the previous literature, point to areas that this research can delve deeper.

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Introduction

Personal Background

My experience at the University of Mississippi was less than ideal. I spent the majority of my first year battling continuous microaggressions, “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconscious” (Ceja, Solórzano and Yosso, 2000) in the University’s Theatre department, which at that time was largely white. I became despondent at the lack of focus on black and feminist theatre and I considered transferring to another university. Simultaneously, however, I realized many of the black women I knew considered transferring as well and by my junior year, four out of the six black women who lived on my hall my first year, either transferred to other institutions or exited the higher education system entirely. I sought to uncover the underlying factors of their departures.

Statement of the Problem

In her article, “Settling into Campus Life: Differences by Race/Ethnicity in College Involvement and Outcome” Mary J. Fischer (2007) explores “racial and ethnic differences in acclimating to college and their subsequent effects on college outcomes. She makes many connections between past considerations of the factors of student persistence and explores the differences between the importance of these factors amongst Black, Asian, White, and Hispanic students. Fischer’s breakdown of the data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshman (1999) leads to several interesting conclusions concerning black students particularly the relationship between their perception of the racial climate of their campus and their performance. She writes:

...[M]inority students had much more negative perceptions of the racial campus than did Whites, with Blacks having by far the most negative assessments. A negative perception of the campus racial climate undermines satisfaction with college for all groups... Perceptions of a negative racial climate on campus are most perilous to minority students themselves, with heightened perceptions of a negative climate increasing the likelihood of leaving college for all groups. (2007)

This finding's importance is magnified by the findings of the National Center for Education Statistics, reporting in *The Digest of Education Statistics: 2012*,

“From 1976 to 2010, the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 3 percent to 13 percent, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2 percent to 6 percent, and the percentage of Black students rose from 10 percent to 15 percent. During the same period, the percentage of White students fell from 83 percent to 61 percent.”¹ Additionally, the DES reports that since 1988 the population of women attending college has been consistently higher than men.

The increased enrollment of minority students contrasted with their increased likelihood to perceive a negative racial climate, a perception that negatively affects their persistence in college, the issue of effective ways to increase retention and persistence of these students becomes increasingly important.

Theoretical Background of the Study

Research on the subject of student persistence has spanned decades. The formation of a theory for student departures by Tinto (1987) ushered in a new era in which researchers sought to explore root causes and overall patterns of student departure

¹ Digest of Education Statistics, “Chapter 3: Postsecondary Education”
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/ch_3.asp

and persistence. In his seminal work on student departure, *Leaving College* (1987, 1993), Vincent Tinto seeks to produce “a viable synthesis of what we know about the character and causes of student departure” (4). Tinto explores everything from individual root causes of departure to institutional perspectives on departure. Tinto concludes that the retention of students at an institution is reliant on that institution’s ability to integrate them into the “social and intellectual fabric of institutional life” (180). The portion of Tinto’s work concerning academic and social integration is intriguing. Tinto writes,

As the academic and social are in some measure distinct... Social isolation may lead to departure independent of one’s academic performance. [However], in some colleges the academic and its stress upon intellectual matters may dominate the wider social life of the institution. In some others, the opposite may apply.

(107)

The lack of clarity between social and academic integration and its effects on students has been the concern of several scholars like Hurtado and Carter (1997). Additionally, as this project and the work of other researchers will show, academic integration and social integration are more closely tied than Tinto originally suggested. This point proves especially true for African-American students.

Criticisms of Tinto’s Concept of Academic and Social Integration

Hurtado and Carter

In the article, “College Transition and Perceptions of Racial Climate in Latino Students’ sense of Belonging” scholars Hurtado and Carter denote the inadequacy of previous researchers’ methods in exploring the social and academic integration of students of color,

Researchers have used constructs that often reflect participation in mainstream activities in colleges without considering whether the social distance between racial and ethnic groups may inhibit participation in these activities. ...

Researchers lack a clear understanding of how the variety of collegiate activities (mainstream and culturally related) may contribute to a student's sense of membership in the college community. (327)

Hurtado and Carter find that despite Tinto's revisions in 1993, done mostly to add updated information to his early conclusion, his failure to provide descriptions of the distinction between systems (academic and social) and institutional integration, ultimately hinders future researchers' test of this relationship (326). Hurtado furthers this point by suggesting this lack of clarity has caused researchers to use their own ideas of integration, thus exasperating a lack of unity amongst explorers of Tinto's work.

Furthermore, Hurtado and Carter argue for a specification "between students' sense of integration (psychological measures) and actual participation in campus life (behavioral measures)" (326).² Further critiques of Tinto's theory of social and academic integration find that Tinto's model does not allow for an exploration of the difficulties historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups have in regards to integration. Moreover, Hurtado and Carter find that Tinto's concept of integration does not consider the differing processes of social integration amongst students of minority racial and ethnic backgrounds.

...underlying the concept of acculturation is the assumption that the cultural differences of ethnic groups should be diminished and that to be

² Although this criticism is not solely limited to Tinto's work when in context of Hurtado and Carter's work, this consideration will prove important during the discussion of new theories in the next section.

successful, minority students must adopt the values of the of the dominant college environment... (Hurtado and Carter, 327).

Thus, the importance of inquiries concerning students' academic and social integration, especially that of racial and ethnic minorities into nonhomogeneous collegiate environments, heightens.

The increased complexity of environments with multiple racial ethnic communities and opportunities for multiple memberships pose new challenges for understanding students' social interaction and affiliation. ...review of the literature suggest[s] that such diverse environments may require a reformulation of Tinto's model (Hurtado,327).

With their critiques of Tinto, researchers have also offered their own theories of exploring the academic and social factors of student persistence.

Hypothesizing that "Latino student's perceptions of a hostile climate directly affect[ed] the students' sense of belonging in their colleges," Hurtado and Carter constructed a model that considered student's self-concept, institutional selectivity, and students' perceptions of the racial climate of the institution they attended. Additionally they explored ease in transition to college in students' first year, perceptions of a hostile racial climate in their second year and the culmination of all these factors and their effect on students' sense of belonging in the third year (330). Hurtado and Carter gleaned how students' perception of the campus climate affected their sense of belonging but Hurtado and Carter also noticed that there were still gaps of Tinto's theory that their research did not reach, stating, "...the outcomes of a subjective sense of integration or student' sense of belonging have not been the focus of systematic study" (341).

Rodgers and Summers

Adding to the voices analyzing Tinto's model are Kelly Rodgers and Jessica Summers (2008) who created a model based on Bean and Eaton's modification of Tinto's model (173). Bean and Eaton's model closed some of the gaps obviated by Hurtado and Carter by providing a "more psychological approach to understanding retention" (173). John Bean and Shavawn Eaton summarize the function of their model as follows:

The overall flow of the model indicates that an individual enters an institution with psychological attributes shaped by particular experiences, abilities, and self-assessments. Among the most important of these psychological factors are self-efficacy assessments ("Do I have confidence that I can perform well academically here?"); normative beliefs ("Do the important people in my life think attending this college is a good idea?"); and past behavior ("Do I have the academic and social experiences that have prepared me to success in college?") (Bean and Eaton 2000)

Bean and Eaton accomplish this psychological approach by assessing how a student's "entry characteristics"-a selection of both academic and personal attributes such as coping skills, academic skills, or motivation- affect the "environmental interactions which in turn affect psychological processes" associated with certain outcomes (173).

Rodgers and Summers explain, "According to Bean and Eaton (2000), when students are academically and socially integrated, they form positive attitudes about the institution which influences their intent to persist and ultimately their actual persistence"(173). Rodgers and Summers build on the foundation of Bean and Eaton's concept by highlighting "aspects of the authors' model as they relate to African-American students attending predominately White institutions" and making adjustments

“based on...the effect of race/culture on the interaction between African American students and PWIs [Predominantly White Institutions]”(174). Furthermore, they combined their modification of Bean and Eaton’s theory with elements of W.E. Cross’s “Model of Negriscense” which explores the formation of a “Black Identity” in order to analyze the ways that a student’s formation of a Black identity affects or is affected by the cycle that Bean and Eaton identified(183).

The similarities between the models of Rodgers and Summers and Hurtado and Carter are striking as both explore the elements of a student’s racial background and explore its inevitable effects on a student’s psychological perceptions of the institution. However, Rodgers and Summers takes Hurtado and Carter’s thesis a step further by combining it with Bean and Eaton’s, suggesting that researchers should consider if a student’s sense of belonging can affect that student’s persistence, particularly if that student is a student of color- in these cases, African-American or Latino.

Hurtado and Carter demystified the ways that a Latino student’s perception of a campus climate can affect his or her sense of belonging. Rodgers and Summers provided a multifaceted theory that added dimensions to Hurtado and Carter’s work by proposing a mixed- theory approach focusing specifically on Black students at Predominantly White Institutions. Attempting to bridge the gap between Hurtado (1997) and Rodgers (2008), Leslie Hausmann, Feifei Ye, Janet Schofield and Rochelle Woods focused on the “sense of belonging and Persistence in White and African-American First-Year Students (2008).

Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods

Hausmann, Ye, Schofield and Woods uncover whether a student’s subjective sense of belonging could affect a student’s persistence, furthering Hurtado and Carter’s thesis and putting in to practice aspects of Rodgers and Summers’s theory. They

conducted their study at a large, public Predominantly White Institution on the east coast of the United States (Hausman, 654). They used surveys and retained 356 participants. This study is unique from the ones mentioned earlier because they attempted to add an intervention component to their research. Working under the assumption that intervention practices designed to increase a student's subjective sense of belonging would have an overall positive outcome on a student's intention to persist, the authors implemented programs of intervention in their study to prove their theory. In order to help stimulate a sense of belonging the researchers employed written communication from the Provost or Vice-Provost of Student Affairs stating that the participants were valued members of the university community and that their participation would serve to help the university community(665). Their findings showed that:

The effects involving sense of belonging were somewhat different for African-American and white students. The hypothesized effect of the intervention on sense of belonging was observed only among white students. However, the effect of peer-group interactions and academic development on sense of belonging, as well as the effect of sense of belonging on institutional commitment, were observed for both African-Americans and for whites (663).

Although this study did not have the projected outcomes, the Hausmann team's foray into connecting a student's subjective sense of belonging on persistence using intervention in conjunction with a survey and not solely analyzing survey data like Hurtado and Carter is important because it helps zero in on possible reasons for the persistence of African-American students.

Although the theories mentioned previously illuminate the relationship between students of color and the institutions they attend, several elements are currently missing. Both Rodgers and Summers (2008) and Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods (2008) address the need for further studies to be done in order to explore areas that their works did not. Rodgers and Summers suggest:

Additional qualitative research should also address the experiences of African-American students at predominantly White institutions. Such investigations should specifically address; (1) students' motivations to attend college in general and their present university in particular; (2) students' perceptions of the academic environment; (3) student's social and academic integration (bicultural development) and their perception of how the university environment contributes to this; and (4) what are their academic and social needs and how can the university support and fulfill these needs (186).

In the next section, I shall explain how I address some of the concerns posed by Rodgers and Summers and add depth to the works of Hurtado, Tinto, and Hausmann.

Purpose of the Study

This project has multiple goals. First, I continue in the trend of Hurtado, Rodgers, and Hausmann by offering insight into the factors of resiliency and persistence of students of color, specifically African-American students. Secondly, I narrow down my scope significantly to focus solely on the experience of Black women at a Predominately White Institutions (PWI) in the state of Mississippi, the University of Mississippi. My reason for focusing on black women is owed to what I perceive to be a shallow area in the research of the collegiate success of black students. Due to the academic achievement

gaps between men and women of color many researchers have focused on the experiences and needs of black men. Despite the high achievement of women of color, black women in particular, research has yet to explore many of their experiences.

Thirdly, in keeping with the suggestions of Rodgers, I provide visual evidence of the experience of African-American women at a southern PWI through the usage of the documentary film mode. Christian Heath, author of *Video in Qualitative Research* notes that using film to capture sociological data has advantages nonexistent in other forms of qualitative data collection. He writes, "...here is a cheap and reliable technology that enables us to record naturally occurring activities as they arise... These records can be repeatedly analyzed and they enable access to the fine details of conduct and interaction that are unavailable to more traditional social science methods" (2). Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the type of work that Heath is discussing in the previous quote and that I have done. I have conducted videotaped interviews and did not observe subjects in their natural environment per se. Still, possibilities within video captured qualitative data that Heath discusses is applicable to my project, most notably the possibility of observing and decoding body conduct and messages during a videotaped interview.³

Explanation of Research Environment

I have chosen to focus on the University of Mississippi due to its status as a southern university and its location in a state with the highest black population of the United States. Moreover, the University of Mississippi has a particularly complicated racial history⁴ and documenting African-Americans within this context could prove

⁴ Within the past two years there have been two racially charged incidents on the University of Mississippi's campus. In 2012 there was a conflict concerning the reelection of President Barack Obama. In

especially fruitful. For the 2013-2014 school year, there are currently 14,615 full-time students enrolled in undergraduate studies at the University of Mississippi main campus. Of this enrolled group about 9.25% are black women compared to the 40% who are white women, the 5.4% who are black men and the 37.1% who are white men.⁵

Assumptions

Within the development of this thesis topic, I have made a few assumptions. I assume that the experience of black women at the University of Mississippi will verify certain findings by the researchers above. I also assume that I will be able to justify my findings with other concepts of studies such as Critical Race Theory (Solorzano et.al. 2000), and Marginality and Mattering (Gossett, Cuyjet, and Cockriel 1996) that aid in explaining how a student's perception of the racial climate and their sense of integration are related.

Method

In order to find my subjects I used the snowball method, a method that finds subjects through a researcher's immediate social group. This technique was chosen because it allows for an ease in discussing sensitive subjects such as race (Biernacki, Patrick 1981). I started by canvassing self-identified black women whom I knew personally through email, on Facebook, text messaging and in person conversations then I asked them to approach their friends concerning my research. My most fruitful contacting methods were the less formal Facebook and text messaging due to their ease of access and common use amongst those canvassed. Once participants were identified, I

2014, a noose was found around the commemorative statue of James Meredith, the student who integrated the University in 1962.

⁵ University of Mississippi Institutional Research

began email and/or text correspondence with the participants to establish a proper time for interviews to take place. The parameters of the interview times were as follows: Interviews had to take place between the hours of 8am and 6pm and they had to take place on a location on campus. These parameters were instilled in order to create a sense of consistency in which the interviews could exist and in order to limit external variables from interfering with the interview process.

I contacted each participant via email, text, or Facebook with my schedule and we worked out which times would work best. After this, I embarked on the beginning of the three, 30-minute interviews. In the first interview, I allotted 15minutes to explain the project and give the participant the relevant consent forms, as required by the University of Mississippi Institutional Research Board. After receiving the signed forms, I began the interview. In the first 30-minute interview, the participants shared demographic information such as their age, major, and hometown as well as a brief description of their family relationships and time in high school. During subsequent in-depth interviews, each respondent gave her perspective on their time at the University of Mississippi and her unique experiences. Interviews were recorded on a Rebel T-3I camera on loan from the University of Mississippi's Theatre department as well as one from the Media and Documentary department. Each interview was then transferred to an external hard drive. I viewed the video several times: first only noting the words of the participant and subsequent times watching for any physical or vocal changes that could possible denote a question's effect on the participant.

I tracked similarities and differences between participants using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I created rows identifying common themes in my questions as well as

separate columns for each participant. In the rows, I wrote a summary of the participants answer to the questions that corresponded to the identified themes. This process allowed for an easy comparison of the participant's experiences. My questions⁶ were formulated in an effort to address some of the aforementioned themes that Rodgers and Summers (2008) suggested.⁷

Throughout the interviews, if a subject presented an answer that needed clarification and further exploration additional questions were asked however due to their informal nature I have not included them in the above list of questions.

Results

I compiled interviews with five women. Three out of the five of those interviews went to completion with the fourth interview stopping close to the end of questioning and the fifth stopping early in the process. The cessations of those interviews were not due to the willingness of the participant but due to time constraints and issues with scheduling.

The first participant was B. She was born in Virginia, but settled in Jackson, Mississippi when she was a young girl and attended Murrah High School. She is a Junior, Pharmacy Major. The second participant was J. She grew up in Jackson, MS and attended Terry High School. She is a sophomore, Political Science major- Chinese Minor. C, participant three, was born in Mississippi but moved to Wisconsin in her adolescence. She attended high school in Wisconsin. She is a senior, Broadcast Journalism major and is the only transfer student I interviewed. Participant four, K, was born in Mississippi and

⁶ See Appendix

⁷ "(1) students' motivations to attend college in general and their present university in particular; (2) students' perceptions of the academic environment;(3) student's social and academic integration (bicultural development) and their perception of how the university environment contributes to this; and (4) what are their academic and social needs and how can the university support and fulfill these needs."

grew up in Greenwood, MS. She attended Greenwood High School and is an English major and a senior. My last participant, S, was born in Mississippi and grew up in both Ridgeland and Canton, MS. She attended Ridgeland High School and is a junior Classics major.

Interestingly, all of these women shared similar family situations. Five out of five grew up in households headed by single women. Furthermore, each one of them had at least one younger sibling. All women had interacted with the institution of the University of Mississippi in one way or another prior to their attendance, whether through visits to the campus, a UM recruiter visiting their school, or online research about the University of Mississippi. S, says of the recruiters, “I saw them at college fairs. They immediately engaged me, the counselors who saw us. I talked to them a lot and they talked to me a lot...” Three out of five explicitly expressed having interest in an area of study prior to enrolling at the University. Two out of those three visited the University specifically to either learn more about that area of study or to begin an early placement program for that area of study i.e. the early entry program for pharmacy, the Luckyday Program⁸ or the MOST conference.⁹ B talks of her experience in the early entry program and the Luckyday Program, “Being in Luckyday and the early entry did indeed help me get integrated into the school. I was able to learn some of the places, like the Turner Center and the Grove and uh, I get to meet new people...”

Four out of five lived on campus their first year. C did not live on campus her first year due to her status as a transfer student. Two out five had roommates that were white

⁸ The Luckyday Program is a retention program that seeks to create a shared learning community to increase a student’s chance of completing college.

⁹ The MOST conference that targets minority students and seeks to serve as an extra step to help them acclimate to the university

their first year at the University and both of those experiences were negative. J reports that her roommate began pledging for a sorority and as a result, cleaned the room less. J recalls, "I would be like could you clean this up? ...she would be like 'No, you're not my mom.' ...I remember that that was the day that set me off that she said I wasn't her mom...the dishes that were in the sink [her roommate's dishes] I just casually threw them all on the ground." This event resulted in the suggestion that they both move to different dorms but J decided that since she was "the aggressor in that situation" she should be the one to leave. C recalls her roommates'--all of whom were white women in a sorority--initial treatment, "At first they were really nice and they were very welcoming...then after the first week they weren't very inclusive of me anymore." Both of these women no longer room with white women or men.

In regards to campus involvement four out of five stated that they were at least occasionally involved with an organization on campus while the participant not involved in a group on campus, K, stated she had considered being a part of an organization but was dissuaded due to the financial obligation. She explains, "Freshman year, I was dead set on being a part of the UM gospel choir because I love to sing...but you know as per every college student I was broke...and they had fees." When asked if this had a negative effect on her she responded, "Yes... It's negative because you network with people... You meet people, you get to network, you have friends, and you take classes with people and you can...study with them and both of y'all work on actually getting stuff done instead of goofing off in college. When asked about her involvement in organizations and whether it would have bettered her experience at the University of Mississippi, K replied, "Definitely."

Three out of five reported an interest or current involvement with a Greek organization whether honors, school-affiliated, or non-Pan-Hellenic. S spoke positively of her involvement in a non-Pan-Hellenic organization stating, “There are people [in the sorority] with whom I have struggled and been through things with who are there for me and listen to me.” Additionally three out of five women discussed interactions with members of Pan-Hellenic sororities and fraternities. Two out of those four were negative as noted above in the discussion of living situations.

Overall, these women exhibit a clear sense of their academic and personal goals. S notes, “I came into Ole Miss honestly thinking about how I’m going to whup this place academically...” Additionally, B had decided upon her major prior to her entry at the University of Mississippi and actively sought attendance at the University of Mississippi due to its high regard in her area of study. She furthers,

“I’ve always loved math and science and so I decided to look it up on google- the different types of, um, careers that you could have in math and science and I ended up coming up with Accounting and Pharmacy ... So I ended up applying to several colleges that had pharmacy programs and Ole Miss was one of those programs that apparently, is pretty good. I think it’s like in the top 30 I believe.”

In regards to the racial climate, three out of five do not claim to have had an overall negative experience at the University of Mississippi with K, solely explicitly stating, “[regarding the James Meredith Incident on campus, where the statue had a noose on its neck]I was like, Oh I’m glad I’m about to graduate. This is bogus. If I was a [sophomore] or freshman, I would be gone... But yeah, I stayed because I felt like I had already done too much here to transfer and I would have to get into a whole new environment and

readjust...” Other participants reported racial incidents, but none explicitly expressed a desire to leave because of such incidents.

Discussion

Prior to the interviews I felt that the experiences of these women would mirror my own due to our similar demographic information and intersecting experiences. The experiences ranged from B. the pharmacy major, saw no problem with her experience at the University of Mississippi to K, who expressed great regret towards her experience at the University of Mississippi partly because of personal reasons but also due to her problems with the racial issues at the University.

In their article, “African Americans’ and Non-African Americans’ Sense of Mattering and Marginality at Public, Predominantly White Institutions,” Gossett, Cuyjet and Cockriel address the possible effects of marginality and mattering on undergraduate students’ learning outcomes. They reiterate from the studies done by Valencic (1995) that “there is a positive correlation between involvement on campus and student’s sense of mattering in relation to administrators, peers, and faculty.” Overall, this effect seems to hold true for the women I interviewed. Despite reporting incidents when they felt uncomfortable, most of the women’s positive experiences with their peer group, specifically their black peer groups, their families, and their academic goals prior to entry seem to anchor them here. This finding resonates with past studies done by scholars like Allen (1992), who found that “academic achievement is highest for students who have high educational aspirations, who are certain that their college choice was correct, and who report positive relationships with faculty.” While not all of these items were true for

every woman interviewed, the fact that it was at least partially true for all of them seems to suggest Allen's finding is still valid.

In regards to the students' subjective sense of mattering and their experience at the University of Mississippi, most of the participants seemed to not have let their racial experiences and/or their perception of the racial climate of the campus affect their sense of belonging at the University of Mississippi. J, who discussed her issues with her white roommate, did not feel that there was a time that she felt like she was not included at the University of Mississippi. She says, "I've always felt like if I want to go do something then I'll go do it ... I don't think I've felt like I wasn't included in something." Overall, while portions of the research hold true for these women, i.e. the correlation between academic and social involvement and overall satisfaction on campus, others such as the correlation between a student's poor sense of belonging and his or her negative perception of their college's racial climate are not entirely reinforced within this sample. The true effect of these women's experiences on their resiliency is unclear. Due to my assumption that the correlation between a student's positive or negative experiences and their decision to complete college was obvious, I failed to ask further probing questions that could have better uncovered factors in these women's resiliency.

Limitations and Weaknesses

As this is an undergraduate thesis, there are certain limitations I encountered. Firstly, time available, money, and my focus on videotaped interviews significantly reduced the scope of my project. Had I more time and money I would have done more follow up interviews in order to flesh out nuances in the experiences of the participants as well as gotten shots of them in class and living life at home to get a deeper idea of who

these women were outside of college life. Secondly, by choosing to use a snowball method in order to gain participants I acknowledge the possibility that my results may be skewed to a certain perspective or type of experience. In fact, I was startled to find that I had found women whose personal information veered very close to mine. Additionally, I expected that I would uncover body language cues that belied a participant's subconscious feelings about a question or issue but this was not so. While the camera aided in presenting my findings, the camera's presence definitely affected participants' responses, especially B, who would get ready for the camera and hold a stilted posture during the earlier interviews. Due to my small sample size I was not able to draw sweeping conclusions about the experiences of all African-American women at the University of Mississippi or at other southern universities. Overall, I feel that my lack of a background in sociological research strategies may have prevented me from exploring my topic as deeply as I could have and perhaps it would work better as a solely visual project. In spite of this, my finding's applicability to previous research should not be discounted. I can only offer my research as a visual supplement to others' research.

Conclusion

Conclusively, while the research on factors of retention is vast and multifaceted, there are still aspects to explore, yet through this inter-disciplinary approach using elements of social science and documentary cinema information can not only deepen the traditional research done it can also widen its reach.

I have focused on black women in an effort to illuminate a poorly explored area in the research of retention specifically that conducted concerning the experiences of students of color at Predominantly White Institutions. I have utilized a documentary

technique in order to provide a visual to these women's experience, a perspective not available in previous research. In this this time period, media is increasingly used to educate and by having a visual, easily digestible format for this work those who stand to benefit the most from the research—minority students, educators, and administrators—can do so with minimal effort.

It is my hope that through this research and subsequent documentary project, I will etch a space for visual research methods in this area of study. Additionally this could prove useful to the University of Mississippi for additional evaluation of retention programs already in place such as the FAstrack program,¹⁰ the Luckyday Program, Freshman Attendance-Based Intuitive, and StudentsFIRST but perhaps suggestions for new practices.

¹⁰This program seeks to create a smaller, comfortable, and supportive learning community for students at risk of successfully transitioning from high school to First-year and beyond.

APPENDIX

Questions for Thesis

General Information

Name? Age? Major? Year?

Can tell you about where you grew up?

Where were you born?

Where did you go to high school?

What was the average economic status of your neighborhood?

Family

Describe your family situation: Your relationships with your parent/Guardians

What is the highest level of education your parent(s)/guardian(s) have had?

-Your Grandparents?

How has your relationship with your family had an effect on your time at the university?

University of Mississippi

How did you come to be a student at the University of Mississippi?

What, if any, were your preconceived notions of ole miss?

Describe the process of acclimating to the University of Mississippi

Did you live on campus your freshman year?

-What was that experience like?

Are you involved with any organization on campus? (How did you come to be involved with this organization?)

Do you have any close relationships with any professors?

-If so, how did this relationship form?

How many professors who have taught you have been the same race as you?

-If not, are there any factors that caused this?

Do you feel you have had a good social life at the University of Mississippi?

-If so, what does this consists of?

-if not, what does your ideal social life look like?

Describe your academic progress at the University of Mississippi.

Have there ever been times you have wanted to leave the University of Mississippi?

-If so, what factors led to that decision?

-If not, why?

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¹¹ Even though I include a question about name I only be refer to participants by their first initial in this report.

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