

Running header: BLACK WOMEN WEALTH BROKERS

COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH BROKERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
THE EXPERIENCES OF LOW-INCOME, FIRST-GENERATION BLACK FEMALE
UNDERGRADUATES AT A HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

American students are increasingly accessing higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a); yet, only 60% of first-time, full-time students will complete a bachelor's degree within six years (U. S. Department of Education, 2016b). While these are current statistics, opportunity programs were instituted in the 1960s to address issues of access, acclimation, and navigation in college, specifically for low-income, first-generation college students. Due to the limited financial, human, and physical resources available in opportunity programs, not all students can participate even if they desire to and meet the criteria. Thus, unaffiliated students must navigate college using their own resources and college knowledge, which requires the attainment and deployment of capital. The present phenomenological study sought to understand the college navigation experiences of low-income, first-generation Black women undergraduates at a historically white institution (HWI), particularly as Black women account for the bulk of the increase in college enrollment rates (Banks, 2009; Gold, 2011; USDOE, 2016c).

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) provides the framework for analysis. Limited research about Black females in higher education, except relative to Black males or white women necessitates this study employ the lens of standpoint theory, which enables the population of study to have agency in the telling of their stories (Collins, 2000; Harding, 2004; Heckman, 1997). Via semi-structured interviews of eight low-income, first-generation Black college women who are not affiliated with opportunity programs and a follow-up focus group with six of these eight women, the study asked how the participants navigated college and what kinds of CCW they used to do so. The following themes emerged from the research: resources at the college; resources outside the college; view of the college; invisibility and visibility; and

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double-consciousness. Study findings suggest that participants deployed multiple forms of CCW to navigate unwelcoming spaces, connect with others, create communities of support, challenge unsupportive administrators and policies, and advocate for themselves. Recommendations for educators are also discussed.

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DEDICATION

My God! My God! My God! Look at You blessing me to be able to do this thing as part of the “all things...” I’m looking forward to embracing what’s next on Your “do, be, experience” list for my life.

To Gramma, Mrs. Bessie Mae Lee, Sr. – You were the woman who knew I could, told me so, and encouraged me always. I miss you so much, Old Lady! Your wisdom and fearlessness set the standard by which I measure all others.

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To my littles, Jada and Eg – Be you! Dream! Plan! Conquer your fears! Do! The world really is yours. Remember how you would look at me with scorn when I said I would quit? Well, I didn’t. The bar has been set (and I’m old), so set it higher and leap, girl, leap! The other littles are watching you, and your Aunt Tie cannot wait to witness all the #BlackGirlMagic you grace this world with.

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Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 provides background information regarding the higher education landscape for first-generation, low-income students. The problem, purpose of the study, and research questions that guide this study are included. Chapter 2 offers a review of related literature to support the necessity of conducting research on low-income, first-generation Black females. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology utilized to investigate the problem, and Chapter 4 presents a thematic representation of individual interview and focus group findings. Finally, Chapter 5 responds to the research questions, discusses the limitations and significance of the current research, and offers recommendations for higher education institutions and educators.

Chapter 1

Understanding the Landscape

Across the United States, students are increasingly gaining access to higher education. Per the United States Department of Education (2016a) projection, in fall 2016, 20.5 million students were expected to attend American colleges and universities, an increase of about 5.2 million students since fall 2000. Women were expected to account for many of these college students: about 11.7 million women were expected to attend in fall 2016, compared with 8.8 million male students. Also, more students were expected to attend school full-time than part-time – an estimated 12.7 million full-time, compared to about 7.9 million attending part-time (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Along with that projected overall growth, the numbers and percentages of Black and Hispanic students attending degree-seeking institutions have also increased (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Between 2000 and 2014, the percentage of Black college students rose from 11.7 to 14.5 percent, and the percentage of Hispanic college students rose from 9.9 to 16.5 percent (United States Department of Education, 2016a). Of all Black undergraduates at public colleges and universities in the US, 52 percent are women

(Harper & Simmons, 2019). Further, while Blacks are 14.6 percent of the 18-24-year-olds in the country, only 9.8 percent of full-time, degree-seeking students at public colleges are Black (Harper & Simmons, 2019).

The growth of college enrollment across different racial demographics reflects the national push for increased college attendance to expand the numbers of Americans able to participate in America's knowledge economy. Under President Obama, the White House's (2014) education webpage indicated that higher education attainment was "no longer just a pathway to opportunity for a talented few; rather, it is a prerequisite for the growing jobs of the new economy." With initiatives such as President Obama's 2020 College Completion Agenda, the nation was awakened to the idea that a college degree allows more people to participate in the middle class, as the average lifetime earnings of a college graduate are double those with only a high school diploma (Swail, 2000). This remains true, particularly given that an education has the greatest potential to change someone's life (Swail, 2000).

Unfortunately, while more students are gaining access to higher education, completion rates are still low. "Only 60 percent of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2008 completed the degree at that institution by 2014," (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). Specifically, the six-year graduation rate was 58 percent at public colleges and universities in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). At public colleges and universities across the four cohorts of students starting college in 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010, only 39.4 percent of Black students completed bachelor's degrees within six years compared to 50.6 percent of undergraduates overall (Harper & Simmons, 2019). Of note, Harper and Simmons' (2019) report card on the status of Black undergraduates at public

colleges and universities in the United States indicates that forty-one percent of these institutions graduate “one-third or fewer Black students within six years” (p. 3).

While there are social, cultural, institutional, academic, and economic reasons that lead students to leave institutions (Bean, 1983; Ishitani, 2006; Tinto, 1993; Tinto & Pusser, 2006), some universities have programs to help integrate students into the institution and alleviate some of the stress of transitioning into and persisting in college. Specifically, first-generation students, and/or students with an academic need and who show historical poverty in their families (U.S. Department of Education, 2017) may benefit from opportunity programs. For example, federal TRIO programs are in place to identify and provide services - such as grants, tutoring, academic advising, and supplemental instruction - to individuals from economically and academically disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Similar programs have been implemented statewide, such as the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) in New York, Act 101 in Pennsylvania, and the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) in New Jersey. These programs aid first-generation, low-income students who have an academic need and have families with historical poverty, by providing an opportunity to access higher education, navigate unfamiliar college spaces, and succeed while enrolled (NYSED, 2016; PHEAA, 2011; State of New Jersey OSHE, 2013a). Still, there are low-income, first-generation college students who do not participate in these programs and navigate higher education without the aid of such a program. The present study focused on the college navigation experiences of low-income, first-generation Black female Allegiance University (a pseudonym) undergraduates who are not affiliated with such programs.

Statement of the Problem

While many students aspire to attain a college degree, many of them do not have the familiarity of college to understand how to navigate particular spaces. Knowing how to be successful in college must be learned, as college is necessarily different from elementary and high school, and most likely vastly different from any other experience in which a student has ever engaged. Without learning the mores of college, the likelihood of attaining a degree is lessened. Understanding the mores of college is necessary, as they reflect the accumulation of assets over time that are beneficial and have exchange value in particular contexts – in this case, in a college setting (Bourdieu, 1986). The problem associated with the lack of capital needed *for* college, or not knowing how to deploy capital *in* college is embedded in the story of June, a 21-year old, low-income Black female who was the first in her family to attend college. June is a friend of the family. At the time of this encounter June had been enrolled in college for three semesters prior to leaving.

When I asked June about her college experience and why she had left, she indicated that while she enjoyed the experience of college (meeting new people, having freedom, taking different courses), she became frustrated because she had taken the same developmental math course three times and had failed each time. When I asked her if she had gone to tutoring, she said no because she could not afford it. I then told her that tutoring was part of the package – if she had paid her tuition and fees, then she could make use of all the tutoring options and writing centers. I asked her if she had gone to office hours to speak to her professor, and she replied that she wanted to, but she was intimidated by him so she did not. She needed exactly what office hours were for – to have space and time to engage with her professor individually and get the academic assistance she needed. Ultimately, I explained to June that her leaving

school was unfortunate, particularly because she took the course three times and had paid for it each time through her student loans, even though she had failed. June was stunned to realize this as she could not understand how or why the college would charge her three times for a course for which she never received credit. When I asked her about her financial aid, she said she could not rely on financial aid to help her return to school because she had failed the math course so many times; however, it seemed to me that the real reason she was no longer eligible for financial aid was because she had not met institutional satisfactory academic progress (SAP) standards, which are in place to ensure that students complete a certain number of credits toward their degrees within a certain time period. Thus, the number of failing grades, withdrawals, and incompletes should be kept to a minimum in order to remain financial aid eligible (Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

June is an example of a first-generation, low-income Black woman who could have benefitted from participating in an opportunity program or tapping into a network that could have provided her with insights about the resources necessary for college success. Resources can come in many different forms, but they require that a person is knowledgeable of their existence, and how to access and utilize them. Although this argument can be made for almost any first-generation student, of particular interest in the present research were the ways low-income, first-generation Black females navigated the institution and succeeded. Specifically, how they used their Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2015) to access the college resources and opportunities that students who are in opportunity programs or who are second-generation college attendees are told about and guided to use. June's lack of understanding how to make the best use of her Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) while in college had negative consequences to the extent that she did not return to the institution; however, the college women in this study

who are also low-income, first-generation students are thriving. Their stories of success are significant and provide insights into helping other similarly positioned students.

Black women are a small population at Allegiance and they are successful in this space, which is a historically white institution or HWI. Allegiance University was a predominantly white institution for much of its existence. Predominantly white institutions (PWIs) are those colleges and universities in which white students “account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (Brown & Dancy, 2010, p. 525). Predominately white institutions (PWIs) and historically white institutions (HWIs) are not known for being accommodating spaces for Students of Color. In fact, Brown and Dancy (2010) note that the majority of PWIs “may also be understood as historically white institutions (HWIs), in recognition of the binarism and exclusion supported by the United States prior to 1964,” (pp.525-526). Since white student enrollment is less than 50% of its total student enrollment, I chose to refer to Allegiance as an HWI, which reflects how a change in the composition of the student population may say nothing about a change in institutional climate and culture, as reflected through the stories the women revealed in their interviews and the focus group. The women in the study refer to Allegiance as a PWi.

While some students will have early access to the institution via a pre-college summer institute required of opportunity program participants, these women have not had this exposure. As well, opportunity program participants are connected to staff whose work is to help students connect with resources and connect them to others who can and will support them; yet, these women do not have a dedicated college staff to aid them. Thus, the women in this study apparently have come to the institution with or have learned what the institution requires of them in order to be successful, and have navigated institutional spaces with some measure of success. This being the case, analyzing the experiences of low-income, first-generation Black women can

offer educators insight on how to address issues this population finds important, particularly those related to access, underrepresentation, misrepresentation, financial aid, diversity and inclusion, and equality.

Cultural Capital

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu coined the term “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1973). Cultural capital may take many forms such as internalized behaviors, dispositions, knowledge, and habits acquired in the socialization process or accumulated through investment in education and training or in acquiring cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1973). Regardless of the space(s) a person occupies, he or she needs the capital associated with that environment to thrive. The knowledge through which students may acquire advantages in the educational process is part of the cultural capital that we give to our children. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) indicate that though we think of America as “the promised land of social fluidity and individual achievement,” all of its educational institutions “perpetuate and legitimate social hierarchies” (p. xi). The reproduction of social inequality is ensured “by safeguarding the preservation of the structure of the distribution of powers through a constant re-distribution of people and titles characterized, behind the impeccable appearance of equity and meritocracy, by a systematic bias in favour of the possessors of inherited cultural capital,” (p. xi). In other words, although we appear to have an equitable and meritocratic country, our educational systems favor those who already possess the kind of capital endorsed by the majority white, middle class. Those with capital pass it down to their children; thereby, reproducing capital. In so doing, this ability to operate with privilege disadvantages others as the cycle of the “haves” and “have-nots” is perpetuated.

While there are different types of capital – academic, cultural, and social – which can be used to analyze differences between diverse groups in varying settings, the very existence of

university opportunity programs geared toward first-generation college students speaks to the fact that certain forms of cultural capital are not passed down to all students equally (Ward, Seigel, & Davenport, 2012), thus creating a need for such programs to try to provide equal access and equitable outcomes for students. Without the aid of family who are familiar with the culture of college and the challenges students face when transitioning from one world and acclimating to another, first-generation college students must determine how best to negotiate their higher education experiences (Ward et al., 2012; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009). This difficulty is increased for minority students, as Museus and Neville (2012) highlight the importance of having an institutional agent help “connect racial minority students to social capital (i.e., information and support) in the broader social networks at an institution and, in turn, facilitate their success” (Museus & Neville, 2012, pp. 437). Museus and Neville (2012) reference Stanton-Salazar’s (1997) research on K-12 students, yet they (2012) conclude that his recommendations apply to higher education, where institutional agents who are committed to the success of Students of Color provide them with social capital “by offering them various funds of knowledge (e.g., information about social norms and cultural nuances), serving as human bridges between them and social networks, and providing them with opportunities to engage in educational activities, programs, and opportunities across their organizations” (Museus & Neville, 2012, pp. 436-437). Although sometimes not specifically for first-generation students, opportunity programs are able to capture this population and are able to offer them necessary skills for succeeding in college (Ward et al., 2012). The purpose of opportunity programs is to break through barriers to pursuing higher education and offer the participating students the cultural and social capital relevant to higher education. Opportunity programs can serve as

capital brokers for students who participate in them. Thus, without access to these programs and an institutional agent to help bridge the gap, minority students are at a disadvantage.

Opportunity Programs for First-Generation Students

First-generation students (FGS) are the first in their families to attend college or students whose parents have not attained a baccalaureate degree (Higher Education Act of 1965; Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). An affiliation with a group or an organization which can offer opportunities to build the cultural (e.g., learning the mores of college life) and social (e.g., networking with other students; creating a support system) capital as it relates to the college-going culture and navigating the norms and expectations of academia is an asset to securing their educational futures. Opportunity programs such as Act 101, HEOP, and EOF provide a bridge to college for low-income, first-generation college students (Ward et al., 2012). They may also provide these students with a support network, supplemental instruction, mentoring, and financial assistance, all of which Engle and Tinto (2008) identify as critical to the success of low-income, first-generation students in college.

The resources (physical, financial, and human) for opportunity programs are limited and the programs cannot assist everyone who may benefit from their services (Swail, 2000). In an article published in 2000, Swail noted, “It is estimated that the TRIO programs are able to serve no more than 10 percent of the eligible student population in the United States under current budget provisions. Based on current congressional funding, serving the entire eligible population would require an annual expenditure of over \$6 billion” (p. 90). Although federal TRIO funding reached over \$1 billion in 2018, this is still not enough to fund the entire eligible population (Council on Opportunity in Education, n.d.). Therefore, many students must serve as capital

brokers for themselves. Looking at low-income, first-generation Black women is important to understand how they can succeed when they do not have the tools given to others in opportunity programs. Despite limited resources, many are succeeding, so this research endeavors to understand what they are doing to achieve, and what forms of capital provide them the foundation to manage issues inherent to navigating and adjusting to college, particularly as a Black woman at an HWI.

Black College Women

While the percentage of students of every race and ethnicity enrolled in college is increasing, the bulk of the overall increase in college enrollment rates can be attributed to Black women (Banks, 2009; Gold, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2016c). Of total college degrees earned by Black students, females earn 66% compared to males who earn 34% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Yet, there is limited research about Black women in higher education; still much of the research that exists about Black women presents findings about them relative to Black males, or conflated with white women or other women of color. Additionally, Zambrana and MacDonald (2009) point out that studies on Blacks in higher education have “remained remarkably silent on gender issues” with the emphasis being on aggregate data of racial or gender groups (p. 73) rather than that specific to Black women as a group under study, despite the importance of focusing on Black women specifically.

The scarcity of an intersectional focus on Black women in research means that “the voices of Black women have often been missing [or] overlooked...” (Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2013, p. 128). Given their increased enrollment and their relative success as they outpace their male peers (Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009), Black women who are succeeding in higher education settings must possess a form of capital, even though what they possess is not given its

due in the research literature. Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, and Watson (2016) discuss how the Black Lives Matter movement's focus on Black men and boys is like previous movements and programs that serve to further marginalize Black women and girls, even though they are also disproportionately impacted by police brutality and predation by law enforcement. If Black women and girls' issues are addressed at all, they are situated as the support for Black men and boys. While some research on the experiences of Black college women exists relevant to identity development (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Roman, 2016; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Winkle-Wagner, 2009), college access and choice (Smith, 2008), and cultural capital (Banks, 2009; Gold, 2011), "between 1991-2016, a 22-year span, only 48 articles were published on the experiences of Black college women in juried higher education related, psychology, and behavioral publications. In contrast, since 2001, over 62 publications have been written that are geared toward the collegiate experiences of Black undergraduate men alone," (Patton et al., 2016, p. 194). Knowledge of the lived experiences of Black women and girls is limited and their voices remain silent. Patton et al. (2016) indicated that unfortunately "there are no significant platforms that would influence educational practice and policies toward social justice on behalf of Black women and girls," (p. 195). The research herein endeavored to reckon with the invisibility and silence demanded of Black women and girls. This research project was an opportunity to learn about their lived experiences and determine – based on their stories – how to move them from the margins. Thus, the purpose of the current phenomenological study was to understand the types capital – in the form of Community Cultural Wealth – successful, low-income, first-generation Black female students drew on to help them succeed in college without participating in opportunity programs.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand the college-going experiences and the potential deployment of capital for low-income, first-generation Black female undergraduates who did not participate in opportunity programs. I endeavored to identify if a lack of traditionally prized – or white, middle-class – capital resulted in conflict and difficulty for these students, and where they found assistance and support if they did not have it. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What types of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) did these women rely on to navigate Allegiance University, a historically white institution (HWI)?
 - a. How did these students describe their college experiences?
 - b. What challenges did they describe, and how did the deployment of CCW enable them to overcome these challenges?
 - c. Where did they gain support?
2. Did these women experience a sense of invisibility while navigating their HWI, and did the deployment of CCW then render these women visible?

Definition of Terms

The term *Black* is used rather than African American, unless the researcher cited on interviewee does so; as well, *Black* is capitalized throughout, as are the terms *Students of Color*, *People of Color*, and *Communities of Color*, except where the author cited does not capitalize.

The terms *women/woman* and *females/female* are used interchangeably. The term *girls* is used to refer to high-school aged females, although some of the cited research may extend the term to refer to college-aged women.

Chapter 2

Missed Opportunities:

The Literature on Unaffiliated, Low-Income, First-Generation Black College Women

To explore this topic and to frame the need for such a study, I sought research that addressed forms of capital, first-generation students, opportunity programs, and Black women in higher education. In seeking literature in which to ground my study, my search for “first-generation low-income Black college women higher education” in the university’s library database generated one result specific to the topic – a dissertation focused on community college women. I subsequently searched for “first generation Black college women higher education” in the university’s library database, which garnered ten results – two were peer-reviewed articles and eight were dissertations. Neither of the two peer-reviewed articles were about Black college women; three of the dissertations were. Thus, in my review of the literature, I recognized the gap in scholarship as there is not a comprehensive body of research that addresses these combined factors. I recognized the need to research the ways in which these issues of capital, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and college success intersect to impact a Black female student’s experiences at a large, public university where students can easily become invisible.

The scope of this literature review covers notions of capital relevant to Black women in the higher education setting. While some students enter the institution affiliated with opportunity programs or other special programs which aid them in acclimating to college and being visible on the college campus, there are low-income, first-generation minority students who do not have the advantage of readily participating in a program that will help them navigate the college or university. My research concerns students who fit this description – unaffiliated, low-income, first-generation Black women in higher education. To provide context for understanding the

college-going experiences of this population at Allegiance University, a four-year public research university in the northeastern United States, I examined literature related to capital, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), first-generation students, opportunity programs, Black college women, invisibility, and intersectionality. Further, an explanation of standpoint theory is offered as a theoretical perspective to help understand and clarify the particular point of view of this population and my own stance, as their experiences of college may be necessarily distinct from other groups, particularly in the ways they deploy capital.

Capital

Bourdieu (1986) indicates that the accumulation of capital has an impact on our social worlds, and the extent to which we are able to acquire capital affects the extent to which we can participate in different aspects and exchange it for other forms. Bourdieu (1986) employs the game of roulette as a metaphor for capital:

Roulette, which holds out the opportunity of winning a lot of money in a short space of time, and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously, and in which the winning of the previous spin of the wheel can be staked and lost at every new spin, gives a fairly accurate image of this imaginary universe of perfect competition or **perfect equality of opportunity** (emphasis added), a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one, every soldier has a marshal's baton in his knapsack, and every prize can be attained, instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything. Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its

being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible (p. 46).

Capital is not evenly distributed. There is a system of “haves” and “have nots” with the have nots at the lower end of the distribution scale. Also, what counts as capital may vary at different points in time, but still reflects our social worlds with restrictions which govern how society functions. As such, the possession of capital ultimately determines who succeeds and who does not (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital does not occur by chance (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, contrary to the often-touted belief that everyone in America has an equal opportunity, Bourdieu (1986) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) clarify that social hierarchies and inequalities are perpetuated as those with capital pass it along to those chosen to inherit it, and in so doing diminish the opportunity for Others to accumulate capital over time and disburse it generationally.

Capital affords a person access to and opportunities to engage in exclusive arenas that traditionally serve only those privileged with such capital from their parents and/or prior schooling experiences (Ward et al., 2012). Colleges and universities have long worked the same way. Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) outline a three-stage process for students in regard to their college experiences – getting in (the precollege process of preparing for college, including planning and selecting a college); fitting in (the process of adjusting to college); and, moving on (the process of developing knowledge and expectations of and planning for post-college professional and career interests). Those who know their way into (getting in) and through the higher education journey (fitting in) are bound to do well. For many others, however, higher education is like a foreign land that students must travel without a map, and once in, they are not aware of how to make the adjustment to college life (fitting in). The prospect of having students blindly navigating through their college careers is one we can ill afford; one that lends itself to

low graduation rates and high dropout rates, particularly for low-income, first-generation college students, of which only 11% will have earned a bachelor's degree after six years, compared to 55% of students who were either low-income or first-generation (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Students in college access and opportunity programs are afforded an opportunity to gain college knowledge that will give them the capital necessary for college success. Through these programs, students have access to mentoring, tutoring, personalized academic advising, supplemental instruction, course planning, counseling, career advisement, and skill building workshops in the areas of financial management, time management, etc. As Swail (2000) notes, "That which is a de facto facet of some children's education is either entirely missing for others or is included in an ad hoc and often incomplete fashion" (p. 89). The "haves" received these services as a "normal or average scholastic practice" (Swail, 2000, p. 89), while for the "have nots," this "takes the form of separate and distinct early intervention and college outreach efforts" (Swail, 2000, p. 89). Students who do not have these resources at their disposal do not receive these benefits.

Latino and Black, low-income, and first-generation students are often considered deficient (Harper, 2010; Martin, Miller, & Simmons, 2014; O'Shea, 2015; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004) in ways that suggest they do not have capital. While the goal of college opportunity programs is to expose students to the forms of capital they may not have been exposed to previously, students are afforded the additional opportunity to network and connect with peers who act as role models and mentors (Swail, 2012). Instead of simply seeing these students as vessels to be filled, the program acts as a conduit for channeling additional information to students. Viewing these populations via an anti-deficit lens is critical to

integrating them into the college; further, these students are able to enrichen the college campus with expressions of their possessed capital.

Community Cultural Wealth. Tara Yosso's (2005) notion of Community Cultural Wealth frames this study. While the subjugated knowledge (Collins, 2000) of the population of this study is not valued by traditional evaluations of capital (Holland, 2016; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011), such as that presented by Bourdieu (1973), Tara Yosso's (2005) notion of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) presents a way to prize the unique standpoint of Black women, as the forms of capital she identifies are more inclusive than that posited by Bourdieu (1973). CCW reconsiders Bourdieu's (1973) understanding of capital to acknowledge the capital valued and replicated in Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) explicates several forms of capital which are not traditionally valued but are an important resource for Students of Color. CCW embodies "at least six forms of capital... which can transform the process of schooling" (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). The forms of capital which contribute to Community Cultural Wealth include aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital is the ability to remain hopeful and dream of the future regardless of the obstacles before you (Yosso, 2005). Students with aspirational capital will be resilient and work toward high aspirations that were either set by themselves or their families. Linguistic capital refers to the multiple languages or linguistic styles of Students of Color, resulting from various communication experiences in which students develop intellectual and social skills (Yosso, 2005). Students possessing linguistic capital may be bilingual and/or have various communication styles borne from a tradition of storytelling in their cultures, including parables and proverbs. Linguistic capital also includes communicating through visual art, music or poetry. Familial capital refers to the

communities of which the students are members. Here family is not solely inclusive of biological members; rather, immediate, extended, and fictive kin are included so long as there is a mutual commitment to and concern for the communities in which they are members (Yosso, 2005).

Through these relationships, students have developed and nurtured shared values and beliefs.

Social capital includes social contacts, or networks of people or community resources through which students receive the necessary support to navigate society's institutions, such as identifying a health care agency for someone recently diagnosed with an illness and ensuring she is supported throughout the process of receiving treatment, and further ensuring that the resource becomes one that is known throughout the community so others may access it as necessary. Essentially, the community members engage in a tradition of "lifting as we climb" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). While Bourdieu (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119) references the collective in his discussion of social capital, the individual or group benefits from a network for the sake of maintaining the individual or group's status. In the case of CCW, the community benefits from the social action as much as the individual, and the primary goal is to share information via the network, for the benefit of the collective.

Navigational capital includes the skills of maneuvering through social institutions, particularly those created without Communities of Color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Students who have navigational capital will be able to withstand stressful events and seek assistance so they can maintain their achievements. Navigational capital also includes resilience in the face of institutional barriers, where students will show agency and ask for assistance from their communities to "survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning" (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 229, as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Resistant capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through

oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005). As Communities of Color have faced subordination in this country, many students have learned to challenge the status quo and resist dominant messages that would have them believe they are inferior, invaluable, or without agency.

In contrast to the dimensions of CCW, Bourdieu's (1973) notion of capital is limiting, as "a traditional view of cultural capital is narrowly defined by White, middle class values, and is more limited than wealth - one's accumulated assets and resources," (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). A framework of Community Cultural Wealth offers a broader range of "knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts" to be counted as material, and by which the multiple strengths of Communities of Color may be recognized (Holland, 2016; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011; Yosso, 2005). CCW helps give voice to and validate the experiences and perspectives of the Other (Collins, 1986; Holland, 2016). Further, Yosso (2005) notes that in order to change from deficit thinking which would suggest that low-income, Black female first-generation college students do not possess capital, we must "connect the community to the academy" (Anzaldua, 1990, p. xxvi, as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 82). By connecting with real people instead of solely relying on theory, the experiences of low-income, first-generation Black female college students "expose the racism underlying cultural deficit theorizing and reveal the need to restructure US social institutions around those knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks – the Community Cultural Wealth – possessed and utilized by People of Color" (Yosso, 2005). This type of acknowledgement could enable Black women to participate in spaces that privilege their capital and thus support them in achieving success in college.

Black Women's Cultural Capital. Banks (2009) claims that nontraditional forms of capital (i.e. other than those posited by Bourdieu) exist in Black women's communities, which

they also bring to college with them. She proposes that cultural capital be defined more broadly to ensure that all forms are understood and valued; only valuing one kind of capital as advanced by Bourdieu (1973) privileges white, middle to upper class males who replicate not only the advantages of capital to their children but also perpetuate the disadvantages to other groups who do not possess this capital (Holland, 2016; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011).

Yosso's (2005) notion of Community Cultural Wealth can be associated here, as it includes the forms of capital privileged in ethnic communities (Tate, 1997), such as linguistic capital wherein students may rely upon multiple languages and various linguistic styles to communicate and learn, and also as a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion in various contexts.

Valadez (1993) grounds his research in Bourdieu's (1973) and Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theories about capital which indicate that in order to adjust to college life students must "possess the skills and knowledge necessary for understanding and maneuvering through the higher education system, [including] the various strategies, linguistic codes, and cultural competencies that ease the transition into higher education.... Because [an institution's] ongoing structures and arrangements... represent an accepted way of operating;" some students are privileged while others are disadvantaged (Valadez, 1993, p. 31). While it is true that students must acclimate to college to garner success (Tinto & Pusser, 2006) it is equally true that while they may not have traditional forms of capital, successful Black women in higher education settings clearly have some kind of valuable resources, although they are not documented in the research literature. My interest is in how they become successful, particularly as they do not have prior exposure to the culture of college, whereas continuing-generation students have a background which allows them an easier time engaging in the process of navigating college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Mehta et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2012) since they have access to immediate

family members – their parents – who have experienced college, and achieved bachelor's degrees.

Banks (2009) argues that “academic success is connected to cultural capital in that cultural capital operates in the same way as academic capital; both have exchange value” (p. 15) since the deployment of either in the correct or appropriate context determines the level of success one can achieve in that setting. The close ties between academic success and cultural capital cannot be denied as those with cultural capital – the “winners” – are already in place since they have long-ago acquired the resources to outpace other groups (Perry, 2003 as cited in Banks, 2009, p. 15). Black women, given their dual status as minorities and women, are less likely to be considered winners. At the same time, “since black women undergraduates are often deemed to be deficient and ill-equipped with traditional academic capital (e.g., skills, intellect, practice), there is a need to understand their particular strategies for academic success” (Banks, 2009, p. 10). What are Black women doing or what resources are they accessing since the societal odds are stacked against them? Where and how are they able to acquire the capital necessary for success? Further, how do they deploy the capital they do have? Banks (2009) points to the historical values and skills that Blacks have, such as the ability to navigate and adjust to complex, discriminatory systems which are an expression of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). A core value within the Black community is the necessity of education, strong family bonds and support, a group consciousness that promotes economic enterprise, and an ancestral past of slavery which provides motivation for success. These forms of capital, though not addressed in Bourdieu's analysis, are those deployed by Black women for success in higher education according to Banks (2009). These forms of capital are also reflective of various forms of CCW (Yosso, 2005).

Because of the nature of the issues and concerns of Black women being considered after other populations if at all, Zamani (2003) analyzes the places Black women appear in the higher education context – community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), predominantly white institutions (PWIs), proprietary institutions, and women’s colleges. While Black women are present in all higher education settings, some settings do better at giving Black women agency in achieving their goals. Generally, the higher education “adaptation process is inherently oppressive in that black women undergraduates cannot just be students. They have the additional constant, college work of seeking support from students and faculty who understand their position as raced, classed, **and** gendered beings...” (emphasis added) (Banks, 2009, p. 37). Zamani (2003) notes “special populations colleges – such as coeducational HBCUs, historically Black women’s colleges, and women’s colleges – as having the most positive and profound impact on the lives of African American women” (p. 14). The cultural practices in these institutions have much to offer to other institutions in which the status of Black women is not regarded as unique, and they are treated similarly to every other population (Zamani, 2003).

While no institution is perfect, some institutions are more committed to allowing Black women to do the work of school without their race and gendered [intersectional] status being a barrier to their success. At the same time, not everyone has the opportunity nor desire to attend a special-populations college. Further, this is not an argument for maintaining separate learning environments. The point Zamani (2003) makes is that while these institutions are more adept at supporting Black women, other institutions would do well to find ways to support them as well. Black female students are tasked with “challenging racism in classrooms and other spaces on campus, acknowledging and confronting discourses and perceptions regarding their academic preparation and practice, and finding and nurturing relationships with faculty and staff on

campus that recognize the ways race, class, and gender inform their school lives,” (Banks, 2009, p. 141) at institutions which do not allow Black women full expression of their current capital, and any acquisition of additional capital comes through negotiation or demand.

First-Generation Students

First-generation students are individuals whose parents “did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not receive a baccalaureate degree” (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008). First-generation students are typically low-income students, of which many may be racial or ethnic minorities (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006; Hutchins, Deffendall, & Peabody, 2011). These students often do not have the capital associated with academic and social success in college (Ward et al., 2012).

Mehta, Newbold, and O’Rourke (2011) studied the differences between first-generation students (FGS) and continuing generation students (CGS). The authors outlined the most obvious difference between FGS and CGS, which is that FGS have not grown up around adults who completed college; therefore, they do not have the cultural capital associated with the college-going culture. Additionally, FGS may have limited family support for going to college and understanding of college, have to work long hours, have dependents, and may be averse to taking out student loans despite the rising costs of tuition (Mehta et al., 2011). These factors may contribute to a difficult college-going experience for FGS. On the other hand, Mehta et al. (2011) propose initiatives such as living-learning communities, specialized orientation programs for FGS and/or transfer students, and increased peer interactions to benefit FGS and aid them in more successfully transitioning to college so that once on campus, first-generation students have an opportunity to gain cultural capital and do well. Incorporating such programming would

require the institution to create programming that is comprehensive and targeted to the specific population in need. If programming is general, FGS may feel further isolated as they do not have the cultural capital that other students may have, and they may retreat from participating. The more students are involved in the institution, the greater their chances of graduating (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Therefore, the institution should provide these opportunities specifically for this population (Tinto & Pusser, 2006); otherwise, the very initiative that is meant to help may do more harm than good by further isolating these students.

First-generation students must also be encouraged and coached on how to engage with faculty. An example of this is the story of Teresa Heinz Housel who is now a successful professor of media and cultural studies. Housel (2012) described her experience as a first-generation student, noting that these students participate in two cultures. After receiving a low grade on an exam, Housel was interested in approaching the professor for help, but did not know how. She (2012) wrote, “I made it to her office door before turning back. Although I was intelligent enough to be at a rigorous college, I still wondered during that first semester if I really belonged there.” Whereas CGS have parents who attended college, and who could explain the mores of college culture to their children, (e.g. attending professor’s office hours, joining student organizations, forming study groups), FGS may not possess such cultural capital because they do not have these examples readily available in their families (Holland, 2016; Housel, 2012; Mehta et al., 2011), and perhaps not in their communities. They do not understand the importance of being involved and engaging professors, and they struggle in adjusting to college, which has an academic and social impact that ultimately leads to lower graduation rates (Mehta et al., 2011; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). A college’s concerted efforts to address issues of cultural capital then, are

an effort to improve retention and graduation rates which necessarily has positive implications for the institution.

While Mehta et al. (2011) propose additional programmatic initiatives, Collier and Morgan (2008) focus more on the interaction between students and professors in the classroom. The researchers (2008) discuss the ways cultural capital or lack thereof impacts students' understanding of a professor's explicit and implicit expectations in college. The authors note that once students are on campus, they must activate their academic skills, but if they do not have a well-spring of cultural capital to draw from, then their actual capacity to complete tasks may not be reflected in their work. "Students who arrive at the university with a greater mastery of the college student role possess an important resource for recognizing what their instructors expect of them and for responding appropriately to those expectations," (Collier & Morgan, 2008, p. 425). Those without such knowledge have limited capacity to master the college student role, as they have limited cultural capital to facilitate this mastery. Success in higher education is the result of the ability to activate academic skills in response to the professor's explicit and implicit expectations, not only the result of demonstrating abilities (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Additionally, there are university-wide expectations, such as prioritizing an education over work or family obligations, which is sometimes not a possibility for FGS as they may have responsibilities outside of class (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

The only way for FGS to become familiar with implicit expectations is through exposure to the culture of college; without this exposure, the only capacity students can demonstrate is their understanding of content knowledge in the way they deem appropriate. However, their perceptions may differ from professor's expectations, as Collier and Morgan (2008) found to be true in regard to making education a priority, understanding assignments, communicating with

professors, and solving problems, which often left first-generation students frustrated and had a negative impact on their classroom performance. “Differences in both explicit knowledge about course content and implicit knowledge about the college student role can contribute to a process of ‘reproduction’ (Bourdieu, 1973), where those who come from an advantaged background maintain that advantage into the next generation,” (Collier & Morgan, 2008, p. 442). Students without this capital advantage reproduce that disadvantage into the next generation just as those with the advantage reproduce that advantage into the next generation (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The activation of cultural capital *and* content knowledge aids students in performing well in class as students must know *how* to demonstrate their content knowledge appropriately in a college setting, and therefore persist through to graduation.

Opportunity Programs

College opportunity programs are offered to students who, based on their academic and economic backgrounds, may face particular challenges while enrolled at the institution because they lack the type of capital that is valued and considered necessary in this setting. Many of these programs include a summer bridge component which is an intense experience to quickly acclimate students to college, and an academic year program to sustain and further the communal relationships built during the summer. Both components serve to offer the students college knowledge regarding time management, course planning, interfacing with professors, creating study groups, developing effective study habits, financial management, etc. While some argue the effectiveness of these programs at preparing students for college by providing coaching and advising to expose them early to college culture, others have considered that these programs operate from a deficit perspective which perpetuates negative stereotypes of minority and low-income students.

Opportunity programs are generally offered to first-generation college students as they – unlike their continuing generation peers – do not have family members who have gone to college who can offer them access to the capital associated with college. Swail, Quinn, Landis, and Fung (2012) conducted a survey of 374 pre-college programs across the United States and found that 53 percent of programs are targeted to specific groups of students, with the primarily targeted groups being low-income students (85% of the programs target them); first-generation college students (78%); historically underrepresented minorities (65%); and low-academic performing students (33%). Sixty-six percent of students served by the program were low-income students (Swail et al., 2012). By participating in opportunity programs that offer an intensive pre-college summer institute, students are often able to address issues related to acclimating to college, navigating different and unfamiliar college spaces, and gaining the college knowledge to succeed (Stolle-McAllister, 2011). “Generally, the overarching goals of summer bridge programs are to remediate academic skills, inform about campus life, orient to institutional culture, help develop social networks, focus goals, and help students begin college with a positive outlook,” (Stolle-McAllister, 2011, p. 20). This type of structured early exposure to the culture of college is important because it helps students become knowledgeable of, acclimated to, and comfortable in the higher education context. They, in a nutshell, create capital, and help students determine how and when to deploy the capital they possess.

Many researchers (Gold, 2011; Stolle-McAllister, 2011; Sommerfeld and Bowen, 2013) have documented the effectiveness of these types of programs. For example, Stolle-McAllister (2011) outlines the importance of a pre-college summer program to retain talented Black STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) students. She notes that such programs help students succeed in college by augmenting their social and cultural capital. Her longitudinal

study analyzed data from 134 participants of the Meyerhoff Scholarship Program (MALIAP) at University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) to determine the extent to which the augmentation of their social and cultural capital aided in their success. Stolle-McAllister (2011) uses Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as a framework for understanding how students gain access to the STEM fields. Stolle-McAllister (2011) notes, "If traditionally underrepresented populations are to succeed in STEM, they need the cultural tools to fit into that field;" these are tools that summer bridge programs can offer (p. 13). Likewise, if FGS are to succeed in college, they need the cultural tools (e.g. mannerisms) to fit into that environment.

Sommerfeld and Bowen (2013) also note the importance of using programs other than those within the university, to pre-expose students to the culture of college. In their assessment of the Trinity Excellence for Education Program (TEEP) in Boston – a summer program offered to seventh through twelfth grade students - they found that through a structured program which incorporates (1) discussions of college aspirations; (2) academic programming which emphasizes college preparedness, including engaging parents in conversations about higher education and educational goals; (3) providing accurate financial information about college attendance and explicit instructions for applying to colleges; and (4) having students participate in college visits, bringing in TEEP alumni to share their experiences, and maintaining high standards of professionalism (i.e. punctuality, responsibility, time management, program planning, and task execution), the TEEP program was able to foster social and cultural capital for its students and their families (Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013). Additionally, and very importantly, TEEP alumni who attended college outperformed their peers who did not participate in the program (Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013). Therefore, comprehensive programmatic approaches are important, particularly for first-generation students. Yet, not every community offers such

programming, and everyone who may need the programs may not be able to participate in such programming (Swail, 2000).

Gold's (2011) qualitative analysis of an academic support program specifically for female Students of Color at a predominantly white institution uses Yosso's (2005) lens of Community Cultural Wealth. In the program, the students were given opportunities at "self-authorship" through which they "embodied or discovered at least 5 of the 6 skill sets included in Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth," (p. 60). This program showed that given opportunities for capital development, self-advocacy, and agency in educational settings, Black female students use their current capital to gain more capital by fully participating in the programs and supporting each other through them (Gold, 2011).

While opportunity programs are valuable, some may critique them as promoting a deficit perspective when helping students acclimate to college, as they focus on students' lack of resources and knowledge. Gorski (2011) defines the deficit perspective as "a worldview that explains and justifies outcome inequalities... by pointing to supposed deficiencies within disenfranchised individuals and communities," (p. 153). Gorski (2011) continues that "simultaneously, and of equal importance, deficit ideology discounts sociopolitical context, such as the system of conditions (racism, economic injustice, and so on) that grant some people greater social, political, and economic access, such as that to high-quality schooling, than others," (p. 153). Where what Gorski (2011) posits is true in many educational areas, the origins of opportunity programs is the lack of economic and educational opportunities faced by many students in urban areas during the 1960s in the United States of America, which led to civil unrest across the country (State of New Jersey OSHE, 2013b). Dissimilarities in capital attainment across races are not happenstance occurrences. Various populations have been shut

out of educational arenas by which they could gain a degree and better provide for their families, not because they are deficient, but because they have not been given opportunities due to social, economic, and educational marginalization (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006). As such, many marginalized populations have experienced schools as places that continue to reproduce existing social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Opportunity programs work to change this perspective and offer students ways to gain equal footing as populations that have not been marginalized as such, by addressing social, economic, structural, and institutional barriers to college access and success (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013).

Of note is the limited research on Black college women in opportunity programs, or first-generation Black college women. I conducted a search for peer-reviewed articles about Black college women in college opportunity or access programs, using the specific keywords “Black women in college access programs” and “Black women in higher education access programs” from 2007-2018. There were no results in the first 100 hits. The first 100 hits of my search for “first generation Black college females,” sorted by relevance, resulted in one article on Black females’ college choice process and another on the Black students’ college experience at predominantly white institutions. Again, there is a serious dearth in research specifically about Black college women, which limits educators’ opportunities to understand their particular experiences.

Black College Women’s Invisibility as a Benefit and Deficit

An important theme that arose in the literature under review was that of Black women’s invisibility. The irony is that although there has been an increase in undergraduate college attendance across all populations in the United States, Black women account for the majority of

this increase (Banks, 2009; Gold, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2016c). Yet, many societal factors contribute to the invisibility of Black women in educational settings.

Fordham (1993) notes that many successful Black women learned to be invisible from parents, teachers, and male peers, which highlights that they have been socialized into silence. Thus, their full expression within the educational setting has not been encouraged. On their own, Black women would do well academically, but when weighed with the expectations of others, their choices are limited to an unequal exchange of silence for success (Fordham, 1993). In Fordham's (1993) qualitative study at Capital High, she noted, "The most salient characteristic of the academically successful females... is a deliberate [but unconscious] silence, a controlled response to their evolving, ambiguous status as academically successful students.... Invisibility is a highly valued prerequisite for academic success" (Fordham, 1993, p. 17). Therefore, according to Fordham (1993), Black women seem to have only two choices – to be invisible and be successful, or to be "loud" and be unsuccessful. Those women (or girls) who demand the recognition of their femaleness and Blackness – their identities - suffer academically and are referred to as "loud" (Fordham, 1993; Morris, 2007). It should be noted that Fordham (1993) does not define loudness as mere noisemaking; instead, loudness refers to one of the mechanisms through which Black women "seek to deny the society's efforts to assign them to a stigmatized status... as 'nothingness.' Therefore, 'those loud Black girls' is here used as a metaphor proclaiming African American women's existence, their collective denial of, and resistance to, their socially proclaimed powerlessness, or 'nothingness'," (Fordham, 1993, p. 25). In a university the size of Allegiance, invisibility is easy to achieve, but I would argue that in order to persist, some level of visibility or "loudness" may be necessary to challenge and force their recognition in a world that does not readily acknowledge the existence of Black women

(Fordham, 1993; Morris, 2007). Thus, this research aimed to explore how CCW may render Black female, low-income, FGS invisible or loud.

Fordham (1993) notes that the invisibility of successful Black women in education leads to their disconnection from other Black women, either because they choose not to connect or because they are not seen as relatable. According to Fordham (1993), silent or invisible female students do not enjoy the fictive kinship ties (i.e. close friendships that mock sisterhood) in which “those loud Black girls” participate. “Socialization to silence and invisibility is also distressing because it isolates and alienates Black girls from their more communal and popular underachieving female cohorts,” (Fordham, 1993, p. 24). Therefore, silent women miss opportunities to gain capital in the form of supportive relationships that may be beneficial as they navigate the educational setting. Through these relationships, in which can be found friendships, mentorships, and sisterhood, women may empower and encourage one another, but as Fordham (1993) further notes, “for African American women in the academy, being taken seriously means dissociating oneself from the image of ‘those loud Black girls’,” (p. 22) which if done effectively is another means by which solidarity is weakened and isolation is encouraged. At the same time, some of these women and girls see their silence as a mechanism for survival in a predominantly white context (Lafleur, 2012; Rodriguez, 2011). Because “cultural capital is context-specific and its currency varies across different social spaces where struggles for legitimization and power exist” (Carter, 2003, p. 137), silence can be read as a form of capital since it affords some Black women a place in the academy. Even though this is a place where they are invisible, they can gain academic success. I am interested in understanding when and where unaffiliated, first-generation Black women feel comfortable with not being silent, and where their “loudness” may be determined meaningful, particularly as an expression of their CCW.

Morris's (2007) ethnographic research highlights how the Black women teachers in a predominantly minority school often critiqued and disciplined "loud" Black girls because their loudness was deemed unladylike. While the girls exhibited behaviors such as self-reliance and outspokenness which could be beneficial to their long-term educational success, teachers were more focused on the girls' perceived compromised femininity as they were unable to comport themselves in acceptably and stereotypically feminine ways, such as deferring to authority, remaining silent and passive, and being ladylike (Morris, 2007). As such, these teachers' perceptions and admonitions of the girls inhibited a connection between the girls and the teachers, who could have been seen as mentors or even fictive kin (Morris, 2007).

Banks (2009) begins the discussion of her qualitative analysis by challenging Fordham's (1993) notions about how Black women perceive themselves educationally. Banks (2009) believes that Fordham (1993) analyzes Black women's educational success from the point of view of whiteness, which is limiting because it does not lend credence to the Black woman's experience on her own, nor acknowledge that Black women do not achieve success because they do not want to be perceived as "acting white" as Fordham (1993) suggests, but that they do so because intellectual success and academic achievement are positive characteristics of the Black community and in Black culture (Banks, 2009). Academic success is not exclusive to any group; although, given the historicity of the United States, whites are in a more privileged position academically and socially (Blanchett, 2006; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Yosso, Parker, Solarzano, & Lynn, 2004). For example, white students who are underprepared for college have a better chance at attending a selective higher education institution than an equally underprepared Black student (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Maimor, 2004). The consequence of this privilege is that there are obstacles for low-income, first-generation Black

students as they have inferior schooling opportunities and a lack of resources with which to prepare for college in comparison to white students (Astin, 1993; Banks, 2009). Therefore, I was curious about what low-income, first-generation Black college women brought with them that encouraged their success, whereas some other students may have either gained it through their families, or in the process of participating in an opportunity program, or even learned to broker the capital they had through participation in such a program.

Chavous and Cogburn (2007) indicate that Black female undergraduates occupy dual spaces that identify them as both at-risk and resilient. While being resilient is notable, it is an indication that we need to look deeper at situations in which these young women must be resilient and determine what college administrators can do to eliminate some of the barriers to their success. By focusing solely on their resilience, the entire story of the spaces they occupy is not considered (Zamani, 2003), nor is what can be done to make those higher education spaces friendlier and more welcoming to the experiences of Black women (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). In fact, Chavous and Cogburn (2007) note that research does not speak to how the race and gender of Black women impact identity formation, schooling experiences, and academic achievement, which is part of the story of Black women. This lack of research results in “overgeneralizations and [misrepresented] popular images of Black women...,” (p. 27). Chavous and Cogburn (2007) call for a greater body of research which reflects the varied experiences of Black women, and “the ways in which gender intersects with race, ethnicity, or minority status to result in different expectations, motivational orientations, and responses to educational settings among Black girls and women,” (p. 36). Without attending to how naturally we assign social dividing labels related to race, gender, and social class, we fail to “acknowledge the historical and social context in which these categories were created” and reinforce oversimplified notions

of Black women (Chavous and Cogburn, 2007, p. 42). As such, an intersectional view of this population is necessary.

Intersectionality

I employed an intersectional approach to analyze the experiences of low-income, first-generation Black college women who are not in opportunity programs. Intersectionality is a necessary perspective to understand this population since their identities combine to influence one another, as individual's lives are not experienced via a single identity (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Morris, 2007). The origin of intersectionality is in critical legal studies (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) coined the term "intersectionality" to describe people's multiple identities that must be considered to tell their stories. Intersectionality is "a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). Specifically, people should not have to choose one identity over another, as each of these identities intersect (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991). In discussing violence committed by men against women of color, Crenshaw (1991) highlights the importance of intersectionality as each identity is shaped by and responsive to the other; further, "women of color are marginalized within both" identities as women and persons of color (p. 1244). Collins and Bilge (2016) further indicate that our social and political conditions are shaped by many factors relevant to our identities. "When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). To that end, speaking to the intersectional identities of the participants in the study is important, as each category itself represents a marginalized status which is mutually influential (Harrison, 2017; Morris, 2007).

The present work includes an intersectional discussion of gender, race, and class, specifically about low-income, first-generation, Black women in college, with the understanding that each identity informs the others, and influences the way the participants experienced the worlds they occupied. This particular intersectional approach has not been identified in the research to date.

As Crenshaw (1991) notes, intersectionality “can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color” so as not to subsume one identity to another (p.1245). “Where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge... intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246). In this relatively new conversation about Black women undergraduate achievement, Zamani (2003) acknowledges that “African American women traditionally have been preceded by White men, White women, and African American men in importance and standing,” (p. 7). Feminist studies have focused on white women, and anti-racist work has focused on Black men; thus, Black women are not included in the social justice conversation (Harrison, 2017). Using this perspective to view the entirety of the experiences of low-income, first-generation Black women, intersectionality allows for “particular schools of thought and subjects” to be legitimized, while “privileging particular genealogies and national locations” that may otherwise be overlooked (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 203), especially given the social location of the Black woman in research.

Recognizing multiple identities is not only valuable to dominant groups, but also aids those within any group to develop a critical consciousness by which they can accept and challenge different viewpoints. This is important as even within groups there are differences which can lead to tensions and a lack of solidarity (Fordham, 1993; Patton, McEwen, Rendon, &

Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Furthermore, intersectionality insists upon a critique of the social system; in this case, these Black women must successfully navigate a historically white college environment through the deployment of non-traditional forms of capital.

Standpoint Theory

Given the lack of research about Black college women in general, the extent to which they have negative or positive experiences at a historically white institution, (HWI) is unknown. The use of standpoint theory as a theoretical perspective enabled the participants to share their stories. Standpoint theory reflects the value of Black women's subjugated knowledge (Collins 2000), which was accounted for in the participants' speaking about their educational experiences at an HWI. Standpoint theory has been used in feminist studies (Harding, 2004; Heckman, 1997), and more specifically in Collins' (2000) description of Black feminist thought where she notes that Black women have a particular standpoint as a result of their particular position in society. Standpoint theory has also been used in communication studies (Allen, 1996; Orbe, 1998), social work (Swigonski, 1994), and education (Walker, Geertsema, & Barnett, 2009) as a way to privilege voices that are not white and male, to ensure that subjugated groups have their voices heard regarding their particular social locations (Allen, 1996; Collins, 2000; Orbe, 1998; Swingoski, 1994; Walker et al., 2009). Thus, I used standpoint theory as a way to inform the questions asked of the participants in the interview.

Black feminist theory (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991) provides a perspective from which to view the experiences of Black women's feminism. Standpoint theory argues that "group location in hierarchical power relations produces common challenges for individuals in those groups. Moreover, shared experiences can foster similar angles of vision leading to group knowledge of standpoint deemed essential for political action," (Collins, 2000,

p. 321). At the same time, standpoint theory allows Black women to provide counternarratives to the dominant, hegemonic narrative shaped by white males with economic, academic, and social power – or capital – by speaking to their experiences on their own behalf, while acknowledging that these experiences are borne of a particular set of power relations (Allen, 1996; Collins, 2000; Rolin, 2009). What we may have defined as truth may change because the stories – or counternarratives – of these women become the unit of analysis by which we enrich our knowledge of Black women in their particular situations and contexts, and challenge the status quo (Collins, 2000).

The subjugated knowledge (Collins, 2000) of Black women undergraduates embodies cultural wealth. Subjugated knowledge (Collins, 2000) is “the secret knowledges generated by oppressed groups. Such knowledge typically remains hidden because revealing it weakens its purpose of assisting them in dealing with oppression. Subjugated knowledges that aim to resist oppression constitute oppositional knowledges,” (Collins, 2000, p. 321). Oppositional knowledges are those “developed by, for, and/or in defense of an oppressed groups’ interests. Ideally, it fosters the group’s self-definition and self-determination,” (Collins, 2000, p. 320). As such, understanding the standpoint of this group, their subjugated and oppositional knowledges, and the Community Cultural Wealth they possess and deploy may be essential in understanding how they navigate spaces at an HWI.

Additionally, Holland (2016) delineates reasons a Community Cultural Wealth framework is helpful, including accessing and deploying CCW helps students gain support for engaging in college preparatory activities from their families, peers, and educators. Further, students may develop a sense of pride in being able to use the skills and strategies associated with CCW, and those with institutional power may become cognizant and accepting of the skills

these students have and the strategies they use to access educational resources, especially given the limited resources that may be available to these students (Holland, 2016). Altogether, recognition, acknowledgement, and validation of these women's CCW can create a genuine opportunity for the redistribution of power, resources, and social mobility. Being a Black woman at an HWI would bring particular challenges that the same population would probably not experience at an HBCU, for example. Thus, the present study endeavored to understand the phenomenon of navigating an HWI without the aid of an opportunity program, and applied the framework of Community Cultural Wealth as a way to understand how these women navigated various college spaces, as HWIs are spaces that were not made with Black women in mind. Therefore, the truth of their experiences must be told, defined, and interpreted by them.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter introduces the research methodology for this qualitative phenomenological study regarding the deployment of CCW by unaffiliated, low-income, first-generation Black college women at Allegiance University. A phenomenological study “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon,” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). The central phenomenon of this study is these students’ use of CCW to navigate an HWI, and their experience of invisibility while doing so in a large, public university. Discussed are the theoretical underpinnings of this research, the research site and sample, the criteria for participant consideration, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness and researcher positionality. The chapter ends with profiles of the participants.

Epistemological Stance and Research Approach

An interpretive-constructivist epistemological stance undergirds the research methodology, since the world is subjective and constructed by the individual. There are multiple realities as defined by the individuals living those realities; thus, phenomenology is focused on a deep understanding of the individual’s lived experience. My goal in the research was to understand the participants’ views of their worlds and their life experiences and the meanings they attached to them (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Rubin and Rubin (2005) note that for interpretive-constructionists, imposing standard meanings to things or events may obfuscate how individuals experience, interpret, and articulate their realities; instead “groups of people create such definitions and share them with each other,” thereby creating shared or cultural understandings borne out of the individual experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 27). The “syntheses of understandings” result from sorting through the experiences of different people as interpreted

through the interviewees' own “cultural lenses and then weigh[ing] different versions to put together a single explanation” (p. 28).

Though I share many of the multiple identities the research participants possess – Black, woman, first-generation – I am not presently an undergraduate student at Allegiance, nor am I any longer considered low-income. Also, I currently work in higher education in an administrative position, so my perception of events as a higher education professional are inherently different than they would have been when I was a student navigating my undergraduate experience. Thus, I was careful to be reflexive to prevent any potential biases from impacting the research. At the same time, my shared culture with the participants could perhaps facilitate them being more conversant with me as a first-generation Black woman who shared a similar background.

Procedures

A phenomenological approach was chosen for this study as it aligns with the use of standpoint theory. A phenomenology asks the researcher to identify core themes relevant to the phenomenon experienced by the research participants (Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews and a focus group allowed for these women to tell their stories and provided a deeper understanding of the ways they used their capital to navigate the university. Seidman (2006) notes that “an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience is at the heart of interviewing,” (p. 9), particularly their subjective understanding of their experiences and behaviors. Thus, through questions specific to their experiences, impressions, and interpretations of such experiences, participants were empowered to discuss their realities in the context of being a student at Allegiance University (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2013). While the students may have common challenges, each individual spoke to

her specific experience and interpreted it as such, which lent to the identification of emerging themes. Similarly, when speaking to the core themes of BFT, Collins (2000) noted, “The existence of core themes does not mean that African American women respond to these themes in the same way. Differences among individual Black women produce different patterns of experiential knowledge that in turn shape individual reactions to the core themes,” (Collins, 2000, p. 30). Thus, while core themes may arise in the research, each student had different experiences as a Black female undergraduate who is low-income, first-generation, and not affiliated with an opportunity program while navigating college at an HWI.

Site and Sample. Although Allegiance boasts its diversity – cultural, economic, and experiential - on its website, it is also considered a historically white institution (HWI). Black women students in a historically white context may still face challenges due to the persistence “of societal racial stereotypes... [in which] Black women tend to be marginalized, hated, *rendered invisible* (emphasis added), put under increased surveillance, or assigned into one or more socially acceptable stereotypical categories (e.g., lazy, unintelligent, violent, hypersexual, preference for welfare, uninterested in working for a living),” (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007, p. 563). Yet, it is through their experiential knowledge that educators can learn how best to support these students.

Allegiance University, located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, is a large research institution, which consists of several regional campuses across its state. The university is considered a historically white institution because for much of its history, white students made up more than 50% of its enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010, p. 525). The university has an undergraduate student population of approximately 50,000 students, and Black women account for a little over 12% of that population.

This study employed criterion sampling. Specifically, student participants in the study met the following criteria:

1. be a self-identified Black woman;
2. be a first-generation college student – the first in her family to attend college, or an individual neither of whose parents obtained a baccalaureate degree (Higher Education Act of 1965; Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012) - who has not participated in an opportunity program;
3. have attended Allegiance University full-time for at least four semesters (which I considered as current juniors and seniors), to show a record of their successful retention at the university;
4. have maintained a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, which is the university's minimum standard to show successful progress toward graduation; and
5. be self-identified as a low-income, meeting the income eligibility guidelines set forth for opportunity programs in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States (as indicated in Table 1).

To identify an income eligibility criterion for participants of this study, I reviewed the income guidelines for opportunity programs in three states which have such programs - New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. Both Pennsylvania and New Jersey rely upon the United States Department of Health and Human Services federal poverty guidelines to determine student eligibility for opportunity programs (PHEAA, 2017; NJOSHE, 2018); family income must not be greater than 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). New York relies upon a scale of 185% of

federal poverty guidelines to determine students' financial eligibility for HEOP and EOP

(NYSED, 2018). (See Table 1.) Since the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Table 1				
<i>Opportunity Program Maximum Income Eligibility Guidelines Using Prior-Prior Year Income Data: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania</i>				
Persons in Household	2015 Federal Poverty Level (FPL)	185% of FPL for New York	200% FPL for New Jersey	200% FPL for Pennsylvania
1	\$11,770	\$21,775	\$23,540	\$23,540
2	\$15,930	\$29,471	\$31,860	\$31,860
3	\$20,090	\$37,167	\$40,180	\$40,180
4	\$24,250	\$44,863	\$48,500	\$48,500
5	\$28,410	\$52,559	\$56,820	\$56,820
6	\$32,570	\$60,255	\$65,140	\$65,140
7	\$36,730	\$67,951	\$73,460	\$73,460
8	\$40,890 ^a	\$75,647 ^b	\$81,780 ^c	\$81,780 ^c
^a For each additional family member, add \$4,160				
^b For each additional member of the household add \$7,696				
^c For each additional member of the household add \$8,320				

relies on prior-prior year (PPY) income data (USDOE, 2015), these opportunity programs use that standard as well; thus, the federal poverty level for 2015 was used to determine 2017-2018 academic year program eligibility, and income levels for participation in the present study.

Juniors and seniors were the target population of the study because at this point in their educational journey, they should be better acclimated to the institution, have a better understanding of their experience (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), and would have more experience than freshmen and sophomores at navigating different college spaces. For phenomenological studies, individuals must have experienced the same phenomenon and be able to articulate their own lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). Thus, juniors and seniors should be better able to elucidate this experience (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) than freshmen and sophomores. Ultimately, eight women participated in this study; seven of whom were Allegiance seniors. Researchers offer varied recommendations for sample size; Creswell

(2007) recommends that 5-25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest be interviewed, while Dukes (1984) recommends 3-10 participants. As I conducted interviews, I continued recruiting participants. The eight participants shared similar information regarding their experiences, and continued recruitment was unnecessary since a saturation point (Creswell, 2007) was reached in data collection.

Participant Recruitment. To recruit participants for the study, I emailed university advising deans (Appendix A) who work closely with students to encourage students to participate in the study and provided them with a letter (Appendix B) to share with students. The institution is home to several cultural centers and student organizations, which I emailed (Appendix C) asking them to share an advertisement (Appendix D) with students who met the criteria outlined, which encouraged students to contact me by email or telephone if they were interested in participating in the study. I also requested of the student groups that I be allowed to attend any of their organizational meetings at which their general body would be present. One student group, a Black student organization affiliated with one of the schools at the institution allowed me to visit their general body meeting in December of the fall 2017 semester. Two other student groups, a group which runs a student magazine focused on issues relevant to Black and Latino/a students, and a Haitian American student group, allowed me to visit their general body meetings in the beginning of the spring 2018 semester. Approximately 13 members were present at the first student organization meeting; around six at the second; and about nine at the third. Both groups were mixed with male and female members. At each meeting, I introduced myself, discussed the goals of the study, distributed flyers, and answered students' questions about my research. Two students were recruited directly as a result of my visits to student organization meetings.

I also employed snowball sampling for this research. Once an interview was completed, I asked each participant to recommend others they knew who might be interested in participating in the study. Snowball sampling "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). Six of my participants were gained via snowball sampling, by word-of-mouth, or having received a forwarded email or online post (i.e., Instagram, GroupMe, or other form of online group chat) from a friend.

Students were offered an incentive to participate in the study; each participant who showed up for her scheduled individual interview received \$25 cash prior to starting the interview. Following the initial data analysis of participants' interviews, students were invited to participate in a focus group, where their attendance was incentivized with \$50 cash at the start of the focus group. Participants were offered a significant incentive for their participation in the study because they gave their time in lieu of other activities they could have engaged in otherwise. My goal in providing this incentive was to account for the amount of time I was asking of participants. Research (Corrigan, 2003; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004) shows that low income, first-generation students work more hours than their peers, so these students could have spent the interview and focus group time working rather than engaging with me. I wanted to send a clear message that their time and stories were valuable and they would be incentivized accordingly.

Data Collection. Once potential study participants were identified, they were emailed an informed consent form (Appendix E) and a live weblink to the participant information form (Appendix F) – <https://goo.gl/forms/k9uDrGHc9uAnkQu23> – where they provided answers to demographic questions related to their race, gender, college class standing, GPA, and economic status. I then reviewed the responses to the participant information form to determine the

respondents' fitness for the study, including financial eligibility by determining where their family fell in terms of federal poverty guidelines and income eligibility requirements in relation to family size. Each selected participant fell well below the 185% or 200% of federal poverty guidelines (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015), as necessary for participation in an opportunity program in New York, New Jersey, or Pennsylvania.

Of 31 completed participant information forms, eight persons met the criteria for participating in the study (Table 2). I arranged an interview time with each respondent who fully

Table 2						
<i>Participant Demographic Information</i>						
Name	Age	College Year	College Major(s)	GPA	Household Size	Family Income
Aniya ^a	22	Senior	Communication	3.25	3	\$30,000
Cleo ^{a, b}	21	Senior	Information Technology and Informatics	2.75	3	\$20,000
Jocelyn ^a	22	Senior	Journalism and Media Studies	2.25	1	\$0
Malia ^{a, b}	21	Senior	Communication	3.41	3	\$10,000
Melissa ^{a, b}	21	Senior	Political Science; Women's and Gender Studies	3.71	7	\$45,000
Olivia ^{a, b}	21	Senior	Criminal Justice; Sociology	3.30	4	\$30,000
Robyn ^{a, b}	22	Junior	Biological Sciences	2.25	3	\$36,000
Shuri ^{a, b}	21	Senior	Africana Studies; Information Technology and Informatics	2.99	3	\$40,000
^a Participated in the individual interviews.						
^b Participated in the focus group interview.						

met the participation criteria. Interview slots were scheduled for 90 minutes, with the expectation that an interview would last approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were held on the main campus of the university, in reserved quiet spaces, such as classrooms and library study rooms.

Upon meeting with each participant, I introduced myself and engaged in small talk to establish a rapport. I gave the participant the informed consent form (Appendix E) which also outlined the purpose of the study and the limits to their participation, which they were to read and sign. I then read the opening statement from the interview protocol (Appendix G) which offers a summation of the purpose of the study. From there, the semi-structured interview was conducted, and audio recorded. The average interview time was approximately 57 minutes, with the shortest interview being 39 minutes, and the longest being one hour and 48 minutes. Data collection spanned from December 2017 to February 2018, during which I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the eight participants, and a subsequent focus group interview with six of them.

Creswell (2007) indicated that two broad questions should be asked during the data collection process for a phenomenological study: “What have you experienced in terms of this phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of this phenomenon” (p. 61)? In understanding the college experiences of low-income, first-generation Black women undergraduates, my research questions as indicated in the interview protocol, required participants to describe their experiences – the phenomenon of navigating a historically white institution – to provide a way to understand the potential presence and deployment of different forms of capital. Asking about their challenges, triumphs, and support also enabled me to understand different contexts and situations that influenced their experiences of navigating the institution.

Other open-ended questions were also asked (Creswell, 2007). The additional open-ended questions were related to the deployment of different aspects of CCW, the college experience at Allegiance, and potential feelings of invisibility, to provide a broad view of the students’

successful college experience. Individual interviews allowed me to gather in-depth data from students with keen or unique insights about themselves and their experiences. Interviews allow the researcher to “reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes. The interview is also a very convenient way of overcoming distances both in space and in time; past events or faraway experiences can be studied by interviewing people who took part in them” (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2013, p. 277).

I used a pen and notebook to document by hand what I observed as an interviewer, recording information as it occurred during the interviews, and describing events without ascribing meaning to them, being sure to observe and not make inferences when in the process of documenting, and making sure to include the actual participant language used in context (Creswell, 2009, p. 179); although, clarifying questions were asked to ensure I understood the points participants made. After each interview was complete, a transcription service transcribed the audio-recorded individual interviews verbatim.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological researchers (Keen, 1975; Hycner, 1985) caution against ascribing specific “cookbook” steps to the analysis of phenomenological data, as phenomenological research is more about the researcher adopting a particular attitude toward the research undertaken. As well, other researchers (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990) offer a set of considerations for analyzing phenomenological data, which helped provide structure for the data analysis in the present research:

(1) The researcher determines and eliminates or becomes clear about her personal biases and preconceptions about the phenomenon under study through epoché (Patton, 2010, pp. 408-409). The researcher must obtain the phenomenological attitude to be clear about her pre-

understandings and their potential impact on the research (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 92). My interest in this phenomenon generated from my personal experience, the telling of which allowed me to build rapport with my participants. Prior to engaging in the research, I was thoughtful about my pre-understandings about my undergraduate experiences at a predominantly white institution, and how I felt as a low-income Black college woman who was not in an opportunity program. For example, although I considered participation in an opportunity program a “privilege” as it offers students all the things I felt I needed as an undergraduate – connections to other students, transitional support from high school into college, financial support, an assigned advisor, and a community – participants in the study may not share these feelings, and as a researcher, I must pay careful attention to *their* experiences and how they impacted them rather than impose my feelings on them.

(2) This “step” asks the researcher to bracket by suspending judgment in order to see the subject on its own without involving her preconceptions and to direct the focus of the inquiry on the study participants; the researcher may then scrutinize the phenomenon by viewing it separately from “the world where it occurs” (Patton, 2010, p. 408) and not interpret using standard meanings (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 92). At the same time, other researchers caution against bracketing and offer the notion of “persistent curiosity” (LeVasseur, 2003) as a way to continue to be “situated and involved” in the world and subsequently with the data. Further, because the research on low-income, first-generation Black women is virtually non-existent, there are no “standard meanings” from which to interpret. At the same time, I had to be mindful to listen to the participants without judging their experiences. My experience as an undergraduate was my own, and theirs was their own. Thus, I had to come to understand not only the participants, but also their experiences, and their perceptions of Allegiance as a navigable or

unnavigable space. While a total disconnection from pre-understandings was not possible – those understandings are the basis of a significant portion of my life experience and have led me to my professional work – the ability to remain persistently curious remained. Still, after each interview, I documented my reflections on the interview to re-examine my perspectives and consider how any emerging insights may be influenced by my previous assumptions and interpretations of the phenomena under study (Fischer, 2009; Rolls & Relf, 2006) to ensure I allowed my participants' stories and voices their due.

(3) I “horizontalized” the data by developing a Microsoft Excel list of significant statements from each interview about how participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2010) of navigating Allegiance. At the close of the interviews, I listened to the audio recordings to become familiar with the data. By re-listening to the recordings, I identified significant statements by variances in participants' tone of voice and how often they repeated particular statements or stories. For example, stories about financial aid, family support, and “the Milo incident” (in which admitted white nationalist Milo Yiannopoulos was invited to speak on campus and Black students were denied entry into the event) were often the subject of impassioned discussions in the individual and focus group interviews. Once I received the transcriptions, while listening to the audio, I highlighted those significant statements and listed them in a spreadsheet, which would facilitate coding them. Each completed interview was transcribed and then coded by hand to identify significant statements.

(4) I examined the horizontalized data to organize it into meaningful clusters (Patton, 2010, p. 408), called “meaning units” or themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 159), ensuring there were no repetitive or overlapping data, so as to identify invariant themes (Patton, 2010, p. 408). Each completed interview was coded by hand to identify emerging “patterns, themes and categories of

analysis” (Patton, 1987, p. 306). Using the horizontalized data, I sought impactful clusters of commentary and organized them for their thematic invariability. For example, terminology related to academic advising, professors, courses, and college administrators were labeled as “Allegiance resources.” Upon further review, that theme in particular was further condensed to two categories or subthemes – “presence of resources at Allegiance,” and “lack of resources at Allegiance.” The themes which were most consistent across several participants are those discussed in the following chapter. The themes which emerged are resources at Allegiance, resources outside Allegiance, the participants’ views of the college, their feelings of invisibility and visibility, and their experiences of double-consciousness.

(5) I provided a textural portrayal (Patton, 2010) or description (Creswell, 2007) of the experience of what happened regarding each theme – including verbatim examples – to relate the data in a way that provides the content and illustration of the theme (Patton, 2010, p. 409). I reread and invoked the participants’ direct commentary to develop rich, thick descriptions of the themes so that they would be understood by anyone reading the research. Using the participants’ specific language is in keeping with the standpoint (Collins, 2000; Harding, 2004; Heckman, 1997) and interpretive-constructivist perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

(6) I developed a structural synthesis (Patton, 2010) or a structural description (Creswell, 2007) of how the experience of navigating Allegiance occurred, including setting and context. For example, one participant was very descriptive in her portrayal of being blocked from attending a speech given by a white supremacist who was invited on campus. Her sharing this story clarifies the direct impact this experience had on her and how it shaped her perceptions of Allegiance. So, in developing the structural synthesis, I made sure to synthesize the data to

develop a description of the experiences, people, and places that determine how someone is able to navigate Allegiance University, while still sharing her voice.

(7) Finally, I described the essence of the phenomenon or experience of navigating Allegiance by incorporating the textural and structural descriptions to indicate what the participants experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2007), and indicated meanings of the experiences for the participants (Patton, 2010). Thus, the data reveals the essence of the phenomenon of what it meant to navigate Allegiance and deploy CCW to do so as a low-income, first-generation, unaffiliated Black female college student.

Trustworthiness and Positionality

Through bracketing, disclosure, and member checks, I ensured trustworthiness and accounted for researcher positionality in collecting and interpreting the data.

Bracketing. Important to the use of phenomenology in research is for the researcher to bracketing her own experiences (Creswell, 2007) so as not to have her experience or interpretations and the meanings she assigns to her personal experiences be conflated with those of the research participants (Rolls & Relf, 2006). Bracketing requires the researcher to identify “vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study’s data. For the sake of viewing data freshly, these involvements are placed in ‘brackets’ and ‘shelved’ for the time being as much as is possible,” (Fischer, 2009). Thus, prior to conducting any interviews, I bracketed my experience as a first-generation, low-income Black woman who attended a predominantly white university by documenting my insights about acclimating to and navigating college without the aid of an opportunity program.

The goal of bracketing in phenomenological research is to help the researcher identify and examine her perspectives on the phenomenon under study (Fischer, 2009) to increase objectivity (Rolls & Relf, 2006). Bracketing requires ongoing reflection, self-awareness, and the ability to be reflexive, or look back to ensure the researcher is not imposing the meaning ascribed to their personal experience on the data (Fischer, 2009; Rolls & Relf, 2006). Instead, the researcher should always be looking for new insights and meanings of the data collected for the research study (Fischer, 2009). At the same time, LeVasseur (2003) offers that the idea that we are able to truly suspend our pre-understandings of a phenomenon may be faulty because as human beings we are “situated and involved” (p. 414) in the world, and therefore, there is “no such thing as pure reflection, because reflection was, as all consciousness is, intentional and, therefore, never completely uninvolved with or separated from the world” (p. 414). Given this understanding of the fault with bracketing, I adopted LeVasseur’s (2003) attitude of “persistent curiosity” (p. 419), which allows the researcher to bracket “to get beyond the ordinary assumptions of understanding and stay persistently curious about the phenomena...which provides opportunity for fresh experience and the possibility of new horizons of meaning” (p. 419). For example, I come from a low-income background, I was a first-generation, unaffiliated college attendee, and I was academically successful. Because the information I gathered from the interviews are the participants’ personal experiences and their interpretations of them, my goal was to understand what was communicated within the context of the participant’s experience and my research, not to place a value on it according to my background and experiences. After all, Hamill and Sinclair (2010) note that “the overall aim [of the research] is to produce data and descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon that has not been adjusted, massaged, embellished or misinterpreted by participants or researchers alike,” (p. 23).

Positionality. Positionality indicates that aspects of our identities, including gender, race, class, etc. “are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities. Knowledge is valid when it includes an acknowledgment of the knower's specific position in any context, because changing contextual and relational factors are crucial for defining identities and our knowledge in any given situation,” (Maher & Tetreault, 1993, p. 118). Taking positionality into account, where I was an academically successful low-income student and a first-generation, unaffiliated college attendee, my experience could inform my ability to help bring these women’s stories to the forefront. Therefore, I disclosed my background to the participants so that they could understand my interest and positionality in this research, and my perspectives on why this research – design and data analysis included – is important (Fischer, 2009). Thus, my perspective and personal experience as a Black woman can be a strength in the research process to help quickly build rapport with participants. Further, I demonstrated theoretical sensitivity as the women shared their experiences and gave them meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Additionally, my professional experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as an advisor to and a program director for low-income, first generation students helped me understand the nuances of the language students may use to describe their experiences, and the inferences they made about their experiences because not only am I *in* the group, but I also *work with* the group.

Member checks. Once I began to identify themes in the data, I conducted a member check by having participants view portions of their interview transcripts which identified significant statements from the data, as associated with the themes that arose from the data set. Participants’ views were important to ensure that my interpretations of their lived experiences were accurate. Engaging them in the process confirmed their decisions to trust me and participate in the research and gave them the opportunity to comment on the findings (Creswell, 2009). To

do so, after the individual participant interviews were conducted, I invited each participant to participate in the focus group at a specific date, time, and location.

Six of the students who were individually interviewed also participated in the focus group. A date that was convenient for the majority of the women's schedules was chosen, and the two women who did not participate had commitments that they could not rearrange to attend the focus group, such as scheduled travel and class. To begin the discussion, I outlined the goals for the focus group, and then reviewed the informed consent forms with each participant and had them acknowledge that they consented to participate in the focus group. From there, each participant briefly introduced herself to the group, and was given time to review the transcript of her interview. Significant statements were highlighted on the interview transcript. Our discussion centered on what the participants found significant in their interviews and anything they wanted to expand upon as a result of reviewing the transcripts. Thereafter, each participant was then given a list of emergent themes from the data, and we engaged in a discussion based on the Focus Group Protocol (Appendix H). The focus group lasted one hour and six minutes, and was audio recorded; I also took handwritten notes during the discussion.

Many researchers (Creswell, 2007; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011; Patton, 1990) offer that focus groups are beneficial when the group is homogeneous, as the participants will be inclined to engage in a discussion of the issues and draw from each other's ideas and commentary. I intended to create an environment where they could openly share their experiences and discuss the research findings – thereby challenging, confirming, and addressing any themes that arose during the discussion.

Participant Profiles

Eight women participated in this research study. Each participant is referred to by pseudonym. They are:

ANIYA. Aniya is a native and permanent out-of-state resident. She is a communication major with a specialization in public relations and maintains a 3.25 cumulative grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale at Allegiance. Both her mother and father attended a two-year/community college and graduated. Aniya has two older sisters, one of whom completed an associate's degree, and the other does not have college experience. Aniya lives on-campus but considers her "home" to be her mother's residence. She and her mother do not have a close relationship. Aniya has a family of three with an annual income of \$30,000.

CLEO. Cleo, a 21-year-old senior information technology and informatics major with a focus in e-commerce, was born in Dominica and identifies as a Black Caribbean. She has an approximate 2.75 cumulative GPA. While her mother attended a two-year/community college and did not graduate, Cleo is unsure of father's educational background. When not on campus, Cleo lives out-of-state in a family of three with an annual income of less than \$20,000. Cleo is very close to her maternal grandparents, aunts, and uncles, all of whom have supported her educational journey. Although she wishes to pursue a graduate degree, she is unsure of the financial feasibility of her dream.

JOCELYN. Born out-of-state, 22-year-old Jocelyn is currently a resident of the same town in which the university is located. She is a journalism and media studies major who intends to become an educator or policy analyst. Jocelyn is a senior whose cumulative GPA is 2.25. Her mother recently passed away. Prior to her mother's passing, her family income was approximately \$50,000. At this time, she has no parental income, and relies on assistance from

family members. Jocelyn recently learned that she was adopted by her mother and has several biological siblings who live in Florida. Her mother attended a two-year/community college, but did not graduate, and she is unaware of her father's educational background. Jocelyn participated only in the individual interview as she was unable to alter her travel plans to participate in the focus group.

MALIA. Malia is a 21-year-old student of Dominican descent who identifies as Black. She is a communication major, who formerly had an interest in sports journalism. She is a senior who was a member of the university track team until an injury in her junior year forced her to quit the team, and she lost her scholarship as a result. She maintains a cumulative GPA of 3.41. Neither of her parents attended college, but her older brother, with whom she shares a very close relationship, is a recent Cornell University graduate. She also has two older sisters with whom she is not close. Malia shared her plans to pursue a master's degree in social work in the fall of 2018. She and her parents have an annual income of approximately \$10,000; her mother is disabled and unable to work.

MELISSA. Melissa was born and raised in a large urban area within the state. She has 10 siblings, five of whom still live with her and her mother. Neither of her parents attended college. Melissa is a double major in political science and women's and gender studies and intends to become a civil rights or criminal law attorney. She is a senior with a cumulative GPA of 3.71. The seven members in her household subsist on an annual income of \$45,000.

OLIVIA. Olivia is a 21-year-old senior with double majors in sociology and criminal justice, and a minor in French. Olivia intends to become a lawyer and shared her plans to apply for admission to law school for the fall 2018. She is an in-state student and her family of four, including her father, mother, and younger sister, has an annual income of about \$30,000. Olivia

maintains a 3.30 cumulative GPA. Her parents both emigrated from Haiti and attended a two-year/ community college after several years of living in the United States; both graduated. Olivia considers herself a first-generation Haitian-American and expressed that her family feels pride that she is also the first to attend a four-year university.

ROBYN. Robyn is a 22-year-old junior from one of the most affluent counties in the state. Robyn is a biological sciences major with an approximate cumulative GPA of 2.25. Her mother, who attended a two-year/community college but did not graduate, is now a practical nurse at a long-term care facility. Her father emigrated from Uganda to the United States to attend college, and his experience as an international college student was uniquely different from Robyn's as the first of four daughters born in the United States and attending college. Her father works as an independent accountant, and her household's annual income is \$36,000.

SHURI. Shuri is 21-years-old and has a double major in Africana Studies and information technology and informatics. Shuri is a senior from within the state with a 2.99 cumulative GPA. Her father never attended college, but her mother attended a two-year/ community college and graduated. Shuri is the oldest of four children, and shares a close relationship with her maternal relatives. Her household of three, including her mother and her younger sister, maintains a \$40,000 annual income.

Chapter 4

The Themes: In Their Words

As these women shared their stories of navigating the university, they challenged the dominant narratives posited about the college experience, including some of the perceived positive narratives surrounding Allegiance and its support of students. The participants in this study spoke of similar experiences at the university, as well as in their larger lived experiences. Their understanding of their experiences reflects the argument of standpoint theory that “group location in hierarchical power relations produces common challenges for individuals in those groups” (Collins, 2000, p. 300). As a result, their experiences help enhance our knowledge of Black women in their particular situations and contexts (Collins, 2000), specifically at an HWI. The importance of these women sharing and defining their experiences at Allegiance cannot be understated. What follows is a discussion of the five invariant themes identified in the research as a result of analyzing the content of the women’s interviews: resources at the college; resources outside the college; view of the college; invisibility and visibility; and double-consciousness. The themes are those each participant reflected upon throughout her interview, though some of the specific experiences through which the themes were reflected are varied. Additionally, each of the six types of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) are applied to the themes which emerged from the participants’ interview data, as indicated in Table 3. Together, these themes as explored through the lens of CCW help illuminate the collegiate experiences of low-income, first-generation, unaffiliated Black female college students at Allegiance University.

Resources at Allegiance

An important theme which arose in the participants’ discussions was the presence, lack of accessibility, and helpfulness of various resources at the college. Several kinds of college resources appear to exist - those which are available and helpful; those which are available and

Table 3	
<i>Alignment of Themes with CCW</i>	
<u>Theme</u>	<u>Types of CCW Evident</u>
Resources at Allegiance	aspirational; familial; linguistic; navigational; resistant; social
Resources outside Allegiance	aspirational; familial; navigational; resistant; social
View of the College	aspirational; navigational; resistant; social
Invisibility and Visibility	aspirational; familial; linguistic; navigational; resistant; social
Double-consciousness	aspirational; linguistic; navigational; resistant; social

inaccessible but could be helpful; and those which are altogether unavailable or otherwise not helpful. For most participants, professors, academic advisors, student organizations, and the body called Black Allegiance was found to be helpful and available. The State Opportunity Program (SOP) was considered inaccessible to these students, but given additional funding, could prove helpful to more students were it available. Other resources that were considered altogether unavailable or otherwise unhelpful, resulting in a lack of trust, were specifically the financial aid office and more generally, professors, academic advisors, and the administration (or “they”), resulting in the long-known colloquialism at the college, Allegiance Abuse wherein the students felt taken advantage of, misinformed, disregarded, or manipulated by the institution.

Student organizations and Black Allegiance. One of the primary resources that all participants found helpful were student organizations, specifically student organizations focused on Black students at Allegiance, which gave Black students an opportunity to connect with one another. Often in the discussion of student organizations, participants pointed to those which referenced their identities as Black students, and sometimes those connected to their identities as women. Specifically, Black Allegiance, an online platform or GroupMe chat network which exists to connect the Black-identified students at Allegiance University, played a significant role in the participants’ Allegiance experience. The term “Black Allegiance” had also been extended

to refer to the connections Black students made among each other even off the online platform.

Four participants specifically referred to Black Allegiance in their individual interviews, and others referenced it during the focus group interview.

Cleo's was the first interview and when asked about her connections and group membership at Allegiance, she shared what Black Allegiance was and her connection to it:

CLEO: I guess I belong to Black Allegiance is what they call it, because well, I'm Black, to begin, and just the people that I've met through there, the organizations that I became a part of through that, like Black Assemblage, and Collegiate 100, these are things that . . . Kind of like the workplace, how I want my future workplace to represent me and my values, is the same for these organizations and the people that I've met through Black Allegiance. I'm comfortable with them and everything that I've done. Whereas before, I've been to-

ME: Black Allegiance? Is this a location? Is it a space?

CLEO: No.... It started with Twitter, and it's just what everyone is... Literally, one day I heard Black Allegiance, and then it just blew up after that.

ME: Got it. So is it like Black Twitter?

CLEO: Yes... It's not a physical... It's like this community, I guess, where everybody is the same. But I guess at the end of the day, everyone's the same because of our skin color and who we are, but also race and ethnicity. A lot of people in Black Allegiance are either African, or Caribbean, or something. Whereas people in Spanish Allegiance, they're Puerto Rican, Dominican, things like that nature. I guess it's literally just what everyone is comfortable with and what everyone is used to.... It's like everyone has kind of like the same past [experiences growing up and shares common stories].

Shuri explained how Black Allegiance has changed over the time she has been at Allegiance, how her participation has changed, and how her understanding of its purpose has changed.

SHURI: ... Allegiance has this thing called Black Allegiance, how they subsection in events and stuff like that. And I used to be heavily immersed into Black Allegiance, but I also noticed that Black Allegiance is, is more partying than anything. And there's a few clubs that do activism and are serious, but for the general body, you wouldn't know... On the outside or even while me being there, a good majority of them, I haven't had serious conversations with them, so I would just assume all they care about is when is the next party.

Or I remember spring semester of my sophomore year, there was a thing you have to dress up and go to Langston Circle and just sit there. People would skip class and stuff like that. And at the time, I was like, "Oh, okay." But looking back at it, that was, I think, one of the stupidest things of I've done was sit there and do absolutely nothing, but you do it because there's a DJ or blah, blah, blah.

ME: When you say "dress up," what do you mean? Costume or formal?

SHURI: The girls would wear dresses, but semi-clothed, so you don't understand why they're wearing dresses or crop tops. Or the guys will wear the nicest pair of sneakers and go get a haircut. (She chuckles.) Kind of impressing, but not professional. Just trying to get attention from the opposite sex pretty much.

ME: Okay. You were disappointed about that experience?

SHURI: Yeah. Just looking back at it, that doesn't make any sense. But the friends I had at the time, they were like, "Come on, Shuri, come on." I'm like, "I guess." And the worst part about it is the class I skipped was on the same campus, so I had no reason not to go besides the fact I wanted to fit in.

And now I just don't really care and I just focus on my studies. Some of the friends I made from that environment, they also realized, being juniors and seniors, you have a different outlook than being a freshman and a sophomore and you still thinking you can party and do whatever.

ME: So how would you describe or define Black Allegiance?

SHURI: I would describe it as ... It's like all, not all ... in terms of the Black students that care about social media and in terms of ... They care about being known on campus, then ... I only heard that terminology from the Haitian club that I was in, and there was a meeting where they were talking about how to be known in Black Allegiance. And prior to sophomore year, because I was sophomore year based on my dorm, most of my friends were either Asian or white, I never... I was like, "What are you guys talking about?"

So in terms of Black Allegiance, it's the Black students that have maybe ... I want to say Instagram is their best friend. And they're either all part of the Black orgs on campus. And that's what actually connects the Black students. For the most part, the people that are in Black Allegiance are either in the Caribbean or the African student orgs or different Black organizations. They even have a Black social in the beginning on the semester for the students at the Black Cultural Center.

And also with that, on Twitter, there's sometimes conversation of how Black Allegiance has died off because the university has taken away some of the privileges of either the Black Greeks or the clubs. Because usually... my freshman year, there used to be a Halloween party, a Back to School party, a spring semester Back to School party, a Valentine's Day party. Like at the student campus center, in the multipurpose rooms.

But because of how loud or rowdy the university saw it as, they started cracking down saying you can only have one [party] a semester. And I think because also having non-Allegiance students come. In the springtime there's Caribbean Day. So Caribbean Day used to be open to the general public. And the year before last, there was a fight that broke out, and it was with non-Allegiance students. So last year they made a mandate you have to be an Allegiance student and you can only have one guest, and it was in a small location. And ever since then, people have been talking about how it's not the same, how Black Allegiance in terms of partying it's not the same because we're confined on how many parties or where we can party.

And they complain how because most of the Black fraternities they don't have houses, but if you go down University Lane you see all the white sororities and fraternities have houses and still do underage drinking and parties. But you don't see their houses getting shut down, or stuff like that.

Shuri noted how Black Allegiance was a resource for information sharing and a community through which Black students connected on campus. Black Allegiance was even helpful to the historically Black fraternities and sororities because unlike the historically white fraternities and sororities, they did not have their own living spaces where they could have parties. The change in policy for parties on campus seemed to have impacted the Black students disproportionately.

Aniya highlighted how Black Allegiance's community allowed her to learn more about events marketed to Black students on campus:

Well, like so they call it Black Allegiance, like it's a very smaller community, but it may seem diverse because you kind of like situate yourself with people that look like you, so it seems like there's a lot more people that look like you because you're surrounded by them. But then on the grand scheme, like the diversity that they like alluded to was like Asians, white people, Hispanic people, Latinos. But even then, I don't see them, that many of them in my classes. I do see a lot more Asian and white people than Black and Hispanics....

It's just like, well there's a group chat that's the Black Allegiance group chat and it's literally like all the Black students. I mean there's maybe a couple hundred in the chat, but then Black Allegiance is alluding to the people you see when you go out to parties or like BSC [Black Student Cooperative] members, like Africans, but that sort... But I don't know I just, I didn't feel the need to join the BSC here because it wasn't widely promoted and stuff like that. I didn't hear a lot about it. The meetings were harder to hear about, but then I didn't also know that there was a Black Allegiance chat, so I mean now that there is one, I get notifications of meetings that I didn't even know existed before.

For Robyn, Black Allegiance brought her information about participating in the present study. It also presented a way for her to find others whose needs were similar, and with whom she could connect for support:

Yeah, I kind of hang out with a lot of ... Again, as I told you, the way I knew about this was through that Black Allegiance group chat, so I kind of make sure that I'm always sticking with people that have a same likelihood of needing the same help, so that's what I try to do.

During the focus group Olivia asked the other participants what communities they associated with to help them during their Allegiance experience. The first community they referenced was Black Allegiance.

ROBYN: I was quite general in the sense where I said Black Allegiance. Yeah. Just in the sense that, like, obviously you can relate to and kind of get through your years at Allegiance with people who look similar to you, have shared, you know, similar trials and errors. Especially when I'm an African-American female studying in a STEM program. So it's kind of difficult sometimes to get that insight as to what programs or what facilities could help you if you're struggling or if you need resourcing. So, I feel like a lot of my other peers who look like me help me in that regard.

MELISSA: And I definitely agree with what she said in terms of like, I kind of mention Black Allegiance and the general sense of finding the Black community in transferring from [one Allegiance campus to another]. I feel like it was something that definitely was a lot bigger here, and definitely helped my experiences.

ROBYN: Just to stem off that, I feel like just recently, it became more of like an online space. Instagram was definitely an impact. But I think just in the same way you can be assimilated into the culture by just attending events, that's like the number one way that I kind of got acquainted.

But I do want to say that I didn't start off, you know, being around all Black people. First coming here, I was definitely in like a mixed housing, both male and female. And I think it's just like, the impact of Black Allegiance has been more influential in my time as being a student, just because I feel like ... there's not much to feel like you have to hide back or suppress about your Blackness, and you get to learn more about it, too.

CLEO: I definitely agree with that, because I've mentioned Black Allegiance as well, and on top of that, mentioned organizations that I'm a part of... because even though

they're geared and open towards everybody, they're still, like, Black, if that makes sense. So like, you still feel you're a part of your own community.

The impact of Black Allegiance for Robyn and Melissa was the connection to community and the ability to participate with others they believed to be like them. As the name implies, Black Allegiance was a resource for affirming Blackness on campus.

While the women found Black Allegiance helpful in connecting to other Black students and getting information on Black-focused events, activities, and resources, they also affiliated with a range of other student organizations.

ANIYA: Only one I've joined so far is the [study abroad ambassadors] because I studied abroad a semester and so I've joined that. Then like I'm in the [scholarship group for study abroad students]. Oh, I just joined the Allegiance PR group for women. That's pretty much it.

SHURI: So freshman and sophomore year I was a part of McDougal Women's Club and my advisor for that club, when she got promoted and left the McDougal Residential College, I stopped being part of the club, but her and a few other advisors within MRC were the first people I went to, and they helped me in terms of planning and just making sure I was okay and giving me the tools in which I would then go to my classes and be fine with asking for help, or just showing up to office hours or... study tips. Because in high school, I don't think I ever studied, I just naturally got things, and in college it was the opposite.

So, actually learning how to study was one of the most important and best things I ever did because that made my life easier.

Aniya and Shuri are the only participants who mentioned participating in an organization specifically for women.

ROBYN: I'm not per se on any e-board at Allegiance, but again, I have a lot of friends who are, but I did attend the [Caribbean student organization] meetings a lot... but then, I mean, I am from an African country so there is [the West African student organization] as well. They're both a dance group and just a student-run org trying to bridge the gap between Caribbean and African communities.... They do a lot of events together and they try to fundraise together and stuff. The school has a lot of programs for African communities as well as Caribbean communities and they try to just partner together so that there is that kind of union on campus... All of these things, they really try to get everybody to have a continued dialogue about anything and everything that's going on in

maybe the African or Caribbean diaspora, but also just in context of school. It's a great way to connect.

Robyn, whose parents are Ugandan immigrants, took advantage of groups focused on African and Caribbean identities and used those organizations as a way to connect to other students.

While she stated that the school has a lot of programs in this cultural vein, she only mentioned two organizations that ran programs for Caribbean and African students.

Similarly, Malia used student organizations to expand her network, and even to help promote her spiritual growth:

Again, my senior year is really, well this year, is where I really started to open up and try to find different resources. I think that being a part of the Iota Sweethearts Incorporated and United Black Council definitely was really good for me in regards to my social life, really. Meeting more people, networking with more people, after that, so I just recently started going to [a religious student organization], it's basically a, it's kinda like, it's an organization of people that worship Jesus Christ and stuff. It's kinda like church, but like students-wise, so I think that's really cool. Again, it's something that I'm into now so it's cool, I love it.

Student organizations were also used to further the women's personal and career interests.

SHURI: In the beginning, I was a part of the Haitian [student's] association at Allegiance University. I was a part of the club partly because I wanted to be comfortable in speaking Creole because I understand it well and I can respond in English to what people are saying, but actually being comfortable to speak Creole is a different thing. So that was one. And I also thought being new at Allegiance that would be an easy way to at least find people you have some connection or something to relate with.

With [the Haitian student organization], I remember one of the meetings that got me interested was... It wasn't a Creole speaking session, but it was similar to that where there was beginners, even people who aren't Haitian, you're welcome to learn how to... I was like, okay, at least in that environment, they're not expecting me to suck, but it's okay for you not to be an expert in speaking the language. So that's how I got in the club.

MELISSA: Personally, thankfully, through the Black Law Students Association, someone mentioned that even if you aren't SOP [a State Opportunity Program student] you should try to email the professor because you might be able to get in the class. I basically took advantage of that, and that was something that was really helpful, because I was able to get lot of free LSAT [Law School Admission Test] prep tips, and that really helped out. I basically also try to recommend that, as well as organizations, to other students who may be interested in law, so they know that they have free resources

available to them, because prep classes are \$1000. It's not like, if you are low-income, it's not something that you necessarily can pay for, so it's good to have at least some help....

Melissa capitalized off student organizations that offered her advice on how to circumvent fees that would impede her progress toward law school:

I feel like something else that I've taken advantage of, since being here, is, I just feel like student organizations are a really great way to kind of network and just get involved with different things. Personally, I feel like, just getting involved with organizations that are related to your career goals, I feel like that's something that is good advice that I try to recommend people to do, just because, well, personally, mainly I guess geared toward pre-law students, because that's been my way of getting involved in the community, joining different political organizations, and just things like that.

OLIVIA: For [the Haitian students' organization], for example, one of my church members was already in school here, and she's Haitian, of course. She's like, "Oh, Olivia, you gotta come. The Haitian students' organization] meets every Wednesday." She brought me to [the Haitian students' organization] And I did the same with another church girl who came after me, like two years. I did the same thing, I was like, "Oh, Sara, you gotta come to [the Haitian students' organization]." That's one thing that we've been doing. The other, the Black pre-law association for example, it was girls that I was taking classes with. When you're in class, it's mostly white kids, you see that one Black girl, you link up and then you start talking. And then you figure out you're interested in law school, just like me. It's talking like that and then you find other Black girls that are interested in law school. Other Black guys that are interested in law school. And then we build that community. That's how I found that community, through my peers, through my classes.

For Melissa and Olivia, other students in these organizations were able to offer them useful information to help further their career aspirations.

Each participant discussed the value of using student organizations to connect with others. They reflected on the level of assistance they received as a result of membership in various student organizations. The women learned things that would help throughout their college careers, such as effective study habits, engaging in dialogue, strengthening their faith, applying skills learned in their majors, networking, and community building. These skills are also relatable to life beyond college. What appeared most important to the participants was

aligning with organizations that focused on their cultural identities, and ultimately finding communities of support via student organizations.

Professors. Five participants acknowledged the ways in which the institution is resource rich, including helpful professors who offer guidance on coursework and opportunities beyond the classroom.

SHURI: But I remember I did really bad on one of my classes. And the professor was like, "Shuri, if you needed help throughout the semester, why didn't you come?" And in my head I was like, "Because..." I don't know. It just felt... that I should get it on my own or that I need to do it on my own....

I usually just tell people, one of the first things in terms of resources, now I tell my younger friends who are still sophomore and junior, I would tell them to go to your professor, just because, especially in terms of class, the only person that knows it all or that can help you figure out what the actual information is the professor because they created the class or at least how they teach the class.

ROBYN: Currently, actually right now I'm enrolled in physics and it's really hard. I just came to know that my roommate is in the same class as me and she's been struggling too and she's not Black, so for me, that's even more comforting and then to know that she also is like, "Well let's try to go over practice problems, maybe with the instructor." So going to office hours or something that I've noticed in previous classes that I've taken benefited a lot because not only are you getting a more direct approach to tackling the problems but also you're creating a, I guess, a relationship with your professor, so it's more engaging in that sense, that they know that you've been trying to gain some more help with the material and they know that you're insistent about it, and so they'll think about you, like they'll see your name on the [roster] and it's not just a name, like they know you. Going to office hours is great.

MELISSA: I get the opportunity to network with more lawyers, and network with people who have already done it, and I feel like, often times, the majority of the lawyers I've had the privilege to meet, have been a lot of white lawyers because I've gotten opportunities through professors, who may be in the political science department, or in the pre-law...

MALIA: ...I remember [a professor] was telling me how much harder it is to be a minority in the media world, cause she's a writer and stuff. She's a writer and she's a radio. . . like one of those, I don't know what you call 'em, but she's talked on the radio and stuff, and she's Spanish, and she said it's really hard. Especially, 'cause I was telling her how I wanted to be on-air, you know like on camera and stuff, and she said it's harder to be Black and on camera. It's rare for that to happen.

SHURI: Junior fall semester, I was taking seminar in Africana Studies, I think that's the class. And then we had to do a research paper. And I was like, "Okay." And I was reading *Ebony and Ivy*, and that's when I chose my topic to look into colonial universities and their history into slavery. And then once I started realizing Allegiance had, I just focused my paper on that. And then by the end of my semester, my professor was like, "Oh, Shuri, they already did the research into colonial," but mine was during the 60s mostly and a brief on Allegiance's development.

So that was fall semester. So then I got in contact with [the Black female professor] who runs the project. And then I had a class with her, but then I showed her my research paper, and she told me about the student internship, which... No, wait. Fast forward.

So I did the paper, cool. And then my professor how I did it for the class, she was like, "Oh, you should do an independent study so you can continue and talk about now since you were talking about the 60s and you want to talk about now." And I was like, "Okay."

Shuri then recounts additional opportunities that have been presented to her as a result of her making the connection with her professor, including developing an app related to Africana Studies that will be used university-wide. She expressed pride in how her IT and Africana Studies majors came together through this project.

Notably, for Jocelyn, Olivia, Malia, and Shuri, their engagement with Black female professors and professors of color has been important.

JOCELYN: I had [the woman who wrote a book on Allegiance's connection to slavery and the occupation of Native Americans]. Or she's... So she was my professor for [an Africana Studies course] and that was my first Africana class, which is really how I pushed into political science. So just little things like that, like the Black professors have made such impacts on my life. I had [a professor in the journalism department]. Just having those Black professors does make a difference. And I mean having Black professors that aren't your Africana Studies professors. (Her speech and facial expressions become more animated.) I had two Black business professors last semester and I thought that was just *never* gonna happen. So it's just kind of like I appreciate the experience here, I just will not be a diehard go Allegiance fan once I leave. Because I feel like they could've done so much more for our community here on campus while we were here.

OLIVIA: I think that the people that I've come in contact with, the organizations I've come in contact with, some of the professors I've come in contact with, specifically the professors of color that I didn't even know existed here until I happened to take their class, really made the experience worthwhile....

Professors have been the source of information beyond the curriculum. Participants sought extra help for academics but were also engaged in research, connected to networking opportunities, and involved in internships as a result of speaking to their professors about their needs and interests. Using their voice allowed the women the agency to advocate for themselves and their connections to professors, especially those of color, helped them enter spaces they may not have access to otherwise.

While most participants noted favorable interactions with professors, Malia, Shuri, and Melissa indicated that they had experienced the opposite as well.

MALIA: I kinda got those messages - sometimes even indirectly - my professors used to say, "Oh, it's really hard for minorities" and I'm like the only person in my class, like, come on. In the media, that's it. Other than that, I've never gotten a message about being Black, low-income or any of that.

SHURI: I wasn't the only female [in my Calc II course], but I was the only Black person in the class. And then [my professor], by the end of class, she asked me to come to her desk and then she was like, "Oh, I think you should drop to a different level," because it was accelerated, and I was like, "Why?" And then she was like, "Oh, it's just... I think it would be easier if you drop to another level," but she didn't say that to anyone else, so I felt like I was being targeted, and that pissed me off to the point where I still came into class for the exams, but I went to a different lecture because I just didn't feel like she wanted to teach me or wanted to help me.

MELISSA: Even though I went to, I remember, about a month ago, I went to the 13th annual Black pre-law conference at NYU, and it was basically held by Black lawyers, Black law students, it was geared toward Black pre-law students, and I feel like a lot of them were civil rights lawyers, and a lot of them encouraged us to go for that, if that's what we were interested in.

I guess, talking to advisors and professors, they probably come across so many, I would say specifically Black students, who say that they want to be civil rights lawyers, they're just kind of like, "Well, that's not really an area of law you can go into specifically, maybe one day after you go into another kind of law you can kind of work on those areas, but you can't really do that straight out of law school." That's kind of the attitude that they push, and it kind of makes you deterred, because you don't want to go into something, and then not be able to find a job. Especially because law school is really expensive.

SHURI: I don't know how professors, their training, but I realize there is a lack of... diversity sensitive type of professors, aside from my Africana Studies professors. My general elective classes, or even my IT classes, but more my general electives, that there's

been times where conversations or debates on race in class or poverty and stuff, and students would say something that's absurd or just say something that's offensive or whatever, and the professor just gets choked up and they just either pretend it didn't happen or just be like, "Oh, okay. Next thing," but not trying to make sure the people that's being offended are okay or just their thoughts or feelings are hurt.

I don't know how professors get trained, but I know a lot of professors, they need to be constantly trained or up to date, especially with microaggressions because most times it's subtle, so you might not catch on to it unless the other person it's being said to and you know because of your background. You're just more susceptible to pick up on when you're being... someone's being offensive to you.

Especially coming into the school, I had to desensitize myself because I used to really get upset, especially with my professors, because I couldn't understand why they weren't helpful or why it seemed they just didn't care or it was easier for them to just continue on with the lesson if someone says something offensive.

So now it's more... that I just expect them not to do anything, so I don't get as upset or afflicted by whatever happens in the classroom because either they don't know... I think, "Oh, they just don't know. It's bad for them that they don't know. "

Rather than encouraging, Malia, Shuri, and Melissa found professors who were discouraging and sought to detract these women from their pursuits. For Shuri, the professors' lack of consideration for how Students of Color were impacted by microaggressions in the classroom signaled to her that she should have low expectations of faculty. Interestingly, Malia was essentially told the same advice about the difficulty of getting on camera as a Black woman by a Latina professor, and a different professor. Yet, she was more receptive to the advice of her Latina professor. In fact, she received it as an act of caring as opposed to a deterrent.

Academic advisors. Academic advisors are in place to assist students in planning their courses in order to achieve their graduation requirements in the time frame the student sets. Allegiance has different types of academic advisors – general advisors who help students plan their core liberal arts courses; major advisors who help students plan the courses required for their majors; and faculty advisors who work with students to plan their major courses and connect with additional opportunities, such as independent studies, internships, and research

opportunities. Academic advisors, also referred to as counselors, sometimes were located at the intersection of being available, but not always helpful, and at times altogether unavailable, with some students not recognizing the benefit of seeking out a student counselor.

MALIA: Also, again since I'm not an athlete anymore, I was trying to find an advisor, but I didn't know how to go about it. I feel like it's not put out there enough, and then one of my friends told me like, "Oh you have to go to the [general advising] building on Langston" so I went there, and I remember because I wanted to make sure I was on track for graduating, and when I go there the lady's like, I forgot what she said, but she basically couldn't help me. I had a specific question, I came here to be advised. I remember I was crying, but I don't remember why, what exactly, what it was, but I wasn't helped is basically the point, so I guess that I don't really know how to go about - I mean now I know, I figured it out for myself, **as always** - but I feel like it would have been nice to have that, or like counselors, or all of that.

Malia noted how the very people who were supposed to help her left her in a position to figure things out for herself "as always." Her comment about always having to problem solve on her own is indicative of the "additional work" Black female students are called to do at PWIs (Banks, 2009). Advisors, rather than helping her navigate Allegiance, became another Allegiance entity to navigate. The same was true for Robyn, Jocelyn, and Cleo.

ROBYN: ...when I was facing academic difficulty, a counselor might tell me, "Well maybe you need to re-strategize and think of a different major." I've been told so many times like, "Change your major and you'll be able to graduate in four years." It's like okay, so what if I graduate in five years but I still get this degree, you know what I mean?

I can still go to med school, I can still do all these things and yet a lot of times people are always trying to redirect me onto a different path that seems more achievable and I hate that. If anybody ever tells me that, a kind of counselor will tell me that, I most likely will never go back because already they just have this way of phrasing things that innately is saying you don't believe I can do this, without saying it. It's literally without saying it because obviously I'm still here at school, like they're not financing my schooling so they can't tell me that you shouldn't be in school, 'cause I've shown that I'm here, but at the same time, if I'm not academically showing that I'm doing well, and that could be just at that time, like maybe I haven't utilized all my resources, and that's more so the case, a lot of kids don't know that they just need to get out of their head, get out of their ego and be like, "Well maybe I just need to get extra help in a class."

Robyn noted the disparity between how she understood her academic issues versus how advisors perceived them. Their responses redirecting her to an alternate major spoke to them not understanding her personal goals, despite her stated goals possibly taking longer to achieve.

SHURI: For [my school affiliation] we don't really have an [assigned] academic advisor. It's like whenever you go, you just get a new one. In my head, I was on track and I was doing fine, but then this semester I decided to go to an academic advisor just to make sure that I'm looking at everything right and I'm on track. And then she told me that I have to take a summer class so I can walk in May, but I won't get my diploma until September, at least August, but September at the latest.... Because I know other [schools], they have an academic advisor and you know that person's name from freshman year, but [my school] because it's so big, you don't. And I was like, "Oh, wonderful" (sarcastically).

ROBYN: It's good to always get that outside perspective [from an academic advisor] but not outside in the sense that it's not academic but outside of just your own knowledge, like you need to be able to go back to the school and be like "Well, what can I do if I can no longer do this [major]?" They'll be able to outline a new strategy for you, and *that might take a few counselors. I've never had one direct counselor the first time I went to them, tell me, "Okay, this is what you need to do."* A lot of times, if I was off track of my biological sciences degree, that's the first that I'm going for, they might tell me, "Well, I mean maybe you shouldn't go for this degree, maybe you should go for a sociology degree. "

CLEO: Then, there are things like courses. Personally, before I was an IT major, I used to be a criminal justice major. I just feel like going to... I went to an advisor before about that. I was like, "I'm not really sure if this is for me. I like the study and the things of it, but the classes that I have to take, I'm not passing. I don't know what to do about this." For me personally, that first advisor was not helpful at all. They were just like, "Well, maybe you should do this, your study habits, or something, something." I'm like, "Maybe it's not me. Maybe I really just... This major's really just not for me." I just want a helpful sit-down. I went because I heard so many positive things about seeing an advisor, and then for it not to be positive, I was like, "Is it me because everyone else is positive? I don't know."

JOCELYN: When I first got here I used, not counseling, the academic counselors I guess... I don't think, my first year advising like before I picked my major I don't think it was helpful. But ever since I got into my major and everything, I felt like I've been helped pretty well because they're more tailored to knowing what you wanna do. I feel like general advising they're kind of just like, "We don't know you. We're gonna give you some kind of answer and maybe you'll figure it out."

CLEO: For me, for the advisor thing, I went to different people to ask them about recommendations for different advisors. *I ended up having to go through like four different advisors until I found one that actually helped me.* Because the one that I did find, he helped me and I changed my major because of it. I focused on IT. Now I'm doing

great. I love IT... He also helped through with graduation. You need 120 credits. But since IT isn't course intensive, then you don't fit that many credits into your schedule. Then, by graduation, I'll have a little credits left, so I'll have to take summer classes. He's like, "If you want to take summer classes [at a college in another state], not at Allegiance, just let me know. I can find other schools that we accept the credits for." That's what you need.

While advisors were sometimes helpful, they were not immediately so. Sometimes it took three or more tries for a student to get the answer that showed the advisor understood the students' needs and goals. When advisors made recommendations counter to the students' expressed interests and goals, the women understood that to be a lack of support.

Participants discussed the use of the student mental health, drug and alcohol dependency center as a resource to help manage their stress and emotional well-being. It was a source of assistance and frustration.

ANIYA: ... My friend, she just recently started going to see her student therapist here on campus and she was telling me how she feels like Black women and Black people in general generally don't like to admit when they're feeling anything really because it's like a sign of weakness. I feel like too, I feel like we don't like to let people know when we're stressed out, and then we just bottle up and then kind of snap. Then I mean I don't really feel that much pressure only aside from trying to do good for myself really. But like when you're, I don't know, coming from a family that's pressuring you to succeed and you're taking all these hard courses, I feel like that stress alone is kind of continued over, and then you have to deal with your social life, and then work. So my reasoning for being stressed is because I have to work, and support myself, and then go to school, and then find time for studying and sleep. It's just that to me is the kind of stress that I'm facing.

MALIA: I went to [the student mental health, drug and alcohol dependency center] before.... It didn't help... I don't know, it just like, it kinda felt like... every time I talk to people I kinda feel like they feel bad for me. They talk to me as if they feel bad for me and it's like... Yeah, like, don't do that.... You know? It's not that. It's not... I don't... I try to look at things, not as a hindrance, so if you make me feel that way, it's like I already don't feel that way, don't make me feel that way. It's one thing if I did. It'd be fine, but I don't feel that way, so yeah. It didn't help.... Even talking to people, I feel like it's just something that *I have to figure out for myself*.

Yeah, I stopped goin' [to the student mental health, drug and alcohol dependency center]. I remember they called me to come and I didn't wanna go back. Then it was this one portion of it where we had, it was like a group thing, so it was like other people. I really didn't like it. It just felt uncomfortable. I don't know. Yeah, it just didn't feel right... I don't wanna talk about my problems. I think it was because I couldn't even tell you what

my problem is. It's just a feeling. I would just... and they would ask, "Did this happen?" No. Just a feeling. It's just a feeling... They would ask me, "Oh, is there a specific moment in your life that led to this that day or...?" No. I just woke up one day and I wanted to sleep and stay in the dark and I did not wanna leave my room. I didn't want anybody to bother me.

Malia had been diagnosed with depression while in college and used the student mental health center for counseling, which she did not find helpful. On the other hand, Jocelyn had a more positive experience with the center while coping with her mother's death. She even referred her friends to the center.

JOCELYN: I'm now using [the student mental health, drug and alcohol dependency center], my first time using [the center] I've told my friends to use [the center] now that I've done that. I've told people to use academic advising, [specific major advising] and that's about it. I told them not to really use general advising because I just didn't find it helpful.

Although Allegiance offers many resources which the participants tried to take advantage of, they found that the staff was not always effective. Participants also learned from friends of different resources available to assist them.

Lack of Resources or Resource Knowledge at Allegiance. Participants discussed the ways they felt limited in their ability to access the resources available at Allegiance. While overall, the institution is rich with student-centered resources, some are not known about and available to everyone, or are not helpful in engaging students and setting them up for success. Participants also noted that their limited college knowledge made knowing what resources they “should” have available to them was difficult. Opportunity programs and financial aid were of primary concern in regard to the women's lack of resources or limited resource knowledge at Allegiance.

Opportunity programs. Five participants referenced the state-funded on-campus opportunity programs, the State Opportunity Program (SOP) and the State Opportunity Program in STEM (SOP-STEM), as potentially helpful resources, which were not available to them. For

both programs, students must be in-state residents and have to apply and qualify based on state guidelines. SOP offers an intense summer experience in which students get acclimated to college by learning classroom expectations, how to engage with financial aid, connect with professors and other students, create an academic plan, and gain exposure to college culture. The students continue their participation in the academic year and receive additional academic support and are eligible to receive a grant to off-set the cost of tuition and fees at the college.

CLEO: ...I personally am not in SOP since I'm not a resident [of this state], but I know a lot of people I've met came from SOP... And [their managing unit], I've just learned about them this semester. They've done a lot, I guess, for people, but they do throw a lot of free, like those free events with free food and free programs and stuff. That's helpful, too, but I feel like there should be free things for events and programs for minorities, like learning... Even it could be open to everybody, but just learning more about culture, because I feel like a lot of people don't know about culture, and even people within their own culture don't know about culture.

MALIA: I know some of my friends that are SOP, they have the SOP counselors and, again my ex-boyfriend, he had a counselor that he would always go to and one time he brought me with him and I loved that relationship that they had. They would talk about just everything. I was like, "I wish I had that."

SHURI: I was never a part of [SOP-STEM]. And I'm pretty sure if I was, that would probably help navigate me through school, especially with... I mean, I was a computer science major and how hard the majority of the classes, and I know that some of my friends whose parents made less than me and they were in SOP-STEM, they had classes that focused... like, study groups and teachers or staff members helping them prepare for exams and stuff like that. But I didn't have that, so it was all left to either me or me going to professors, which I didn't do in the beginning. So it was stressful.

MELISSA: ... SOP, specifically, would be better to expand, because it has the summer program, where people are able to adjust. I feel like they [the Allegiance administration] should really do more to try to bring in low-income students just because of the educational differences that they face aren't necessarily their fault. Automatically, like they say, I'm not sure if it's kindergarten or pre-K, but you're already at a disadvantage by a few years from other students in other districts. I think that they should do more to take in those students because it's not that they aren't going to succeed, it's just that they haven't really been given the tools throughout their life to succeed. Just being a student who has come [to this particular Allegiance campus] and not been accepted initially, I feel like I've been able to prove, as one of the top students, that students like me can succeed at this school. I think they should do more to take in low-income Black students, and I think that they should just, in general, raise the amount of Black students they're taking...

When asked what the institution could do to better support her as a low-income, first-generation Black woman, Malia stated:

Starting off with more money, not gonna lie, more money. Again, I'm Black. I come from low-income. I think low, low-income, and I feel like they have the money. Why not, you know, put it towards something good? You waste your money on the football team and they have not won a game. Just stuff like that frustrates me, like where they invest their money into. Education shouldn't be this expensive, period, but I mean that's just a whole nation-wide thing, so I guess Allegiance can't really... but aside from that... I think a stronger support system. Maybe besides SOP, maybe something else, cause not everybody has access to SOP. I don't know what's the support system like for white students here because I haven't looked into that, but I'm sure it's probably more.

ROBYN: ...there's the SOP program, which I've never even known that I could apply for, so at this point I've never gotten that kind of aid, but I'm just now getting to know these things because of, actually conversations with my other peers that are of my descent or my color...

Each of these participants identified the on-campus opportunity programs as a resource that could have facilitated their navigating Allegiance. The funding received and the connections made in SOP could have been helpful and participants expressed misgivings for not participating in the programs. Specifically, Malia pointed to her identity as a low-income Black student as a reason why she needs more financial support and Melissa acknowledged the desire for Allegiance to be more intentional about admitting Black students. Robyn, who has learned the value of advocating for herself, recently learned about SOP and offered that it could have been a means of support for her as a low-income, first-generation Black woman. Though she is not in the program, she used her peers who were in the program as a helpful resource. Since SOP and SOP-STEM students have a counselor who is available to them regularly, those students are aware of the resources that are beneficial; as a result of engaging with the SOP and SOP-STEM students, Robyn gained this knowledge as well.

Financial aid. The financial aid department at the university was noted as one of the most troublesome areas students had to navigate. Of all the participants, only one noted that she

received enough financial aid to cover her cost of attendance and did not often interface with the department.

ANIYA: ...I get a lot of financial aid, so in that department I feel like they're fine, but I know a lot of other people struggle with financial aid because I do have outside scholarships, a couple of them... I'm in a scholarship program, so it keeps me on track to make sure that I graduate and they have given me a lot of resources for financial reasons, and building careers, and things of those sorts. So that they are the ones who really kind of keep me on track because like I have a grade requirement and it's like they're paying, so it's like an incentive to go to school.

Aniya was the only participant who felt financially stable regarding paying for school. In addition to financing her education, the scholarship program Aniya participated in offered additional resources related to finances and career.

The other participants discussed the challenges associated with being low-income and how they could afford to pay for their lives at school and outside of school, including the ways these financial challenges interfered with them being able to achieve their goals, and the lack of assistance they received to navigate these concerns.

ROBYN: Financing school. I find that, that's been the most difficult thing.

CLEO: My mom and I moved out of our house like two years ago, and we've been living with my grandparents, so obviously, us finding somewhere solid for us to live again together. That, paying off my loans. I've got a lot of those. Oh my goodness.

.... I feel like grad school would be nice, but I know I don't have the money for that, so that's all. That's something that really just kind of strays me away from that, because that would mean more loans.

JOCELYN: As far as income-wise I feel like it's been interesting because, being in college it's already a privilege I guess. So just to see people who are here who probably do pay for it and they just get by with nothing, no problems, it's kind of like, you kind of feel like, "Oh, ok" [shrugged to indicate a feeling of being resigned to what people believed].

In the focus group, Malia suggested that she would appreciate financial support as she planned to pursue graduate school at Allegiance in the fall:

Like, I'm pursuing my master's this fall here in social work, and I'm afraid of all the financial issues that I'm going to deal with for an extra two years and stuff. So yeah, definitely having some type of [financial] program to help, I know I'd definitely appreciate it. So ...

The participants found themselves interfacing with financial aid quite often, and feeling dismissed and not taken seriously by the department, even when they were owed refunds.

MELISSA: ... the financial aid department is the worst. Not even necessarily, well, yeah, the financial aid department, I won't blame student accounting. I feel like financial aid and student accounting, thankfully this year, I've heard that they're trying to survey students to see what they think about- I heard they're trying to move toward combining them, which I think should have already been in place. I feel like, because at the institutional level, the student accounting department is beside the financial aid department. The buildings are in close proximity, but they're completely two different planets because student accounting handles the term bill, and the cashing out process of paying the bill, and financial aid kind of deals with the financial support that you get, which a lot of the majority of the students do receive some, to some extent, financial aid. Personally, I receive the maximum financial aid package due to my socio-economic status, and thankfully, I feel, thankfully, like I've been able to receive a refund check, but that's just because one of my loans is kind of structured in that way, so I receive a refund check, to kind of pay for books, and things like that.

But, I just feel like, okay, freshman year when I first was at [a different Allegiance campus], I had to pay out of pocket with \$400 a semester, and I remember when it was time to pay, we needed a little extra time, but I didn't really say anything to them, but they were sending me ten different emails from the criminal justice school, they were sending emails from the dorm, they were sending emails from the administration, they were sending me emails from everywhere, to pay them. Or I was going to receive a knock on my door on this date, and I would be de-registered from my classes. They kept sending me these emails. Five emails a day. "Dear Student, you're kicked out of your dorm by this date if you don't pay." Or, basically, set up a payment plan.

My major, the administration sent out its own emails, housing sent out its own emails, it was just emails coming from, it was like the dean, it was four or five different accounts all sending me the same kind of message, in red, to pay. Basically. That was just from that one, and I actually had to pay it. I feel like, when it comes to Allegiance getting their money, and students paying, they're very on you about getting it paid. They threaten you that they're going to de-register you from your classes. I know people who have been de-registered from not paying on time. They are very on top of you when it comes to them getting their money, but in the last three years, since I've been receiving a refund check, it's been the complete opposite.

When it comes to you needing your money, as a student who, personally, doesn't really receive any support from my parents, I've always worked two jobs since I've been in college to have my own source of financial support. Especially because one of my jobs is

work study, and you don't really get much. You get about \$200 a month from work study, which isn't much, so I've always had a second job. Just in the last three years, I needed my refund check to pay for my laptop, and to get books, and things like that at the beginning of the semester because my parents can't afford it, and I'm not necessarily working yet, especially if I have on-campus jobs, so it's like, I haven't really gotten paid yet, and I'm waiting for my refund check. There have been times when I've gotten my refund check a month and a half into the semester, a month late, because of errors....

Melissa's story reflects the work she had to engage in just to ensure she could remain in school.

In addition to focusing on academic success, balancing her courses, and multiple jobs, she had to repeatedly advocate for herself as she engaged with a less-than-helpful financial aid department.

Robyn noted how her immigrant family was not knowledgeable about how financial aid worked or how to complete the FAFSA, which is necessary to receive any federal or state financial aid. Robyn's case is an example of the lack of college capital Swail (2000) mentions when he notes that low-income students who are not in opportunity programs do not receive college knowledge.

ROBYN: We [my family and I] didn't really know how the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] worked. We didn't necessarily know how you could appeal for more aid. At times, it felt like when you would first go to a representative at financial aid, they'd tell you "Well, your FAFSA allots you the maximum amount that you can get." But they don't necessarily tell you, when you're asking if you can appeal, what kind of information can you disclose about your family status, about... Even the fact that you are a first-generation student and that your parents have never had to rearrange their finances to take you into a school, so I mean you can really describe those basic issues into an appeal and provide documentation, and you can get, I think it's called an Allegiance Assistance Grant, and sometimes I can get that...

Similarly, Malia noted having to take the extra step of appealing for additional financial aid:

I don't know why it's so hard [to receive financial aid]. They have so much money. I don't know why I have to take out a loan. My parents make, my mom makes no money. My mom's on disability right now so it's kinda like, they're so greedy with the money. I just recently had to write an appeal letter and stuff and they still haven't responded back. Just how slow everything moves here, I feel like they don't attend to - again, I don't know if it's because I'm Black - but they don't attend to our needs the way they're supposed to.

Study participants noticed the disconnect between them as financial aid recipients and those who worked in the office. The financial aid employees did not offer enough assistance to ensure the

students were educated about their aid options, which exacerbated students' frustration with the office. This point was reiterated in the focus group when financial aid was mentioned over 21 times. Malia shared that as an incoming student and well into her junior year, she did not have to interface with the financial aid department since she had an athletic scholarship. Now that she is no longer on the track team, things are different.

MALIA: I definitely agree with Robyn about the financial struggles and like, it being easier to talk to ... when you go to the financial aid office and you see like, the Black girl, the white girl, you're like, "Oh, I really hope I get the Black woman," because I'd rather talk to her about my issues.

I only recently had to deal with like, the financial struggles because again, like I said, I was on scholarship my first three years because of track. But this year, I've definitely experienced the financial struggle, and I found myself literally crying, breaking down. And I always, you know, wanted, preferred to go to that Black woman to share with her, like, this is what I'm going through, my parents make no money, my mom's on disability, or whatever the case may be, rather than going to the white person and ... because you just kind of feel like, voiceless, or like ashamed, in a sense. Like embarrassed. So, yeah, I definitely agree.

The women went back and forth in the focus group conversation and determined that the "helpful Black woman" in financial aid was an older Black woman named Melba. They also sparred about what kind of comportment they needed to approach the office – when feeling calm and prepared to "do battle."

MELISSA: And then, the one time I went and I actually got to speak to this Black guy who was there, it was probably the only time I ever spoke to anybody who was Black there, he was really helpful. And he told me that, oh, I could get grandfathered in, which is a way that like, if you technically were from [this state] originally, then you technically, since you already started college and got [financial aid] previously, you're entitled to keep getting it.

So I think it definitely isn't necessarily like race, for like the representatives that help you, but definitely is you having to be persistent. But I feel like that speaks on their part more so than yours. And I feel like also, in terms of the racial part, why I brought that up, is because I feel like, if you look at the people that are going to be going to the Financial Aid Office and you're stuck dealing with the annoying, I guess, like, issues that kind of function within how the office runs, like the functional problems that they have. People that are stuck dealing with it are the people who are on financial aid. Because if your

parent is paying, you're not really ... like obviously you might be worried, but that's kind of like an at-home thing. Even if you do need help, you might come in for an appeal, but like, if you know for sure you're going to be able to pay your bill and like it's set, like your parents pay every semester, it's never a problem, then you're not really calling them, going in person and stuff to deal with the grunt work. It's kind of the people who are on financial aid who are stuck with this battle of, gotta fight to get to money. Like not anybody else.

MALIA: And more likely they're Black, they're minorities.

MELISSA: Exactly. So it's like the Black and minority students who are stuck, who are on financial aid, and thankfully you get it. But it's also like, this battle between trying to fight the school to get your money.

ROBYN: ... I feel like when we talk about, like in a negative aspect, our experience at school, it's usually ... I mean, I can only speak for myself, but it's usually because of finances. I feel like oftentimes, I don't know how other people figure it out, but for people of color, we face the racial struggles, and then we have that financial struggle. And it's like tenfold trying to figure that out by semester, and sometimes when you can't find that way of resourcing, you kind of feel like you can't really speak about your struggle to maybe somebody behind the desk, unless you have a solution and you have a set time when you can pay it off. You'll talk about it with people that look like you, or people who know of the same struggle, and it tends to be of the same race.

And I find also that we're only really acknowledged by the university when we are doing exemplary, when we are in lights of really doing well for ourselves, as opposed to maybe a lot of other students who aren't of color, and they're doing ... they're not doing as well, but I mean, maybe they're getting more assistance in different areas.

Robyn highlighted her belief that her intersectional identity – and that of other similarly situated students – as Black and low-income made her college experience that much more difficult. This difficulty was seen to be better understood by financial aid representatives of color; yet, as the women continued the conversation, they determined that the race of the financial aid representative was not always a factor in how well they were assisted.

CLEO: I'm not going to lie, though, last time I went to financial aid, I actually spoke to a white woman and she helped me a lot. Compared to before, I have had instances where I have talked to a Black woman in financial aid, and she's actually given me just attitude the entire time I was speaking to her.

ROBYN: I will say, though, sometimes that's not really a race thing, because I do have ... I did have a one lighter-skinned friend, and she was just like, "I don't know what you're talking about." Like came from the same county as me. But I mean, I can maybe live in a

county that.... So I can come from a county that maybe has wealth, but my family has to work twice as hard, or triple as hard, as anybody else to stay there. Because my parents moved there for me to get a better education.

So it's like, I'm working with this every other day, I'm making sure they're not adding anything and nothing's accruing. So it's just interesting to even see that, too, at school, sometimes people don't know how to just pay a bill. Or that's not an issue for them.

MELISSA: And it's definitely not a color thing. Because I have also had experiences where like, there's definitely class differences, I feel like even among Black people, because I have Black friends at school who, their parents pay the whole thing out of pocket. And though it's not like easy, but same time, they're not really worrying about having the same struggle with the financial aid office as I am.

Malia made a conscious effort to share her financial aid struggles with a Black female who worked in the financial aid office; the assumption being that a person with a shared racial and gender identity would be more helpful – and less embarrassing – to speak with about her concerns. Although Malia learned to navigate Allegiance by connecting with university staff who were similar to her in regard to race and gender, the same was not always true for the other women. Ultimately, the participants assessed that their struggles with financial aid could not necessarily be alleviated by people of color who worked in the office, but there were several mechanizations students – decidedly, more likely low-income Students of Color – needed to endure to navigate the Allegiance financial aid office alone, such as: go on a day when you are feeling at peace; check the counter where the representatives sit before you get in line to see which representatives are working; prepare for the emotional toll the visit will take on you; go daily if you can; be aggressive; try to see Melba (one of the few helpful representatives, who happens to be an older Black woman); wait for Melba if you can; be persuasive; be consistent; be persistent.

Summary. Participants discussed the availability and lack of resources at Allegiance. They found student organizations to be immensely helpful and widely available, although those which catered to Black students were seen as grossly underfunded in comparison to those which

catered to the majority population. Part and parcel to students' participation in student organizations was Black Allegiance, which served to connect Black students to other students, student organizations, campus social events, and opportunities such as free standardized test (e.g., GRE or MCAT) preparation sessions, internships, or even research study solicitations. Additionally, participants found professors a resource for guidance and were frustrated when they did not fulfill their perceived obligation to help students. The same held true for academic advisors and student mental health services.

Unfortunately, students found their inability to participate in state- and institution-sponsored opportunity programs a source of frustration. Though these programs are for students who are deemed low-income by federal poverty guidelines, they cannot help everyone who may need assistance. Participants expressed that given the programs' limitations, the university should do more to aid students in gaining the college knowledge necessary for navigating the institution. Thus, substantial improvement in the efficacy of the financial aid office would promote the university's effort to help students, particularly those who are low-income and first-generation.

Discussions about resources at Allegiance indicated that participants used aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social capital to succeed at Allegiance. The next chapter includes a further discussion of the presence of these forms of capital.

Resources Outside Allegiance

Several resources outside Allegiance were highlighted as extremely helpful to students as they navigated college. The emotional and financial support of their families was prominent. Students' status as first-generation provided them motivation to do well in college. Students'

home communities (friends, family, etc.), through which they made connections, and religious affiliations were also noted as important.

Family. Each participant discussed the ways their families supported them in their higher education journeys. Much of the familial support was in encouraging the participant to remain focused academically and to do well. As such, the respondents also discussed the limited experience their family members had with college.

SHURI: [My grandfather is] proud of me because I'm towards the end of college and in his head I don't have a boyfriend, so that's something to be proud about.

So my mom is... I guess, besides me, she's my second driving force in terms of studying and making sure that I finish school just because I know that having me and my sister, her life got on pause for us, so I want her to at least feel like her life meant something. So going to school and finishing school is really important.

And then my sister, she looks up to me. And at one point she didn't believe she was going to college or anything after [high school]. But she didn't really have a set plan on what she was gonna do as an alternative. And she was like, "Oh, Shuri, would you support me if I don't have a job or something like that?" I'm like, "I don't know about all that, K." But now she's already planning when she's taking the SATs, and she's already looking at schools. So that makes me happy and that also impacts my experience because I like to show her what to look for, either my assignments or I show her my grades just so that she knows that she can do it and I will be there if she needs help.

Family members also showed concern when they thought the participant was getting deeply imbedded in something that may lead to trouble. For example, Shuri's family challenged her to rethink her approach to social justice:

So one thing I've noticed is how I was becoming more interested in Africana Studies, and I stopped thinking about myself in terms of how to make money but how to help. I noticed my mom got worried and my aunt, they're like, "Oh, Shuri..." So I know that's where we differ, but now because of the type of president that we have, they're coming around, but... I applaud them for that, but I remember feeling ostracized in my family just because how two, three years ago they wasn't caring for what I was talking about. So even though now they're getting there, it's like the deed is done. But at the same time, I usually send them articles or they'll be like, "Oh, Shuri, what book should I read?" And I'm like, "Oh, you should read blah, blah, blah."

Shuri's sharing knowledge she learned in college reflects her expressing social capital, in that she seeks to uplift her mother and aunt with the information she has (Yosso, 2005). Whereas Shuri has been the help to her family, Robyn noted how several members of her family have been a help in her college journey:

My family has been so supportive. I feel like even culture as an African-American is something that helps me more. I have a lot of deep, rich family values and morals that I feel like separate me from a lot of my peers. People tell me that I act differently. I just hold myself to those things to my core because I see how it's manifested such great individuals that I can look up to. My mentors are my mom and dad, so I just have communication with them all the time. I talk to them mostly every day, more so than anybody else on campus, so I just make sure that I keep my family first, my academics first too, but my family's really right alongside and they just keep me straightforward...

My dad is so supportive. The tough love is real, so I want to say my family helps me through everything.

So my aunt, my dad's sister, they're also very close. I respect how close he keeps family and siblings. She's also very supportive with us. I remember I went to Uganda with her on a visit and she's like a second mom to me, she always is helping out and I know if I ever need financial assistance, I have her. I also have my other cousins that I can talk to, who are also... They've been Allegiance, like they've gone to Allegiance before, so even one of them is like a graduate student and she has told me, "Well you can go and get help from here or you can try to gain aid here." [Besides] student connects, I've got family who, you know, they have gone to Allegiance or in a nursing program and they kinda tell me how it is being an African-American in the science major, so I have that too.

Cleo's family showed their support by encouraging her to graduate in four years, but they also exemplified that they did not understand the culture of college when she explained the various activities she participated in on campus:

...usually when I go for break or something, or even when I'm talking to my mom on the phone and I have time, it's definitely different because the things that I'm telling her that I'm going to do, the classes I need to take, the organizations that I'm a part of, everything is basically new in there to everybody. So when I'm describing certain things or I go home and I'm like, "Next semester I'm going to do this, this, this," it definitely is all new. To them, to my family, it's more so just like, "Okay, well, make sure you graduate on time." But it's like you need to understand there are a multitude of things that could happen in between now and four years.

But for [my mother and her siblings], coming from high school, it was always like, "Okay, you're going to school getting an education." But for college, it was my choice.

My mom and my family members never really stressed college on me that much after high school. It was just like I came home and I was like, "Oh, school. I took the SATs. I think I'm going to take the ACTs because I want to major in science," but then I was like, "I changed my mind." My mom always tells, she's like, "I'm proud that you found your own path, because it's not something that I... I wanted you to go to college, but it's not something I stressed on you. For you to think about that yourself..." And then for me, it's just like I thought that was the next step. I thought that's what you did, you went to high school and then you went to college, so... But ever since I started, obviously they've been there for me. Being away from home, that was definitely something new, but I feel like it's all just part of the experience at the end of the day.

I feel like a few things definitely have [encouraged me], but one, my family. Because even though I know no matter what they say they'd be proud of me, I know for a fact having a job and being stable would make them even more proud. At least the money that they've been paying for these past four years will not go to waste.

Cleo recognizes that her family's pride also extends to the purpose of the college degree in their estimation, which is to get a job so she can support herself. As the family of a first-generation student, the need for Cleo to be financially stable is almost palpable.

ANIYA: [My family is] kind of what I use for motivation because like I'm the first one in a four year institution and so there's a lot more pressure riding on me to be the one to succeed. But then sometimes I feel like people think or have certain assumptions that I am going to succeed just based off of the fact that I'm in a four-year university, which adds its own kind of pressure because it's not a guaranteed thing...

Well, I have four sisters and one of them, she's not in school, and the other two, they graduated from [a county college]. I'm in school and they think because I'm in school like I have certain passes and my life is kind of easier, but it's not. Like I can't work as much as they do, so I feel like a little bit more dependent on them because I... I mean yes, they have a little bit more of a sense of independence because they went to like [a local community college]. They're able to work and do those sorts of things, but I have a part-time job, but I can't work full-time, so I feel like they kind of like assume. They make all these assumptions that like kind of are backlash on me because from me like being needy. I mean but in some ways they're supportive because they do know that I have like less room to move around. But I mean they're still very wise and stuff, like I mean I feel like their education isn't any really less than what I've gotten. It's just like they don't get the added perks of being at an institution like this.

... I live with [my mom], but like financially she doesn't really support me. I mean she tries to support me with school, but she's not really like in the academic thing, try like pushing me to be the best I can, but it's kind of a motivating factor still.

JOCELYN: So I actually have nine other, eight other siblings. Yeah. And none of them went to college or anything like that. I feel like now I kind of have some other, some new

eyes on me kind of like pushing me to be that example and do what they didn't do you know?

.... So I guess seeing their situation and where I would've been if it weren't for my mom and for that experience. It kind of puts more eyes onto you're coming into this world. You're a college student about to graduate and a lot of people don't get that opportunity. Especially being that that's your family. They didn't make it there so...

So my mom was from [this state]. So I think that was a big impact on my life because coming from Florida I just personally don't think Florida has the best education system. So growing up I've just always longed for, you know they always say if you're the smartest person in the room, get out. I was always that kid in my English classes. I'd challenge my professors. I would never get in trouble for anything else but I'd get in trouble because I'm like "Well, what are you teaching me? What are you doing? I want more I want more." So I think just her education growing up here, she put a lot of that onto me. Especially she was really good with English, hence why I ended up writing and journalism.

So I think she really impacted me. That was my main influence in my life. My uncle, he went to school at somewhere...Syracuse? Somewhere in upper New York. And all his kids, they all did really well in college. They're older than me, so they've kind of been influences in a way to do something with my life. So they've had that impact.

While Aniya felt some backlash from her siblings for the perceived ease of her life at a four-year college, as opposed to the two-year college they attended, she acknowledges that they remained supportive of her. She, Malia, and Jocelyn felt the responsibility to do well so the support they received would not be in vain.

MALIA: It's rewarding making my parents proud. I always come home and I tell them about my experiences here, my academics here, like how's it going, and just seeing that I can put a smile on their face because I'm doing what they didn't get to do and that's what my parents have always wanted for me, so it's rewarding. Yeah, it's not easy. Nothing's easy. Nothing worth having comes easy, but it's definitely worth it. I'm still enjoying it.

My family's pretty small. It really is just my parents, me, my brother. I have two sisters, older sisters. One of them went to a county college... and the other one, she went to [a university]. She's a real estate agent, and the other one, she's all over the place, but I ain't really close to them so I'm not gonna talk about them. My brother has been a great impact on my education because he's guiding me through it as kinda like that parent-figure because I don't have my parents. I always go to him to read my resumes before I submit it or an essay or edit, anything, so he's helped me a lot, greatly. Every time I'm making a decision academically, I go to him. I've always had him there for anything, like when I was deciding whether I wanted to do education or social work, he made me do a pros and cons list or whatever, like this and that, so he's always been there.

My parents, they've always been on top of me. Although they don't really know, they know about grades and about all that. Ever since I was in high school, always would be like, "I need to see your grades." Even to this day I'm like, "Mom, I'm twenty-one, you don't have to see my grades." She's like, "I need to know how you did." Just earlier she asked me, she's like, "You haven't shown me your report card." That's what she calls it, and I'm like, "Oh, my god." They've always been on top of me and always motivating. My mom texts me every morning like, "Have a good day at class, make sure you focus," so we've always had that relationship where they're always on top of me here and then they're asking me, "How's everything going? Are you stressed?" and there were times where I was stressed and crying and I would call my mom and my dad like, "I can't do this. I'm done," and they would be like, "Nah, you gotta keep going."

They're definitely my support system.

Even though Malia's parents do not fully understand what it means to be a college student, they offer support beyond encouraging her to achieve good grades. They are also concerned about her stress levels, and understand that college can be a trying experience for which she requires support.

Like Shuri, Malia, Melissa, and Olivia addressed how college was an opportunity to set an example for the rest of the family since they were first-generation.

MELISSA: I've always wanted to be a lawyer, since the fourth grade. I think a lot of that comes from just coming from a family where no one has went to college. I feel like, sometimes, it feels like more of a pressure to want to excel and go into the highest...I guess, I just always wanted to do a career that I felt like would be kind of high-end. As a kid, I wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer, initially, because, I don't want to lie, I feel like it was because of the money, and I felt like that was a way to have a very prestigious title, that was very esteemed. Not only am I the first person in my family to go to college, but I'm a doctor or a lawyer. That was something that was very important to me growing up.

When asked what motivated her toward academic success, Olivia stated:

The people after me, definitely. I want my sister, my younger cousins, to know that it's hard, yes, but you can do it. When you do get to that point, graduation, and all your family is together, it makes you feel really good. I know that if they're coming up after me, and if they can see me do it then they can do it, too.

ME: Okay. I don't know if you noticed, but your face lit up when you started talking about your sister –

OLIVIA: Really?

ME: – and the people coming after you.

OLIVIA: Yes.

ME: Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

OLIVIA: [wryly] They're kind of important.

ME: Okay.

OLIVIA: Let's see... She's a younger sister, they're going to be annoying and all that other stuff. But, she's my only sister so I know that I have to set an example for her, and I'm also the first of my family, like I said, to go to college. First-generation American to go to college. All my other aunts and uncles, they were born in Haiti and then migrated here. I was the first one that was born here, the first niece, the first daughter to be born here. It is a big responsibility, but I know they have dreams and aspirations, my younger sister and my cousins. She wants to be a doctor. My cousins want to go into computer science and all this other stuff. I want to be a lawyer. It's not like we all just want to come here and do nothing. I know we all have big goals, and big dreams, and if we all work together, talk it out together, give each other that support that we need, whether it's me going first and then everybody else coming after, maybe doing it one at a time where I go to school, finish first, and then the next person can come, go to school, finish first.

Just making sure that we have that support system. That we're all working together. That we're all on the same... Make sure we all get it kind of thing. Not hiding the fact that we're people of color, that we're financially unable to do certain things that other people might be able to do. And making sure that we have that open conversation among my whole family, not even just keeping it amongst the adults. Making sure that everybody is aware, "This is the situation. That's not going to keep you from where you want to go."

Olivia noted the strength of familial capital in ensuring everyone in the family – children and adults – was aware of going to and graduating from college as a family goal that they could and should achieve together. In another instance, Olivia notes how her family used connections to other family members to network for her to obtain an internship:

Let's see. One big resource is my family, for sure. I was looking for an internship the summer after my junior year, and I was going through the Allegiance channels, as per usual, and I couldn't find anything. I sent applications out. Nobody was responding. And I was like, "I really need an internship for the summer." And then my dad reached out to a cousin of mine, more like a second cousin, twice removed thing. I call you my cousin, but I'm not really sure what it looks like kind of thing.

Olivia's family was important in motivating her and providing resources for others in her collegiate network as well, which holds true to her belief in reaching back to help others.

Despite limitations in understanding college culture and their relative's college experiences, family members – parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins – were just as committed to the women's college completion which motivated them to keep working toward their goals. While participants point to their families as a source of support and motivation, they highlight the loving and caring ways that their relatives express the desire for these women to succeed and invest in their success through words and deeds. The familial influence has been a motivator for them to identify ways to navigate Allegiance successfully, and be influential to others in their families as well.

Religion and spirituality. Four participants discussed the ways their religious views and participation in religious communities reinforced their motivation to achieve their goals. Attending religious services and engaging in spiritual practices were important aspects of the respondents' support systems. Melissa noted the connection between her family and her religious views:

I feel like a lot of my beliefs on social justice, even if it's not necessarily in my family that people, I don't think my family necessarily cares as much about politics, so we don't really, necessarily, talk about it as much, but I feel like within the communities at school that I'm in, and just communities in general, I feel like I'm able to share those social justice views, and I feel like, in terms of religious views, I have my family that also connects with my religious views to kind of talk to about those things. I think religious views, and attitudes about politics, I feel like can connect to my community at school, and also my family.

OLIVIA: I'm Seventh Day Adventist. I go to church on Saturday... Besides that really, it's a big community, but a small community because I know there's not that many SDAs here at Allegiance. There'd be maybe Catholics and Protestants. But just the fact that we believe in Jesus Christ, that we believe that He died for us, that He loves us and that He's coming back to get us. Specifically, being SDA, we believe that Saturday is the Sabbath, one of the Ten Commandments says, "Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy." Sabbath being Saturday, and that God asks you to give him 24 hours. Friday night, sundown,

when the sun goes down, to Saturday night when the sun goes down, that you put everything else aside and that you give that time to Him.

I feel that that's helped me a lot because you could easily get into the space where you're just going, going, going. Working seven days a week, 24/7, but I know when Friday comes, I have my Sabbath, I can just put things aside and spend 24 hours with my family, with my church family, with my friends. And then if I want to for Saturday night when the sun goes down, I can get back to my school work and stuff like that.

.... I see how hard [my parents are] working, and I know how well they did in school, as well. It's like, "Okay Olivia. You have no choice. You got to get it together now. If they can do it, you can do it." They were in school, handling jobs and stuff like that when they first got here, full-time jobs. Your little \$8.38 an hour, three hours a week or whatever, three hours a day, something like that. You can do it, too. They're a really big source of motivation for me. I know they're always praying for me, they're always making sure that I'm okay as well.

The religion itself was not the only thing important to Olivia. The community created through shared religious practices, such as observing a holy day and prayer were also important to her sustaining motivation to do well in school. Of further importance was her parents' engagement in continual prayer for her well-being, thus; her familial and religious connections were fortified.

Robyn attributed God for her successes and failures and her ability to learn from them:

And religion, I'm very much Catholic. I'm a Catholic so my faith in God, He is always, always, always leading, He's always watching and He always has an answer. The reasons why things happen, my failures always lead to another blessing, so I keep Him in mind too.

Malia's search for a relationship with God brought her closer to her family:

.... I recently just kinda gave my life to Jesus Christ. I recently just started going to church and stuff, and that's really something that has impacted my life and right now it's the main thing going on right now – God, me getting closer to Him. Building a relationship with Him is something that my mom has always tried to instill in me, but I've always just been like, "Yeah Ma, yeah Ma, yeah Ma." (She rolls her eyes.)

Day in, day out my mom is very, very Christian, very, very holy, but I've always just would be like, "Oh, you're doin' *too much*." I've always felt like, I don't know, I've always felt like she was just, to me, I've always felt like she was acting, or just trying to act like something that she wasn't. I've always felt uncomfortable until I finally started to search for Him myself, so that's something now that we both have in common, and it

sparks good conversation between us. I'm happy about that because I would shut her off so much because of it, so I'm grateful for that, thankful for that, thank You to the Lord.

While family served as a source of connection to religious views, important to these participants was their personal understanding of the impact of religion to them on their own. Religion also served as a way to remain focused and connected their beliefs to their academic pursuits.

Community. Participants found support outside of the university by way of different community-based organizations they participated in, or different communities in which they have an affinity. Youth associations, ethnic organizations, religious groups, sports teams, and physical communities counted in this theme, as the participants considered them important to who they were and how they navigated the world, not just Allegiance.

ROBYN: Outside of school I do have this Ugandan Association, youth association. We try to have meetings every summer and we try to just let the kids know of our generation and younger, how to get internships, the importance of school, the importance of networking, but also just to reunite all of our families and our tribes, despite the differences, and just all come together for a meal, so we try to do that every year.

OLIVIA: Definitely part of the Haitian community. My church community. The Christian community, here at Allegiance and overall in general, at my home church. I would say I'm a part of the Black pre-law community. There's a group of us here. I think in general, actually, I wouldn't even say here. Young Black attorneys that are up and coming and we're trying to really let people know that it's already hard being a Black person, but now you're trying to be a Black lawyer as well. That community is up and coming, it's not as big as others, but it is a community I feel like I'm a part of. I'm a huge Boston Celtics fan, so I'm part of that community as well. NBA basketball, specifically the Celtics, not other teams. What else? What else? The sports community. The music community. I think that's it.

.... I can definitely use them as outlets, for sure. I get really riled up when I'm watching basketball for example, so if I had a real rough day and I'm watching basketball, it's a way for me to let all that steam out. If I'm yelling at my TV screen or whatever, or my choir family for example, being able to be with a group of people that look like me, act like me, and then we can sing, pray together. That's a real source of support for me as well, and an outlet, again. Besides being an outlet, it's also, I feel, good resources and good connections because the people that I met through those communities, I've been able to use to better myself as person. As an individual. As a student. Most of the things that I wrote in my personal statement [for law school] were about the choir, or about the

Haitian Association, for example. And how I've learned either to become a leader, or better person through those organizations.

The committees Olivia belonged to served several purposes – motivation, support, and entertainment. Alternately, Jocelyn discussed her hometown as a source of motivation:

So where I'm from, like the community there... I'm from North Miami and they don't have a really great education system which is why I didn't end up going to school at my home school. I went to a school that I was not in district for. It was a new school so it was a little better for education and they were more focused. I was originally at an art school originally and they just were terrible with education. It was all about music, art, but if you didn't want to do that for the rest of your life it's kind of like you're stuck in this art life.

So I feel like that's where it started, that push to do something with my life. Here the communities... I mean like I said I don't really engage with too many people. But the Black community here definitely they're an inspiration to do better. Because they're all, most of my friends here, they're from here, they're from this place. And they're so educated they're so always on top of their stuff. They understand that they are here for a reason. And I feel like that kind of keeps me going at the end of the day. I have to do something, they have such strong voices, such strong presences on campus to do something. I feel like that's the inspiration and impact that I get from the people here versus I don't feel that same push from my friends or my community of friends at home.

It's kind of like here everyone's fighting to make it out and do something. At home everyone's like, "I want to do the very minimum and I'll make it and be okay."

The various communities of membership serve as sources of comfort and motivation for the participants. Specifically, Robyn and Jocelyn appreciated communities that focused on their ethnic and racial identities.

Summary. Study participants highlighted resources outside the college as being beneficial in their college success. Primarily, the women noted that familial support contributed to their ability to remain focused and do well for two reasons – because they had an obligation to honor the hard work and sacrifice of those who came before them, such as parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles; and, they have a duty to set a good example for those who will come behind them, such as younger siblings, cousins, and community members. Additionally, participants noted their religion or spirituality as a source of support which bolstered their desire to achieve

their goals. Writ large, the participants used their connections to their communities outside of Allegiance as motivation whether the entity was positive or negative.

Use of resources outside Allegiance required the study participants to rely on their aspirational, familial, navigational, resistant, and social capital. A further discussion of these forms of capital is included in the following chapter.

View of the College

Each participant in the study expressed strong views about Allegiance. Their views related to the college's narrative of diversity, its administration, and their overall experience of the university. Included in the present discussion of the theme "view of the college" are the ways the participants perceived and experienced Allegiance. Participants often referenced what they had known about the college prior to matriculating, and how their perceptions of Allegiance have changed as a result of their experiences as students. This theme reveals a great deal about the institution, and as Epps (1991) warned, "We must be concerned with the qualities and characteristics of institutions that support and encourage student success, and those aspects that alienate students and detract from their ability to matriculate successfully at a particular institution," (p. xv). The women offer these insights as they questioned the university's espoused commitment to diversity relative to how they experienced diversity on campus. They shared reflections on how they were impacted by this narrative and made suggestions for improvement. The women also noted that administrators could be unsupportive as their primary goal is seen to be to protect the institution rather than help the students – they were not thought do both. No one in the study was empathic to the experience of the administrators; instead, the conversation most often took a contentious (us versus them) overtone. Several participants explained that while they

appreciated their Allegiance experience overall, there were particular incidents that complicated their previously idealistic view of Allegiance.

The hypocrisy of diversity. Oftentimes participants referenced the ways in which the university is marketed as a diverse institution. The university calls diversity one of its greatest strengths and calls itself one of the nation's most diverse universities. On its website, Allegiance highlights cultural and economic diversity as well as military status and diversity of experience. Despite this, the participants emphasized that the rhetoric of diversity is hypocritical because not everyone is acknowledged equally, as the university's actions should match what is espoused.

Melissa indicated that Allegiance's diversity was attractive to her when selecting colleges. Yet, her perception of the institution changed after having come to the school:

Coming into the school, I feel like because it promotes its diversity, I think that was something that kind of attracted me to come into the school, but having been here, I feel like there is a very large, a predominately white population at the school.

Shuri shared similar views as Melissa, noting the narrative as it is often told:

"Oh, we're a diverse university," and we are. And I remember, I don't remember who was the speaker, but he said that just because... Okay, a majority of our diversity comes from the Asian population, the interracial students. Cool. But he was like, "There's multiple ways to look at diversity. If everyone has the same thinking, then you're not diverse." And I feel like a majority of the students have the same way of thinking or same outlook that isn't diverse, and it's harder, in my opinion, for Students of Color. So, even though we're diverse, there's still problems and Allegiance still allows stuff to happen.

Shuri identified a lack of diverse views as a hindrance to Allegiance's ability to truly be a diverse institution. Further, Aniya noted the ways in which students' friendship groups while at college may make the university seem more diverse in population than it actually is:

...[Allegiance] may seem diverse because you kind of like situate yourself with people that look like you, so it seems like there's a lot more people that look like you because you're surrounded by them. But then on the grand scheme, like the diversity that [the university] like alluded to was like Asians, white people, Hispanic people, Latinos. But even then, I don't see them, that many of them in my classes. I do see a lot more Asian and white people than Black and Hispanics.

Because people tend to congregate with those who are like them racially, those who are around other ethnic minorities may have a false sense that there are many more ethnic minorities at the college than there really are. Aniya points out that even within ethnic minority groups, they may be together in friendship groups, but there are not many together in the classroom. Instead, Asian students are seen more predominantly in the classroom than any other minority group.

Malia noted what she perceived to be the hypocritical nature of the espoused versus enacted diversity at Allegiance:

They [the administration] preach about being a diverse school, but it's one thing to say that and actually tailor to that, go through with that, so I feel like having more programs that are tailored for African-Americans or minorities would be nice. Programs – just like a support system, let us know that they're here. Yeah, we're adults and stuff, but everybody needs a support system. It shouldn't be me having to figure things out. I shouldn't have to find out about an event, or scholarships, or something on my own. It shouldn't have to just be my direct professors, I think it should just be a broader thing.

Similarly, Olivia noted that though the university speaks of diversity, she does not believe the “diverse” students are the ones to whom the university looks for notoriety:

The students that give a name to Allegiance. The ones that they know, in the future, when they're reading their biography, they'll say, "Oh, this student went to Allegiance University!" Mostly, I think, Caucasian students, or students that come from wealthy families, I think, for sure.

ME: Okay. Why do you think that is? That they're not out seeking you, but they're looking for other students?

OLIVIA: Because they know those other students will put Allegiance on the map. I know I'm going to put Allegiance on the map eventually. If they don't think I will, that's their business, but I think they know for sure, *this* kid will put Allegiance on the map because he comes from *this* family. He comes from money. He comes from whatever. I know he's the sure bet thing. If they're making a bet, I'm gonna bet on *this* kid. I'm not really sure about this girl, because she's a little... She can barely pay off her term bill... You don't know if she's gonna finish. This kid, he'll be finishing. He's good. We'll go this way.

Olivia believed that because she is a low-income student from a minority background that she is seen as a burden on the college, and therefore, “they” – the college administration – have low

expectations for her success and therefore do not offer her support. Yet, she is committed to proving this notion wrong.

To improve upon creating balance between what the university says and what it does, Jocelyn suggested that better representation of Black professionals needs to happen when asked what the university could do better to support her as a first-generation Black woman of low-income:

I guess representation. Black professors, Black advisors, Black spaces. Because technically when they're like, "Oh you need something? Go to the Black Cultural Center (BCC)." But when you can't go to the BCC, where do you go? It's kind of like I think Black students feel more comfortable when we see people like us versus when you see you have a white advisor. They don't have my best interest in hand... Just by having more of those Black people on campus who are trying to do things for Black students and understand our struggles, I think it would go a long way.

So definitely increasing the diversity amongst professors, amongst advisors. Just having a place for Black students to see people like them doing good things I think would be really helpful. What else could they do? I know now Black students, we're pushing towards a diversity requirement to have other students understand our experiences as we should be understanding theirs. Because even one of my friends brought that point to me the other day. [Several students have developed a petition requesting a policy that requires every Allegiance student to take courses about diversity, which] isn't just for white kids to understand about Black kids. It's for Black kids to understand Hispanic kids and Asian kids. We all don't mix and mingle. And that goes into my next thing, actually being a diverse university. Allegiance loves to play on diversity this, diversity that. Well when you get here, it's more like segregation.

There's a bunch of different people and ethnic backgrounds here but we don't mix. So some way to get this university "jumbled up" so that we can all learn about one another and learn from other experiences. I don't feel like there's enough doorways for us to interconnect.

Jocelyn suggests that Allegiance engage more Black professionals and create more spaces for Black students on campus. Currently, the Black Cultural Center (BCC) exists, but the one option may not always be available to everyone when they need it. On the other hand, if students have a range of options to address the specific needs of Black students, those needs can more readily be addressed.

Similarly, while Aniya feels recognized for her contributions to the classroom, she does recognize that Black students and professionals are not widely represented on campus:

...I feel like I'm a good asset to the classroom and things in that respect, but like having Black professors and things like that, like there are limited amounts so I can see that there's not that much representation... I'm aware of that, like my presence is not as abundant as other representations in the classroom.

As recently noted by Harper and Simmons (2019), the ratio of full-time, degree-seeking Black undergraduates to full-time Black instructional faculty at public colleges and universities is 42:1. Additionally, Harper and Simmons (2019) note that there are 10 or fewer full-time Black faculty of all ranks and academic areas at 44% of the public institutions analyzed in their 50-state report card. Thus, the students' concerns about limited Black faculty are affirmed by this research.

The focus group conversation corroborated what was said in the individual interviews as the women discussed how "the Milo incident" and the subsequent fallout made them feel. This event and their overall experiences at the university confirmed for them the importance of conducting this research with upperclassmen so that they could provide much-needed context and relate their experiences over time to convey what they see as a more balanced picture of Allegiance than the idealized view a freshman may have. Their perspectives have changed to incorporate their understandings of how different events at the college have impacted them.

SHURI: I feel like that event ... I guess maybe sophomore year in Africana Studies classes made realize how much, like ... Freshman year, I was like, "Oh, yeah, Allegiance. I love it," watch the football games, have the, all the paint with my friends, and, whatever. But I feel like, especially for your research, it's better with doing it with older students, just because I feel like the more time you're here, the more experiences you have, and the less likely you love Allegiance, or like ...

UNIDENTIFIED: Yes, less bias.

SHURI: Yeah, because now, I feel like, "Oh, you like your school [inaudible]? Okay. It's okay. It's okay." And I hate the narrative that administration does with the whole, "Oh, we're diverse, diverse, blah, blah, blah." And in reality, like in terms of diversity of thought, everyone thinks the same. And that's why events like with the Milo thing, it was just crazy, because I'm like, what is going on? And especially I remember at one point,

the police officers, the security guards, they were like pushing us to get away because they didn't want us to get in.

MELISSA: Yeah. They locked the door at one point.

Shuri discussed how “the Milo incident” connects to the institution’s perspective on diversity, in that in a college setting, various points of view are to be shared and even debated. Yet, Black students were denied entry into the event, assuming they would all behave in a contrary manner, and assuming that the white students who had gained entry would not cause a disturbance. Most disturbing for the women was the university’s acceptance of what the women perceived as hate speech. A line was drawn for them as potential attendees, but none was drawn for the invited speaker, or white attendees.

SHURI: Yeah. And I thought that was insane. And also, like ... and then, I remember after, the school was like, “Oh, because we're a diverse school, we have to accept that people have different thoughts,” there was something like that. And I'm like, this, okay, technically, yes, but when someone is blatantly offending you, or like just ignorant, or racist, or...

UNIDENTIFIED: It's like hate speech.

SHURI: You can't like just say, “Oh, okay, you got to accept it because they're people too.” Or like just stuff like that. Because we're people, too, and if we ran around saying you're blah, blah, blah, Allegiance would be like, “Oh, no, shut that down!” Like they do with all the Black Allegiance events.

ROBYN: Just like to stem off the last thing you were saying about like Allegiance events, the school likes to portray itself as diverse, like we appropriate diversity, we accept students of a diverse race. And yet, especially with events like ... I'll say specifically Caribbean Day, they're really trying to take away the things that we love or the things that, if we have all these issues with ... I mean, we haven't called out the Allegiance Abuse, okay, I don't like using that term sometimes, because it's like, I mean, sometimes if you face an obstacle, it's your burden... But like, I mean, it's there for a reason, because a lot of us go through similar trials, and it's like, sometimes the school's at fault.

But going back off that tangent, it's just like, they expect us to want to be giving back to the school, or to want to be, you know, content with our experience here. But it's just like, we're going to show backlash because it's like, well, you want to portray yourself externally as a school that is supporting your diverse students, and yet you're also trying

to extract the things that we love the most and that we want to have our staple on. And I feel like that's my biggest issue with the school. It's just like, you can't say one thing and then you're also trying to extract everything else that we appreciate.

As evident through the interviews, the participants recognized that the university has different kinds of diversity represented, but they felt that not all students were recognized equally, there is limited representation of Black professionals on campus, and there are few opportunities to meaningfully connect with students of different backgrounds. To that end, the students would appreciate administrators who did more for everyone and included them in the actions taken to support diverse students, such as pointing them to appropriate resources and working with all students to promote a diversity of opinions and thinking without appearing to support racism and discrimination. Specifically, for Black students, safe spaces beyond the well-known and often-used BCC would be helpful. One of those recommended safe spaces is additional faculty and staff who can be a resource for Black students, the assumption being that the Black faculty and staff would *or should* welcome this role of mentoring, engaging, and nurturing the Black students on campus. Unfortunately, although faculty of color may take on the “invisible labor” (Matthew, 2016) of mentoring and guiding Students of Color, and advising student groups for Students of Color, they are not recognized by their institutions for this valuable work (Benitez, James, Joshua, Perfetti, & Vick, 2017; Matthew, 2016). Instead, this labor takes away from tasks, such as research and participating on institutional committees, that are acknowledged as part of the tenure and promotion process (Benitez et al., 2017). At the present time, students are taking it upon themselves to ensure the university is true to what it says by petitioning for a diversity requirement which would mandate that in order to earn their Allegiance undergraduate degrees, students must take a course to learn about other cultures, populations, and traditions.

Unsupportive administrators. The participants perceived the primary perpetrators of the narrative of diversity as university administrators. Administrators are those employed by or act as agents of the college and whose work impacts the students. Representatives from financial aid, housing, student affairs, and even university police can be considered college administrators. Overall, when participants spoke of their view of the administration at the university, the comments were not favorable.

Jocelyn pointed to a specific administrator, a Black woman whom she believed had a particular obligation to support Black students at the university but has not fulfilled her responsibility. Diane Nevins is a high-level administrator at the university. Jocelyn was disappointed in Nevins as she believed Nevins missed a significant opportunity to engage with Black students and offer them support:

[Diane Nevins is] supposed to be the Black dean that's supposed to have the Black students' best interest in hand and she's failed so many times with that. So yeah, which is, she kind of conforms to that white institution thing at the end of the day. I mean if that was me, if I was at the top of a white institution, **my Black kids** would be the first thing I'm trying to do. And I wouldn't just put on for them just because "Oh yeah I'm trying to appeal to you." Actually do it. So, I definitely think just having that person at the top to reach out to for whatever reason, it's not there.

ME: Okay, can you tell me a little bit more about Diane Nevins? You said she's failed.

JOCELYN: [A member of a student-parents group] said she's reached out to Diane Nevins for help and she's let it go. With BSC's, not opening ceremony [but] the big Unity Day, she [Nevins] was like, "No, you can't do this." You would think that she'd be the one to help make things work and she kind of just doesn't, but then she shows up at all the Black events like, "Yeah, Black power. Go this, go that." But when we actually do need her for things, she kinda takes that side of the PWI, versus helping the students.

ME: And just to be clear, as far as you've heard, the things that are being asked of her are things that are within the scope of what she can do, but she just hasn't?

JOCELYN: Yes. You would think she would have your best interest in hand. She plays to the PWI total thing.

Jocelyn felt that Nevins was altogether unsupportive and unresponsive to the Black students by not allowing them to host signature events on campus, such as Unity Day which has occurred since the 1980s. On the other hand, she says that Nevins “puts on” at various Black events, acting as if she is in support of the students. This led Jocelyn to question her authenticity and care for the students.

Of note in Jocelyn’s response is her assumption of belonging between herself and Nevins, particularly when Jocelyn said “my Black kids.” Shared racial identities do not equate to shared experiences, understandings, or interests, particularly as Jocelyn and Nevins are in different positions at the institution – one a student, the other an administrator with a responsibility to all students, not just the Black students. Jocelyn also assumed Nevins wanted to take on the role of “caring for” the Black students at Allegiance, which may very well not have been the case.

In recounting an incident in which a student organization invited white nationalist Milo Yiannopoulos to the university, Jocelyn explained that the event made her more aware of the challenges she faced as a Black student on campus without the support of the institution’s administration. When students complained about the nature of the visitor’s speech, Jocelyn indicated that the university was dismissive of their concerns:

Their answer was that it's politics, basically. And I think that was the year that I actually became a poli-sci minor. Because I think I look back at it now and, I don't understand. But I think either way it was wrong, but I've become more understanding of Republican versus Democrat. And I started to see that, but I also just think that was Allegiance’s way of a PR stunt to flip it. You know what I'm saying? It was just kind of like they said, "It's politics, we can't do anything." “It's freedom of speech” was what they used, but freedom of speech has limits. Like, you can't disrespect a population. I feel like they don't respect our population. And when something happens to us or when we feel some type of way about something, it's like, "Well, it's just this. It's just that. You guys will be okay." They don't tailor to our needs at all, it's just, "They'll be fine."

One aspect of students’ distaste for the Allegiance administration was because they feel the administration’s priorities do not align with the needs of the students, such as funding for

student organizations that were specifically for minority students. Specifically, Cleo was concerned about the structure of the funding for student organizations since funding for all student organizations was administered by a student governance body, primarily comprised of white students. This governing body determined the amount of funding each student organization received. The largest Black student organization, Black Assemblage, received a lump sum of funding that was to be further parsed out to the smaller Black student organizations. Since Black Assemblage did not receive a hefty allocation, the smaller organizations had to share an already small pot of funding.

CLEO: The orgs that I'm in, for example, like for us, Black Assemblage, we have allocations to give to these people, like to give to other orgs, because we're like the bigger org like [an umbrella], and we barely get enough money ourselves. It's like we can't. We need the money in order to give it to them if they ask for it. I feel like for one, these orgs should be getting a lot more money, especially... I know you have to give to all the other orgs on campus, but there's no reason why the minority orgs should be getting the least amount, especially if they're setting programs for people in that community.

For example, Curly in College does... I forgot. It's Curlfest, I think, I'm pretty sure, that they do. They bring up someone from like, who owns, or a CEO of Shea Moisture, or Miss Curly Jane, or something like that, and... They have to raise money, and do bake sales, and all the other things in order to get the money to do these things for the Black community. I feel like they shouldn't have to go through that. Because it's not only is affecting them, it's affecting everybody else. Because if they want people to come to their event, you have to make it something different, something better, and they can't do that if they don't have any money.

I feel like there are a lot of things that they [the administration] could do, maybe with sponsoring of orgs that are particular, for example, like Curly in College. I feel like there's [the Allegiance University student association gives] like the money allocations to all the orgs, and they don't give any money to minority orgs.

Students are frustrated that there is a lack of support from the administration given policies that make their work harder. Additionally, Olivia noted:

[The administration] could do better job at supporting other orgs financially. I'm on executive board for the [gospel] choir and for [the Haitian students' association] and just going about the process of getting funding for our org and getting funding for our programs, it seems like the other orgs have a lot of- easier time getting funds and things that they need for their programs than when we do. I don't know if that's a university thing,

or if it's... I know the allocations board is a bunch of students. The students on the board, are majority, predominantly white. It's a predominately white board.

Jocelyn, the editor-in-chief of a student publication focused on Black and Latina/o issues, invoked the imagery of a civil war when mentioning how Black students are impacted by campus policies, and always have to request what they need, rather than the university anticipating those needs.

ME: Okay and so you said they changed the protest policy. What was it and what is it now?

JOCELYN: So, what was it before? Now because even [someone] was just telling me this. She's doing fifteen-minute slideshows to Black students on campus to tell them that now the protest policy, you cannot disrupt anything academic on campus. Which is kind of the whole idea of a protest. Basically, it says you can't protest, so there really is no protest policy. It's like you can't protest.

ME: Is there a definition of "academic"? What things are "academic"?

JOCELYN: I'm not sure, it's just that... I guess because after Trump became president, that protest it shut down the streets. The buses couldn't get anywhere. I guess they mean that, anything that disrupts school. Anything with the school is like we can't do it, that's the whole point.

ME: ...I want to revisit two things. So, one thing you mentioned was that as Black students you have to fight for your needs and wants. And you used the imagery of the civil war, which is pretty powerful. So do you feel like, or how do you feel your needs and wants as a Black student are different from white students?

JOCELYN: I don't feel like they're much different. I feel like we kind of have the same needs, it's just different in the sense of what they give us. So it's kind of like our safe spaces, like we have one center. But then white kids they have all the centers, they don't need a safe space. I always say because I work here at the library and when I'm re-shelving books, the Black sections of the books are kind of old and run down and dingy compared to the other sections. I always ask my supervisor, what's the procedure to get new books. Because even people will come and say, "Oh, I want..." Like, someone asked me for the Jay-Z book the other day and I was like, "I doubt we have that here [at the main campus]." And we didn't have it here. It was at [another Allegiance], but it's just like why don't we have them everywhere? It's just disparities in like things that we don't really know off the tops of our heads that we need, but once it comes to needing them, they're not here.

ME: Okay.

JOCELYN: I feel like we have the same wants and needs as students. Most of us do, it's just that we don't get that need tailored to us. We have to ask for it.

ME: So there's no anticipation-?

JOCELYN: Yeah, it's not like, "Let's think about what Black students are doing. They might need this extra space." Instead it's like, "Black students are protesting because they need this, let's change the protest policy." Instead of like, "Maybe we should figure out a way to tailor to why they're acting this way. What's the problem?"

Jocelyn expressed frustration at the ways in which not considering the needs of Black students at Allegiance was a normalized practice. Altogether, race figured prominently in the discussion of student organizations and the perceived imbalance in the ways Black student organizations were engaged versus those not focused on Black students. Participants noted their needs and wants, such as funding for their student organizations, supportive administrators of color, clear policies that help students promote change, equal application of policies across student organizations, and representation in the classroom were not being met at Allegiance.

When asked what institutional barriers she faced while at Allegiance, Melissa pointed to how the administration itself is a barrier to progress:

I feel like some institutional barriers I've faced have been the administration, specifically, and simply put. Just based on, I don't know, I guess with experiencing different outcomes, with encounters with racism in the school. Even if there's a large-scale reaction from a lot of minority students who feel offended by something, in terms of trying to go to the administration respectfully to try to yield change, I feel like they're not very receptive at all in students' concerns, because I feel like they often times are trying to prioritize free speech. I'm all for the First Amendment, but at the same time, I feel like there should be a divide between hate speech, and free speech. I don't think that that necessarily exists at this university, even despite having a diversity... I'm not sure exactly what it is, but I know their job, basically, is to check in on these issues and to handle them, but I don't think it's very receptive, at administration levels. I think the administration has been a barrier just for different things, encounters with racially bias situations.

I feel like the administration has also, even outside of racially motivated things, I was involved with a lot of students are trying to protest to make the campus a sanctuary campus because of all the challenges to immigration that the president was posing, suggesting, kind of advocating for, and I feel like even with that, the president of the university came to speak at one of the things, and he was literally, ahead of time everybody knew he was going to speak, and people thought that was going to be a good

thing, that he was going to be receptive since he was planning on speaking beforehand, he was already on the agenda. But, I just feel like even with that, students had a very organized list of concerns, the organization that was hosting it, I was just a participant who kind of came in support, but I feel like the people who organized it, they had a very set list of requests, and I feel like, even with that, the administration kind of, was very political in how they handled things, and kind of just said, "Okay, we hear you." But there was not any response. I feel like the administration has been a barrier institutionally.

.... Their response, I feel like, I feel like the school, often times, promotes free speech, and sometimes that can be prioritized over the feelings of a lot of the minority students; especially being as this is a predominately white school. I feel like what also comes into play with that, I feel like money comes into play with that, because I feel like the people who are, the donors, are going to be more prone to being people that are white because they are in a better socioeconomic position, historically, than people of color, so I feel like the skin color aspect of it, and then also the socioeconomic aspect of it kind of hinders Allegiance from, the administration specifically, from having a response on behalf of minority students....

For Melissa, race and class issues impacted the way policies were created and applied. Students not only carry the burden of their race or socioeconomic status, but also the intersection of the two in this case creates the added responsibility of students navigating the university while feeling unsupported, as evidenced by the university not responding to their stated needs.

The following was Shuri's concern regarding the different ways guest speakers and student attendees at the university were treated when visiting the campus:

...when Minister Farrakhan [a prominent Black American Muslim leader and activist] came to campus [in November 2016] we had all these metal detectors and stuff like that, but when the Milo guy came [in February 2016] there was no metal detectors. The administrators I guess, thought it was safe enough for him and his beliefs, but then when Minister Farrakhan came, there was this whole security protocol that they had in place that I didn't understand why it wasn't for both events.

The difference in the treatment for the two guests, who had divergent views and would presumably attract different crowds at their events, revealed a bias that Shuri had not expected from the University administration. Similarly, Melissa stated in her individual interview:

I feel like I attended the Milo Yiannopoulos speech about two years back that one of the student organizations on campus held. It's obviously a white organization, and personally, I feel like that was kind of my wakeup call coming to Allegiance, because I came, and I loved the school, and then that happened within my first year of transferring [to this

campus], and it was like a shock. Personally, it was like a slap in the face because I felt like it was just an insult to come to a school that prides itself on "diversity," but then to have a speaker come and basically insult not only people of color, but women, feminism, and just to stereotype certain groups in general that are already marginalized without content-based facts, it was just kind of like slurs in general... [I came with a Black student organization] to try to, I guess, see what it was about in a respectful manner, and [we ended] up going outside to protest at that because you're just shocked at what the school was allowing.

In a follow-up conversation during the focus group, she continued speaking about her experience of "the Milo incident:"

But that was just crazy to see how they could try to like... an organization could use security and use themselves to prevent the Black students from coming in, and try to give everybody different excuses, and this be allowed. Because we tried to bring it to the administration after the fact, and there was no response. So I know that like, the school basically allowed it, basically, to happen.

UNIDENTIFIED: That's so crazy!

MELISSA: And it was blatant discrimination. The only Black people here are the only ones that can't get in? Magically. Even though we all have tickets.

Melissa's point is relevant to Shuri's assertion that while diversity of thought is important, enabling representation of one group's ideas and hindering that of another group was insulting to students who were interested in a balanced presentation of ideas. Given that the audience attending the event for the white speaker did not have to go through metal detectors while the students attending the event for the Black speaker were made to pass through metal detectors, the participants believed that race had to be the determining factor for how each group would be treated.

The participants expressed overwhelming concern for how allocations are made to student organizations, and the responses the university had to student complaints regarding the balance between protecting the First Amendment and ensuring Students of Color feel safe on campus. University administrators appear to be the primary actors in promoting the rhetoric of

diversity, but they do not support the “diverse” students or student groups on campus in the way the students or groups need and desire to be supported. This is apparent when administrators are not present at signature events, do not offer financial support for student groups, and enact policies that negatively impact Black student groups but without consideration for their needs, while helping promote the agenda of white student organizations.

The Allegiance experience. Study participants spoke about the ways their Allegiance experience has influenced them currently, and the potential long-term impact the experience will have. They also spoke to what they believe Allegiance thinks of them as struggling students, and the impact on their ability to succeed at the institution, and potentially return to support the college or offer advice to others who would consider Allegiance as a post-secondary option.

When asked how she would describe her overall Allegiance experience, Shuri called it “complicated:”

Because there's been great moments, and they're only great because of the mindset I had in those moments, but just the memories that I have to look back on, that's something I'll always have. But with the mindset that I have now and what I see now and what I know now, Allegiance is complicated. And I love them, but I hate them.

Oh, that's another thing. With my grad school, I was like, "You know what, Shuri? I want to have the total opposite experience." I want to go to a HBCU and just feel welcomed, but I don't know if that's to be true until I go experience it.

But I don't know. We have a complicated relationship, me and Allegiance. And it's funny because my mom's like, "Shuri, you love writing these long papers about how Allegiance sucks or how Allegiance doesn't do this, this, and that, but you still go there." I'm like, "Look. We have a complicated relationship." And if anything, I just want them to improve so that my experience isn't... new generation, like my sister won't, if she wants to go here, won't experience the same thing that I did.

I guess I would just say, from my experience, I would assume Allegiance is better than some other colleges in terms of experiences, but I don't want just that notion of them being, "Oh, this [other] university's worse," but then them being, "Oh, okay, then we're good where we are." You should want to strive to be better.

Shuri believed that part of her fondness for Allegiance could be attributed to her naivete at the time, and being enthralled by the newness of her college experience. Presently, the full of her college experience led her to describe her appreciation for Allegiance as “complicated” since she loved and hated it at the same time. For all she gained as an Allegiance student – opportunities for internships, work experience, exploration of her racial identity via her academic major, and administering a poetry collective – Allegiance did not fulfill its end of the bargain as she endured bias and discrimination from fellow students, even to the point where an outsider was invited to campus and openly disparaged her through his hateful rhetoric and faced no recourse for it; rather, he was embraced by those she may have previously considered friends. In the final estimation, Shuri was concerned that Allegiance rested on its laurels and in doing so, did not force itself to make improvements that could benefit current or future students who would attend the college so they would not endure the challenges she has. She used her writing as a mechanism for voice, to express her concerns about the institution. Her family challenged her “loudness” (Fordham, 1993), but she was adamant that it was an effort to force Allegiance to see itself as it was from her perspective and to make necessary changes to benefit all students.

Four participants noted their initial discomfort at attending the university:

MALIA: I mean, it was really diverse [noting the large concentration of white students on the main campus, as compared to her hometown and high school], and not that that’s a bad thing, but because I wasn’t used to it, I felt really uncomfortable.

CLEO: I would say that it's going to be uncomfortable in the beginning, definitely. It's funny because coming from a predominately white grade school and high school back home, it's not the same at all in the circumstance that since it is a lot larger, not everyone is going to be as open as they are, at least from what I'm used to. Being in a classroom with predominately white and you're basically the only minority, it's not going to be the same as friendships, or small conversations, or things like that.

JOCELYN: I mean, one, it's just a big school to navigate, it's really big. And being a PWI, kind of like I saw that happening throughout. Just being in my residence hall. Well, maybe not my residence hall... My residence was in Sebastian my first year. It was kind

of, they were mixed. But just going out into the community you kind of see all the Asians together, the whites together, the Hispanics together. You don't really see that much of mix, so I felt comfortable going with the people who look like me I guess.

Melissa discussed how troubling “the Milo incident” was to her and how it impacted her. Though it occurred early during her time at Allegiance, as she recounted the event in our individual interview, Melissa who already speaks rapidly and uses her hands to communicate, quickened her speech and her hand gestures became much more animated as she spoke:

I feel like, in certain social settings, I feel like it's been more informal situations that have kind of influenced my... I feel like that initial situation I spoke about when I said I first came into Allegiance and everything was great. If anybody asked me, “How do you like Allegiance so far?” when I transferred my sophomore year, I would be like, “It's great.” No complaints, nothing bad to say. Then, after the Milo thing happened, which is the talk I mentioned before, I feel like that kind of opened my eyes a lot, because I feel like just going there...

I went into that event, and I realized there was a line all the way outside, down the, it was right in this area, actually, across the grass, basically, and there were over 400 students there who had tickets, and they had all, basically, came to get, most of the people that were there were in support of this speaker, and were there because they were in favor of this toxic mindset, and toxic thinking of, kind of in support of all this ignorance.

... [the attendees] were majority white students, and then going in, they were literally trying to find any way to prevent the Black students from being able to get into the event. I feel like that was something that really shocked me. I feel like it was to see the event happening in the first place, and see how many students actually showed up in support of this, and it was majority white, it was basically almost all white students, female and male, and then to be in a small group on the steps, of about ten to twelve Black students from the Social Justice floor, who were there, basically, just to come respectfully, watch the event, and then participate in the question and answer section, and then we had different people from the organization giving us different reasons. Kind of giving us the run around, so that we couldn't get in. [She recounts the experience of being denied entry to the event, even though she had a ticket, which should have guaranteed her a wristband for entry.]

The only way I even ended up getting into this event is because I literally recorded someone handing someone else a wristband, and then I went to another person in the organization and they tried to give me the same excuse of, “Oh, well, you needed to get a wristband a few days ago to get into the event.” Then I showed him the video. I'm like, “You literally just handed somebody else a wristband, so if I needed a wristband a few days ago, why did you give her a wristband today?” Then he just kind of handed me the wristband, very nastily, kind of like, slung it toward me, didn't bother to put it on my wrist, he kind of just gave it to me as if it was by force. That was the only way. Had I not

shown him that video of him literally discriminating against me versus a white student, who he made sure to tie her wristband on her, like you are supposed to at an event, he didn't even bother to put it on my wrist. He kind of gave it to me in a very nasty way, and then, that was just the experience at the door, and then going into the event and hearing what the speaker had to say...

None of his thoughts, it wasn't like they brought a well-educated conservative speaker, they brought someone who just kind of was spewing ignorance without any justification, any support, for any of the things that he was saying. Then, I think what shocked me the most, in terms of to bring it back to the political climate, was that, I kept hearing the majority of the audience that were 400-something students, chanting something. I couldn't tell what they were chanting at first, but then after a while I realized they were saying, "Trump. Trump. Trump. Trump." Then, I was just so shocked to see that the school that I came to, that was so diverse, that I thought was such a perfect school, has over 400 students that could be in any of my classes, because a lot of my classes, like I said, for political science, are majority white, to come into this space where it's over 400 students, any of them could be in my class, and organizations I'm in, just that I have to encounter, see on the bus, in the dining hall, and they're here, literally in support of this very toxic, and just ignorant rhetoric. They're here yelling "Trump. Trump. Trump..."

I feel like just going to that event was an initial wakeup call...

Melissa's recognition that there were many Allegiance students present to show their support of this speaker awakened to her the idea that perhaps she was not as welcome at Allegiance as she initially thought. Her reception at the event further clarified that this event was not for her as a Black female, especially as a future lawyer interested in healthy, helpful dialogue centered on civil rights and social justice. While she was disappointed in her fellow students, she was further upset by the university allowing such ideas to be espoused on campus. The students being unwelcoming was one thing, but the university sanctioning what she considered hate speech toward women and people of color, revealed to her that perhaps this rhetoric was part of a systemic failing of a university that did not value her as a student. "The Milo incident" reflected a level of permissiveness that was "inclusive" to the point of being offensive, hurtful, and destructive to some students.

Jocelyn also discussed how the university's permissiveness and the students' acceptance of Milo Yiannopoulos and his ideas on campus tainted her view of the college:

...[At] the Milo [Yiannopoulos] event. Yeah, I heard some crazy stuff that night. And so that was kind of like it gave me... I think that really put me into like, "Wow, you're at a PWI and people actually look at you like that." Like, "you are here because someone's paying for it and you don't deserve to be here, they just need you here for quotas," and so forth. So yeah...

While the students made clear that they understood the need for diversity, in cultures and ideas, they questioned where the line gets drawn when those ideas that are patently offensive to a large swath of the college population are not only unchallenged, but also embraced by students they have to interact with in various campus settings. For these women, no line was drawn, and Allegiance did not make clear that despite a desire to engage different points of view, they did not support Yiannopoulos' ideology.

In the final question of the focus group, I asked the women to give a final comment about their experience at Allegiance and its impact on them.

SHURI: Though I would say my experience has been challenging, I am glad that I came to Allegiance, just because even though in terms of helping me or people like me it was really trash, but it made me who I was in terms of learning about like ... I don't know. At my interview, I said that like in high school, I was... it was like, my glasses were small, I wasn't aware, socially, or not aware enough. And now, because of how Allegiance screwed me, or they screwed just, like, everything in terms of me being Black and going here, or me being a female and going here, I'm very socially aware and socially conscious, and it helped me navigate what I want to do with my future. So, in that way, I could thank Allegiance for this experience. But I wouldn't recommend it to everyone, or the faint of heart...

CLEO: I'm kind of going to sound like contradicting on everything that I probably said in the past, but overall, I personally appreciate what Allegiance has taught me about myself and people as a whole, because if I didn't experience it here, when was I going to experience it at anyway? And since I've experienced it now, in these four years, I'm glad to have my eyes opened to what I'm going to experience when I get out of college. Because that could've literally been a whole different ballgame, and I wouldn't have been prepared. And there's no four years after that for me to prepare myself. So it's like, I'm happy it happened now, I'm happy that I got to experience the people, the social gatherings, all the experiences as a whole.

And, yeah, and like become a part of a lot of things I became a part of...

ROBYN: Overall, my experience of Allegiance was, one that tried me in the sense of my resilience, tried me in the sense of me just expressing myself in any way that I needed to.

And I feel as though the things that I went through at school are only going to help me in, I guess, in life, and life ... things that you just need to know, how to get through challenges and to figure them out triumphantly. So in terms of finding resourcing when I thought that I couldn't, to troubleshoot, to seek out help when I was too prideful to think that I didn't need it. It showed me that sometimes, you need to reach out of yourself to get what you want.

And yeah, I just ... I didn't take no for an answer. Like ever. And especially this spring, earlier in January, I just worked as hard as I could. And it's like, the people that you walk through this life with, they might never know what you had to go through, but it's funny when everybody comes out with their stories, like in senior year, things you never knew people had gone through. They feel comfortable, they feel free to express it because it's like, they've got that certificate, they've got that degree. And I feel like I'm still going to get that from Allegiance, so I'll still be thankful.

But again, some of the things I went through, I think they definitely could've been avoided if I had gotten more assistance from different types of funding at Allegiance. But overall, I mean, I've had some of my best times here, my lowest of lows here, but all in all, it definitely has built me as a stronger individual, a better student. And if I wasn't getting the support from Allegiance, I was always getting it from maybe my peers, people I've known from freshman year, and of course my family and faith.

MELISSA: I definitely agree with a lot of things that have been said so far. I feel like, just in general, this conversation makes me pretty nostalgic, especially as a senior. I feel like my experience has definitely been very bittersweet, very strongly on like both ends. And specifically, I'll start with the sweet. I feel like in a lot of ways, Allegiance is like the world in a box. It really prepares you for the real world and what life is going to be like, what the work force is going to be like. Especially because personally I'm interested in going into law, and that's something that is about 5 to 6% of people that look like me in that field. So, it really prepares me for going into law school and going to work in the law field in general, because it really shows me like this is how, like the people I'm going to be working with, they aren't going to always look like me, they aren't always going to be this way. Like, I'm not going to be able to always control my circumstances.

And then, I feel like in a lot of ways, I've had, like Robyn said, some of my highest of highs, and I feel like some of the best people I've met have been at Allegiance. I feel like my experience at Allegiance is something that's molded me in a lot of ways to be the person I am, to show me what I'm passionate about. As a first-generation student, it's taught me a lot intellectually, socially, culturally, in terms of learning about other cultures. And that it is some diversity in terms of meeting a lot of international students that are here. And I feel like in a lot of ways, I've had a lot of positive experiences through the people, but I feel like ... and through the professors and the academics of the school, I definitely feel like I've had positive experiences.

But I do think that, in more of the bitter end, I feel like that Allegiance could do a lot more for minority students in terms of taking in more students each year of color, in

terms of having more financial support and academic support for Students of Color available for once they are here. And I definitely think that in a lot of ways it could improve, especially in terms of financial aid and student accounting, and everybody just being on the same page about what's going on. And a lot of, like, the different bureaucratic aspects, like it's just a lot of inconsistencies and people not being on the same page and lack of communication.

And I think that with better, just like control, and better... like more of an emphasis on improving the areas of administration, I think that it would definitely be a better university. I definitely think it's also like a great place currently. I'm not saying it's perfect, but it's definitely been something that will, I feel, impact everybody who's attended the university in a lot of ways.

Despite the discomfort and negativity, they experienced at Allegiance, four participants noted advantages to their experience. Melissa indicated:

I feel like overall my experience, I feel like, initially, after experiencing the first wake up call, which was the Milo situation... I think those kind of tainted my opinion of the university, and I had a very, I don't want to say a very negative view, because I am grateful for a lot of the opportunities that I have gotten here, but I feel like I had a pretty cynical view of the school, and felt like it was very hypocritical in how it presents itself, versus how it treated its student. It presents itself as diverse and inclusive, but I feel like, in some ways, if you look at how it actually acts at the institutional level, I feel like it's not necessarily inclusive. I feel like it's more representative of certain groups.

I feel like as a result, I feel like even though I held that more cynical view, and kind of, I don't want to say I felt as if the university was pretty hypocritical, in speaking to... I feel like it's also interesting to speak to people who may have different political views than you, because, even though sometimes it frustrates me, I think in some ways, someone said something to me that was pretty interesting after the Milo situation happened. I don't remember what the conversation kind of started, how it started, but I know I mentioned that I felt like the university was kind of like a hypocrite, and they also explained that it was, that Allegiance, in a way, is the world in a box. I think that that's definitely really true, because I feel like, though I have had some of these negative experiences, I think that it kind of prepares me for the real world.

In a way, it's just like I'm experiencing what I'm going to experience in the working force after I graduate. I'm experiencing what I'm going the encounter in life, because... I think the person might have had similar political views as me, but it just was a really good, I feel like that was an accurate position to hold because, realistically speaking, it prepares you for life. You're not going to always be in settings where people are always going to agree with you, especially when you want to go into a field, like, for me, in law, which is very underrepresented, Black people make up 5% of all lawyers. I have to be prepared to go into settings where people are going to have completely different political views than

me, where people aren't going to agree with everything that I, hold the same views that I hold.

I feel like if you look at it in that way, and in that context, I feel like Allegiance is definitely really reflective of society, and how it's going to be. Just like you can be in a class, like I realized with the whole Milo thing, I could be in a class full of people who are Trump supporters, and who have these internalized racist views. I could also be in a job with people who have those same views, and I would not know how they feel because they're going to keep it to themselves, and I can't just go around feeling like, "Okay, I can't trust anybody around me because I don't know what kind of views they have." It's not just Allegiance, because it's reflective of the world outside of this. I think Allegiance has, my experience as a student has been very turbulent at times, but I think I've had an overall good experience because I met a lot of allies, and I feel like I've been educated in so many ways on so many different issues relating to inequality, and just, I've made so many great connections. I think Allegiance has been an amazing experience, but some of the more negative aspects have been reflective of the society outside. Which, aren't necessarily good things, but in a way, it is good, in terms of preparation.

Melissa viewed Allegiance as a microcosm of the world, where not everyone will share her beliefs or think and behave in a favorable way toward her. Coming to understand that Allegiance was preparing her for “the real world” helped her better deal with “the Milo incident.”

ROBYN: Overall [my experience at Allegiance] has been very eye-opening. I feel more in touch with myself and if I was to be just in my typical suburban small town, I've learnt how to speak up for myself. I've learnt how to negotiate. I've learnt, I guess, how to tackle new problems and to always try to troubleshoot before I say that I can't do it on my own. But I mean, it's been fulfilling in the sense that I've met a lot of people too that are just like me and that my struggle might be unique but it's not something that hasn't been experienced or hasn't had a great outcome. I know people just like myself who are trying to get a pharm degree, or even a science degree, it's achievable and it can be done, so yeah, I'm not defeated in that sense. I feel like I'm finally in a place where I know how to go about school and that's a cool feeling too. It's a lot of trial and error though.

JOCELYN: I feel I don't regret coming here at all. I definitely think it's been a worthwhile experience. I enjoy the resources that I can take from because all the universities don't have the money that we do have. So whatever I can take from this university, I take it proudly and gladly. As for becoming an [alumnus] of Allegiance one day, I definitely don't think I'm gonna be one of those die hard, “Go Allegiance” fans. I just don't feel like they did enough for me in my undergrad for me to give them that recognition in the future. But nonetheless I am happy I came here. I'm happy that I had the experiences I had here, because I definitely believe they've prepared me for the real world, coming with my couple of Black professors I think they've [done] amazing jobs in my academia to promote me or inspire me I guess to do things.

Olivia stated that she “would give [her] experience a 9.5 out of 10,” and she also noted that she would encourage others, such as younger family members, to attend Allegiance:

.... I have a lot of friends, younger grades from my church that are about to start applying to school, and I'm like, "No. You got to go to Allegiance." And I think I'm saying that to them because I know what's here in terms of the communities that they can become a part of. The educators that they can cross paths with that will help them with their future.

Allegiance is known for offering its students a high-quality education, and opportunities to engage with faculty through research experiences and for having a large alumni network to which students may connect for opportunities outside the classroom. For these reasons, the women would recommend Allegiance to others. Additionally, they were able to build community with others with similar interests. Altogether, the women appreciated their Allegiance experience and acknowledged how their views of the college may be seen as contradictory. The “complicated” relationship experienced at Allegiance was reflected in many ways – academically, socially, and politically. Yet, they grew significantly as they endured. Still, they were clear that the university could have done a much better job at supporting them through these processes.

While participants spoke to challenges associated with attending Allegiance, none expressed regret at their overall experience, despite some of the negativity with which they were met at different times. In fact, Cleo, Olivia, Melissa, and Jocelyn recognized their Allegiance experience as preparation for life after college. Yet, their hope was that Allegiance would have done a better job at supporting them, and will do better at supporting and welcoming its Students of Color in the future. Despite the institution’s shortcomings, they valued their Allegiance experience and desire for the university to push beyond its current state and become an exceptional option for all student populations.

Summary. The participants' view of Allegiance reflects how they describe their college experiences, including challenges they encountered. One of these challenges was mitigating their initial excitement around the diversity Allegiance was said to offer with their actual experiences once they arrived at the college. Equally as disappointing was the lack of support from college administrators, particularly in how complaints from Students of Color were received. Altogether, the participants felt that the experiences at Allegiance University awakened them to a reality akin to what they should expect in "the real world," post-college where they would experience more diversity and others would challenge their beliefs. Therefore, they were not disappointed in their overall Allegiance experience as it disabused them of any illusions of what is to come.

The participants' views of the college also represent their deployment of aspirational, navigational, resistant, and social capital. A further discussion of the application of these forms of capital is included in the following chapter.

Invisibility and Visibility

The discussion of invisibility and visibility was prompted by asking about a portion of Signithia Fordham's (1993) seminal research in which she states,

...the most salient characteristic of the academically successful females at Capital High is a deliberate silence, a controlled response to their evolving, ambiguous status as academically successful students. Consequently, silence as a strategy for academic success at Capital is largely unconscious. Developing and using this strategy at the high school level enables high-achieving African-American females to deflect the latent and not too latent hostility and anger that might be directed at them were they to be both highly visible and academically successful. Invisibility is a highly valued prerequisite for academic success (p. 17).

This learned invisibility compromises Black women's ability to fully express themselves (Fordham, 1993) and connect to other Black women in the same space, as fictive kin, mentors, and friends (Fordham, 1993). Thus, of interest to the present study were the places and spaces at Allegiance University where unaffiliated, first-generation, low-income Black women feel

comfortable being visible, or “loud,” and may use their voice as a means to express their Community Cultural Wealth, and where their “loudness” may be determined meaningful, particularly as an expression of their CCW. Further, visibility refers to having voice or agency, whereas invisibility includes feeling unseen and/or unheard, or being silenced by another entity.

Participants were asked when and where they felt visible and invisible, and each responded that they had felt both at Allegiance.

MALIA: I feel like - when I was mentioning the whole professor thing - I think that that's the place where it [feeling invisible] was most common because anywhere else I would honestly avoid my white peers and stuff. I would avoid putting myself in those situations. My [track] teammates, they would try to go to white parties and I would be the one to say, “Nah, I'm good. I'll stay home.” So, yeah, I feel like I only really experienced that in classrooms. I would ask a professor, “Can I have an extension on this assignment,” or whatever the case may be, and they would tell me no, and I would literally notice - it happened to me my sophomore year I remember, three weeks later, it was my general psych class - I watched a student ask the same question and he was a white kid and he got it. It was just little things like that.

Again, something that really stood out to me was just the way that I was talked to. I always felt like I was talked down to, and yeah, you're my professor and stuff, but you know, I'm still human, we're still both adults, and I've always felt that way, especially about my professors. Exceptions of some, not all, but for the most part that's really how I felt. So, yeah, I definitely felt invisible at times.

Malia reflected on how she did not feel a social connection with her teammates who did not mind partying in majority white spaces. She was able to avoid them in social settings. Yet, in the classroom, which she could not avoid, she did not feel valued by her professors. She felt that she was treated differently as a Black woman. Shuri shared a similar sentiment as related to how her professor ignored her in favor of a white male student to the extent that she and her other classmates of color also noticed and discussed it after class.

SHURI: Well, in this particular class, there's five Black people, and I'm the only female. So in my group, the person that pretty much says what I say, he's a white male. And then there's an Asian female, and then there's me, and then there's a Black male, and we're the ones that usually talk about it after class how I'm saying the same thing at first, but my teacher just doesn't hear me, or maybe he does, and he just... I don't know. It sounds better coming from a man.

I really don't... because it's not even like he's closer. It's just... I just... I don't know. He just doesn't... or maybe he hears me but he doesn't react the same as he does with the other student. So **in my head** I think he's not listening to me. But just on praise or whatever, I notice he usually gives it to the male student that's in my group.

Shuri has tried to think through why her professor ignored her in favor of a white male classmate. In an effort not to attribute her professor's actions to his racism and sexism – she was the only Black woman in the classroom and she placed the blame on herself by saying that what was happening was “in her head.” She even dismissed that not only had she recognized the discrimination, her classmates of color had as well. Her professor's behavior toward her was not attributable to *her* head. As noted in Reynolds, Sneeva, and Beehler (2010), Black students face negative consequences as a result of racism and race-related stress in the classroom, such as self-doubt, insecurity, and isolation. Equally, the impacts of being made to feel invisible had social and academic effects for the women in this study.

Olivia's comments about invisibility center on her father, which speaks to men being the arbiters of what or whom gets acknowledged. Silence is required of her at home and in school, and she had to temper her desire to speak up by doing what her father requested of her:

I feel like I've felt that sense of invisibility more so now that I'm about to graduate and leave than when I first started. I didn't really... I don't want to say I didn't care, but I guess I was more nonchalant about having a voice. I was just happy to get into college. Happy to find a way to pay for college and get an education. Then when I started really figuring out what it was that I wanted to do and realizing that what I wanted to do I would need to have a voice and start standing up more, speaking out more, then I did feel it was a little bit [dampened].

For example, I was writing my personal statement, because I'm applying for law school, and I asked my dad to look over it for me. And I wanted to touch on, a little bit, certain points that are maybe a little bit louder than what normal people would write in their personal statement. Mainly because my family is of Haitian descent, so I wanted to talk about what it's like being an immigrant, talking about immigration. Not necessarily bringing in politics but touching on it a little bit.

But he told me, “Don't say anything about immigration. Don't even say anything about Trump or his administration. Or anything. For fear that the people reading your personal statement won't let you in.” I said, “If that's what I believe in and that's the reason I'm

going to law school, and the reason I want to make a change, why shouldn't I be able to mention that?" He's like, "You know, you want them to like you. You want them to accept you. You're a female. We already can't afford undergraduate school, so we need to make sure that you can get into a good school that will give you a lot of money." I felt that I had to really water down my voice and what I wanted to say in my own personal statement, a statement that would define me, to appease other people, or to get something out of it.

Her silence about issues she cared about and wanted to fight for was encouraged by her father because he was afraid that she would be "noticed" and face negative repercussions as a result. Olivia's father even pointed to her gender and low-income status as justification for why she should be silent. He encouraged her to compromise her voice so that she would have a better chance at success (Fordham, 1993). Her intersectional identity impacted her father's understanding of what was required of her to be deemed admissible to law school as a low-income female – silence. Though Olivia understood her father's concerns and his desire to silence her so she could reap the benefits, she felt the misgivings of having to compromise her voice.

Participants also spoke of other ways invisibility was reflected in their Allegiance experiences.

OLIVIA: ...I think to the university people like me are invisible. I think that we just filter through the system. If we graduate, we do, if we don't, oh well thing. I don't think they go really out looking for us the same way they go looking for other types of students.

Olivia perceived that the university does not pay attention to students "like her" – low-income, first-generation, Black women – because the university doesn't "look for" them to assess what their specific needs are.

MELISSA: That was just, those experiences, since I've been here, the various experiences, it's social encounters like that I feel like have made me feel more invisible, and less likely to speak in certain settings because I don't know. Especially with the anonymous thing, and then the over 400 students at the Milo thing, I don't know who I can trust, or what, I hate to say white students, but what white students around me are an ally, versus an enemy. It's very hard, especially with the current president, and the current political climate. You don't know who feels what way, and I think that's why in social

settings I'm less likely to talk, and in academic spaces, where I have more of, I feel like, a voice because I'm a student, and I pay my tuition to go here, and professors are obviously more respectful, I feel more visible and feel the need to speak up more in those settings, versus in social settings.

Although she felt unsure of her voice in social settings, Melissa refused to be silent in the classroom. As a tuition-paying student, she claimed the classroom as her space.

Participants also acknowledged the ways in which they believe Black students are “invisible” at the university, by sheer numbers.

ANIYA: ...I guess I could understand what they mean by being invisible because there's not that many of us, but like, I mean, I guess I feel like I myself probably don't feel that way because I feel like I'm a good asset to the classroom and things in that respect, but like having Black professors and things like that, like there are limited amounts so I can see that there's not that much representation. But as far as me feeling invisible, I don't feel that invisible. But I could... I'm aware of that, like my presence is not as abundant as other representations in the classroom.

ROBYN: I've noticed for myself, the best way of action is to kind of just to work within whatever situation that I'm in, in a quiet manner, just keep going about what I need to do on my own and even if I'm struggling in a class, I feel like I might not say too much because I don't want people to know, maybe at that immediate time but I know I'm gonna work out of that, and I'll go through my own means to get better in that class, so that might be studying with my peers or attending office hours, but how I present myself is very much put together, even in how I dress.

I'm not as loud because I don't want to be **painted** as a person who's a very loud person, I feel like that has a lot of negative connotations in an academic standpoint, so if you're more so just a person who acts more put together and that could, I mean, I guess be invisible because you're just kind of... I can't find the word that I'm looking for. But you're just acting out a role, I guess, to be seen as somebody who's of a good academic standing, then maybe that's what it takes. I don't know why that is but I've always been a person who's just been to myself, kind of quiet, and I get what I need to get done. I think, I guess that plays a role in invisibility.

Robyn's preoccupation with being perceived favorably by anyone with whom she engaged aligns with Morris' (2007) discussion of ladylike behaviors being encouraged for Black girls. Robyn has been socialized into silence (Fordham, 1993), which she uses to her advantage to gain the assistance she needs.

ANIYA: [My study abroad experience] was great. There's obviously not a lot... I don't even know if there was any Black people in my particular program that came with me from Allegiance. I had one other Black girl in my class. She was from Texas, so... But she also had the same issues as I did, not that many Black girls around, but it was definitely an experience. I had a great time. I learned a lot.

CLEO: I know freshman year for me, my dorm living space was... Me and my roommate, we were literally the only Black females on the floor.

ANIYA: I feel like there's, like I said before, some sort of competition usually [among Black women], like either for attention, or for like in the classroom, trying to like assert power, but I don't have that many Black women in my classes actually.

In the focus group, the women also reflected on some of their experiences living in spaces in which they felt comfortable expressing things unique to the Black woman experience, such as tying down their hair at night before bed, and not being afraid of other non-Black people witnessing this practice. While Melissa lived on a dorm floor that focused on the Black experience at Allegiance, Cleo and Malia did not have that same experience.

MELISSA: And then more specifically, I talked about the Frederick Douglass floor that I was fortunate enough to live on for like two years. And I just feel like that really gave me a community of people that looked like me that were directly on my floor. And I was able to meet other transfer students through that, and get to also meet with other freshman students and kind of be there as like a mentor and kind of role model with them, also.

And I feel like it was definitely a big part of my experience, because just meeting other people who stayed in more general, I guess, buildings, they'd talk about how they didn't feel comfortable like straightening their hair, like with their roommate, if their roommate wasn't necessarily Black. Or they felt uncomfortable with their [hair] bonnet, going to like the bathroom. Stuff like that, I didn't necessarily have to experience my first two years here, because I lived around all Black people on my floor. So that definitely really helped out, in my experience.

CLEO: And the same with like freshman year, I lived in a co-ed dorm on McDougal, and we, me and my roommate, were literally the only Black people on the floor. So it's like, with the whole hair thing, like, we had constant meetings about hair in the shower, and I was like, "You know it's not ours," like, "*we know* it's not ours."

MALIA: So contrary to what Melissa said about her experience, like living in like, her first two years, like for me, everybody on my floor was white besides me and my teammate. Like, we were the Black girls. And so, I definitely, like she was saying, like oh, she'd have to worry about being, you know, embarrassed or something, like walking

out with your bonnet or something. But for us, it was like, take off your bonnet, take off your bandana before you go outside.

So yeah, I definitely had a different experience when it came to that.

Normal practices of undoing a headscarf to style their hair for the day were overwrought to ensure the women did not reveal too much about themselves that others would not have been familiar with and thus call into question.

When asked where they feel most visible on campus, respondents spoke about on-campus locations that acknowledged their identities and interests.

SHURI: [I feel most visible] at my job [at the student center] or my club [an open mic poetry collaboration]. In both of those places I have a position.

At my job, I'm the head student manager, and I've been there the longest, so usually people come to me. Be like, "Oh, Shuri, I'm not sure..." especially the new managers. They've never been a manager, so usually either [they] text me if I'm not there or they try to say, "Oh, what would you do in this situation?" So I feel like my voice is for the most part always heard.

And in my club the same thing. Well, not that I've been there the longest, but I'm just very dedicated to the club, so I guess people listen just because of my passion or enthusiasm.

ROBYN: Langston Campus... I feel like it's the place where a lot of people just come through the most in the day and there's also a lot of Black events that happen there. There's one prominent area on campus called the Langston Circle, and it's outside the student center, and anytime it gets warm, all the Black people come out, and they sit outside, and they play music, or perform, or maybe, like the other extracurricular groups, they'll come out, and you'll have the Alphas or the Iotas [Black Greek letter organizations], or somebody stepping. Something will happen there, and it's a great congregation, and it's exciting to watch.

Then if there's something more formal going on, there's the Black Cultural Center, which is on Brier campus, and it's one of our more historical Black buildings, so it has just a lot of academic programs. Maybe sometimes we'll watch a film in reference to maybe even Black History Month, that's probably something that's going on now, or we'll have other board meetings for Black organizations, so there's [the Caribbean student organization], and then there's a whole bunch of other ones, there's a West African [student organization]. When these people have their meetings, it's typically in Lang or it's maybe [at the Black Cultural Center].

MALIA: Most visible, where and when? I feel most visible at Black events, like cookouts - today there's a Black history event at the Black Cultural Center, like soul food, all that - I feel more visible. I feel more inclined to stand out, put on my best outfit like "I'm here!" The dining hall, the MS center, Allegiance Zone has definitely over time . . . I guess it was always like that, but I wasn't exposed to it til my senior year. It's always a lot of Black people in there, and it just feels good, just to be around that. Right now, well this year, we created a Black Allegiance chat. It's new. I wish we woulda had it over time, but it's kind of nice because it's Brothers and Sisters helping each other. We're in there sometimes like, "Oh, if you need a book, I got it," we drop in different flyers, different job opportunities and it's over a thousand of us in there. I never even knew there was this many Black people here, you know, so that's dope.

Malia notes that there are particular spaces where Black students often congregate in which she desires to be seen, using her clothing to signal her comfort in being present and acknowledged.

These are spaces in which she feels welcome and appreciated, unlike the "white" spaces she avoids:

University Lane is white. This whole campus to me is just white. McDougal... I knew that that campus was more predominantly African-American, but I just never really went to that campus. I wish I would have my freshman year or my sophomore year, but I didn't really start going there until my junior year. Again, it's because of me being an athlete. My world was pretty different than the average student here. I would definitely just try to stay on Langston, Langston Dining Hall, you wouldn't catch me at Downey, not because it's nasty, but because I knew the white people were there. The music selection in the both of the dining halls was different. One tailored to white people, one tailored to Black people. I noticed all of those things.

University Lane is located on Allegiance's main campus. To Malia, this thoroughfare, which is accessible to all students, represents a space dominated by white students, and she does not feel welcome. She chose instead to identify spaces where there were more Black students. Similarly,

Robyn also spoke to a desire to connect to others of the same race:

The school has a lot of programs for African communities as well as Caribbean communities and they try to just partner together so that there is that kind of union on campus, and there's a lot of people that have a very front face in the orgs, so they'll get a lot of people to want to come, or they'll create a group chat, and they'll just keep letting you know of when these events are. There's a fashion show coming up at the end of this month that's really popular.

Specifically, Cleo and Olivia noted how they connected with friends and felt visible with them as they shared their intersectional identity as Black women.

CLEO: I definitely feel most visible on campus within my own friend group, because everyone else is also Black females. The people that I surround myself with are like me, not major-wise, or height or something, but literally color of skin, or our paths have some similarities, and the same events, and programs, and organizations we go to, so that's the similarities that we have.

OLIVIA: Definitely when I'm with my peers, those that look like me. In the... I'm part of the gospel choir here, as well. So during rehearsals when I'm with a bunch of other colored girls and boys, when I'm at the Black Cultural Center, definitely, for sure. Or events that they hold, for example [the oratorical contest] that they held maybe a couple weeks ago. You're in a room with a bunch of other Black people, and people are giving these speeches, performances. It's very empowering. And you're listening to their speeches, and even though you're not up there giving it to them, you definitely feel very visible, very present in that situation.

Another space acknowledged as a space in which to feel visible was in courses led by Black faculty, which aligns with Guiffrida and Douthit's (2010) research and indicates that although strong relationships are vital to student success at college, Black students do not connect easily with white faculty.

JOCELYN: ...I definitely feel more visible with Black professors. I feel it's easier to talk to them, relate to them.... Yeah, because now that I'm thinking about it, the classes that I've been engaged in, my professors were Black so... I mean it's always around probably Black people. So BCC is one of my places. I don't go many places on campus. Yeah BCC. Yeah, that's about it really.

Alternately, respondents also noted classroom interactions which made them feel invisible:

SHURI: Originally, I was taking computer science classes. I was a computer science major and now I'm just an [information technology] major. But in the majority of my classes, because I have a lot of programming experience, I would tend to, in the beginning, try to raise my hand and answer the questions or at least help other students, but I noticed that... especially in group assignments, I would say something, and I know that I'm right, but no one would listen to me unless someone else said it, and they would say it verbatim the thing I said. And sometimes when our professor would come listen to us, he'd be like, he or she, they would hear me say something and they'd be like, "Okay," and then when the [white] person said it they'd be like, "That's right!" Or "Blah, blah, blah..." And I'm looking at... Some of my other classmates who noticed, we would just, not laugh it off, but we would talk about it after class, about how that's crazy.

But even I have a class this semester that the same thing happened, every class. So now I just do the assignment, like our group assignment. I just take it on and do it, but to our professor, he thinks everyone's contributing and everyone's getting equal participation but I literally do the whole assignment.

The classroom, by and large, is a non-Black space at a historically white institution. Shuri discussed the extra work she felt the need to do as a Black woman (Banks, 2009) to receive recognition for her contributions to the class, but for which she still did not receive acknowledgement from the professor.

Four additional participants spoke to feelings of invisibility in classes. Specifically, for Malia, feelings of invisibility were rooted in racism and sexism:

Yeah. I think that racism and sexism is something that we try to steer away from because it's just kind of natural. Because of our history we don't wanna pinpoint that that's happening, but it happens. I feel like there were times where I would, again, encounter a white man, or even a professor or something and they would talk to me differently than they would talk to a white girl or a white boy. Definitely with professors. I would definitely see with their tone of voice, I felt like they didn't pay me as much attention in classrooms, but I tried to say, "Oh maybe it's just me." I've always blamed it on myself, I don't know.

Even though Malia did not want to pinpoint reasons why she may have been ignored by her professors, she believed she experienced the classroom differently from white male students due to how she was treated by white male professors in the classroom. Interestingly, Malia stated that racism and sexism are "just kind of natural," in that it happens, and she knows she has experienced it. Yet, like Shuri, she absorbed the burden of professors' racism and sexism by attributing this treatment to a fictional something she had done to make them exhibit biases towards her. Malia and Shuri's experiences reflect the burden they are willing to carry so as not to accept they had faced racism or sexism at Allegiance.

Robyn acknowledged that she learned to make herself visible by asking for help and reaching out specifically to others who "look like" her, Black females. Her intersectional identity was important for making helpful academic connections:

In class, I feel like maybe a teacher might not acknowledge that you might need more assistance if you don't speak up, so as far as invisibility in that sense, you do have to speak up for yourself because if you don't, you will fall behind.

In other spaces where I might feel invisible, I don't know because I've also learnt, as you get older, if you want to work to make yourself a better person, you have to make yourself be seen, otherwise you'll, again, fall behind.

I don't necessarily feel like I have that kind of invisibility anywhere else. I think over time too, you notice how you can communicate with other people that look like you so that you can get ahead, like if someone else knows something, you connect with them and then you just learn more things about yourself and the other kinds of programs that are out there for you, especially, what's it called? [The STEM opportunity program], so that's for a lot of science, STEM majors. I have found too, studying with my friends who are taking similar courses like me, that are African American, that that's another plus. Yeah, I kind of hang out with a lot of... Again, as I told you, the way I knew about this [research opportunity] was through that Black Allegiance group chat, so I kind of make sure that I'm always sticking with people that have a same likelihood of needing the same help, so that's what I try to do.

Robyn found entities – her friends in the STEM opportunity program and Black Allegiance – to connect with, which made her feel less invisible. She had learned over time how to communicate her needs to those who could help her. Robyn's experience is counter to that of Shuri and Malia who were not acknowledged when they spoke up for help in a class, or were treated differently from white males in their classes.

Jocelyn was more reticent in the classroom because she did not feel the need to make herself visible by speaking out unless she was specifically asked to do so:

Not really [invisible], just like not comfortable I guess. Just never felt like what I said here really does much, if that makes sense. Not that it doesn't do anything, you know it's just conversationalist class. Most of the time I feel like people in class are just kind of trying to get the professors' attention. Unless it's like you're asking me a question personally, I just don't feel the need to put my presence out there.

Contrary to Jocelyn, Melissa had always been open to participating in class until her first year at Allegiance when she felt intimidated by the intelligence displayed by her classmates, which she attributed to their higher socio-economic status and thus their potentially better preparation for college:

Okay. I think that in some ways, I've always been the type of student that, throughout my life, who's felt very comfortable participating in academic spaces specifically, so regardless, I feel like coming into college, even though I had always had this mindset that I love to participate, be the first, in the front of the class, from high school, and in my middle school and stuff, but I always went to predominately Black schools because of the area that I lived in, the urban area. Coming into Allegiance University, I started at [a different Allegiance campus], I feel like, though I had always had that mindset, I did feel, initially coming in, sort of deterred, and intimidated, because in some ways, I feel like the vocabulary of some of the students that were in my classes, because they might have been more well-off, or just were better speakers than me, so in some ways when I first started, my first semester, freshman year in college, I felt deterred from wanting to speak in class. I went, the invisibility factor definitely came into play, because I didn't want to speak and then sound ignorant or be a negative representation of where I come from, or of Black people in general, because I wasn't the most eloquent speaker. I didn't want to speak up in class.

Melissa was very aware that others might attribute the ineloquence in her speech to a perceived deficiency she possessed because of her race, rather than the idea that she simply may not have been a good speaker. Malia expressed the same sentiment:

Not necessarily make myself invisible. I've definitely felt like I was put into situations, but at the same time, I feel like unconsciously I might have. I might have not chosen to speak up because I didn't want to be looked at as, "Oh, that's that Black girl," and if I said something wrong, "Well that's that Black girl," so yeah, I probably have.

Malia was careful in choosing when to share her voice for fear of saying something that reflected poorly on her race. Both women felt the burden of representing their entire race while in the classroom.

Voice by choice and by force. For some participants, there was a nexus of invisibility and visibility, in which they possessed and enacted the ability to choose either. Whereas Fordham (1993) posits invisibility as an unconscious decision, the women in the study seem to speak to something different as they were quite strategic about how they would use their voices.

While Jocelyn was not very comfortable speaking out in class, she was aware that as a Black woman who is underrepresented in her chosen career field, she must push herself to ensure she has a voice:

I sort of have [felt invisible on campus]. I feel like in my classes I'm not that person to be like, "Let me tell you what I think." I don't really jump out to say something. I guess I've seen it a little bit more now that I'm doing a sports concentration in journalism which is not really a big women segment. And of course, it's not a Black woman thing. So, I guess I felt like I kind of need to stay back and sort of just listen instead of being out in the open in those fields I guess. But I feel like I do that with most of my classes. Unless... the classes that I've been most comfortable where I've actually spoken were probably when I had Black professors. And that's the time that I was kind of like, [excitedly] "Oh yeah, let's converse." Because they're like me in a way.

I could probably count the Black professors I've had on my hand. So, yeah, I definitely have seen and experienced some invisibility here at Allegiance, but it's by choice.

Jocelyn felt more comfortable speaking out in courses with Black professors. The racial aspect of their identities was important because she felt they had something in common with her as a Black woman, deeming them worthy of her voice. On the other hand, Robyn saw value in being visible because it offered her the opportunity to get the assistance she needed, as she stated, "I avoid invisibility. I know where it exists but I try to avoid it for my own benefit." Robyn learned that not speaking up could only have negative effects for her academically, so she made sure to say what she needed when she needed it.

As a social justice advocate and future lawyer, Melissa has engaged her classmates to ensure their problematic statements did not go unchecked. Since her first year at the college, she has learned the value of speaking up regardless of how she may be viewed by others. She has taken it upon herself to educate her peers and she actually speaks out for the benefit of others:

I feel like in the educational spaces, and also in social settings, I feel like there have been things that have occurred to make me want to speak up. Personally, in educational spaces specifically, I remember my freshman year, I was a criminal justice major before I switched into political science, and in one of my classes, it was around the time when like the Ray Rice situation happened. I think he's a football player, or basketball player, something like that. He was on video beating his wife in the elevator, or something like that, and someone in the class kind of spoke up about the issue and was defending him as an athlete and kind of defending his actions, saying that, "Okay, she's not pressing charges, so obviously it's not that big of a deal." Kind of that mindset. [In 2014, professional football player Ray Rice was accused of committing domestic violence against his then-fiancée, who refused to press charges or speak ill of him publicly. Rice was released from the Baltimore Ravens and has not played professional football since.]

I feel like, sometimes, having people, in certain classes, say problematic things, and everybody else in the class is not necessarily, I don't want to say people are receptive of it, but I think some people are complacent, or some people might be more tending to not want to speak up, so I feel like, sometimes, when that occurs, I feel the need to want to correct people and raise my hand and say something in those academic spaces, so that people aren't just able to, I don't know...

When people just make this certain kind of ignorant remark, it's like, uninformed kind of comment, and then have no one say anything. Other people might think that whatever he said is right or go on thinking that's acceptable. I feel like, sometimes, I need to speak up so that that way anybody who else might not be able to speak up, I speak on their behalf, or just to educate the person who made the comment, in case they, they just might be ignorant of the situation.

Robyn and Melissa noted the role race played into their feelings of invisibility in that they are immediately recognized as a minority when they are in majority spaces.

ROBYN: I feel like the sense of invisibility is kinda like an oxymoron in the sense that my skin color is so "melanated" [enriched with melanin], like I would be spotted out in a room of other people who don't look like me in a classroom, but as far as like speech and voice, I feel like I have been a person who's always been quiet, so I can relate in that sense because even in nature, I feel like African Americans, historically, have been seen as maybe more aggressive or even possessing an attitude maybe in the workplace, for example.

For Melissa, being the "only" in a social setting posed challenges because others were not welcoming. She found similar difficulty in the classroom, but felt more of a duty to show her value as a Black student in that space:

For example, if I go to, say, a new organization is on campus, or something, that I'm interested in, and I go, and I'm the one Black person in the space, specifically as a Black female, I feel like, especially if it's a predominately male, predominantly white space, which I found that a lot of my political science classes are prone to be, in those settings I feel like in some ways it makes me less comfortable with engaging in the rest of, the people in that space, but I feel like, regardless, I still try to speak up and to, now, I feel like, I don't know, I feel like it's kind of a necessity to speak up and make my presence known because I want to show that Black people are here, we can advance, and that we are able to compete on the same level as anyone else in this room, and in any space.

I feel like if it's not an academic space, or something, where it's like, I don't want to say competitive, but if it's not something that is necessary for me to speak, and more social, laid back settings, where I'm supposed to engage with other students, I feel like, sometimes, I feel less comfortable because everyone else, there's no one else in the room who looks like me. I feel like in more social settings, sometimes, it will be a little harder

because I have less of a desire to want to engage with the people because they aren't necessarily making me feel welcome. There's no one I feel can relate to my experiences, so I feel like, in some ways, I don't necessarily want to open up, and I also don't feel the most welcome.

In more social settings I feel more invisible, but in academic spaces, or educational programs, or certain things like that, then I feel more of a need to speak up.

Olivia and Melissa spoke about the privilege of having a voice and having something to say.

OLIVIA: ...I think I've been privileged enough to be able to give my voice if I have... given the opportunity. I think my, that instance [of completing her personal statement for law school] maybe a couple months ago, was the only real time where I really saw [a less ideal view of Allegiance] for once, because even though Allegiance is PWI, I feel like I've had this, "I could care a less if they're PWI," attitude. In the way that I do things, the clubs that I associate myself with, the people that I associate myself with, and if they don't like it, that's their business kind of thing.

MELISSA: I feel like, in some ways, I don't necessarily want to entertain certain people with some of the things that they say, when it comes to, when people are very unaware of how privileged they are, and kind of think that other people are just so well off, I feel like, in some ways, I have, on the individual level, like if I encounter someone, and if they're either speaking to someone near me, or speaking to me directly, if it upsets me enough, I'm the type of person I'm going to speak up about it. I've been trying to learn to not always be the person that has to speak up, because sometimes you need to let other people speak up, or just let people live with their ignorance. Some people don't want to change their mindset. I feel like, even if you educate certain people, they might still try to defend their ignorance, or defend their view, and won't even give you the opportunity to try to hear you.

Both women recognized that though they use their voices, others are not compelled to listen. At the same time, Melissa recognized the value of silence in that she cannot always take on the task of speaking out to educate or defend others. Melissa was constantly doing the "work" that Banks (2009) refers to when she notes that Black women undergraduates are tasked with more than their duties as students; instead they must advocate not only for themselves, but also for others and educate those with problematic views about why their views are problematic.

Summary. Study participants described feelings of visibility and invisibility at Allegiance. They noted the invisibility of Black students in that they are not widely represented at the university. Further, there are campus spaces that demand their silence or invisibility, such

as classes in which they are not acknowledged for their positive contributions or overlooked for inclusion in a group project, or in social situations where they may choose to remain silent so as not to be perceived negatively. Alternately, participants felt most visible or heard in spaces that reflected their identities and supported their interests, such as at the BCC, in their friendship groups, or in courses with Black professors.

The discussion of invisibility and visibility highlighted the participants' possession and deployment of all the forms of CCW Yosso (2005) denotes - aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social capital. A further discussion of these forms of capital is included in the following chapter.

Double-consciousness

While participants described themselves in a variety of ways, what appeared often in their discussions were the ways in which they were conscious of how they were seen by others. The saliency of intersectionality was reflected as participants often referred to themselves racially, rather than via multiple identities or inclusive of the identities of being gendered, a first-generation student, or coming from a low socioeconomic status. All eight participants referred to a sense of double-consciousness most often associated with their racial identity. While they were aware of their own perceptions of themselves, they were hyper-aware of others' perceptions of them – as students at Allegiance, as Black women, and as low-income, first-generation Black women. Participants noted that at times they felt a sense of double-consciousness, wherein they were equally aware of their speech and comportment in front of peers and others of differing races, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and social locations as authority figures. Operating in a manner that could be viewed negatively by someone outside the group – or with a lack of awareness or double consciousness – meant consequences for the race, and potentially for the

participant's intersectional identity as a Black woman. Thus, they were conscious of their speech and language use, dress, and behavior as a means to be successful or to gain what they needed in particular situations, and often others' perceptions were used as a motivator for their success.

Participants often referenced the tension between how they saw themselves and how others saw them or what others expected of them, specifically, family members, classmates, and professors, and generally, society.

SHURI: I remember one Thanksgiving, they [my family] were like, "Oh, you sound like a Black Panther extremist." And I thought that was a compliment, but I could tell how they were saying it that it wasn't supposed to be a compliment just in terms of me wanting to fight for justice and whatever, and them thinking it was not something I should be doing or not thinking in terms of the community within the stakes and even gullibly.

Melissa alluded to how her intersectional identity contributed to her double-consciousness:

I feel like, in some ways, you try to make sure that you're always on your A game, because you don't want to be underestimated and doubted, just by virtue of being a person of color. I think it also comes into play of the stereotypes of being a Black woman, that you also police yourself because of those.

I feel like, as a woman, and then as a Black woman, I feel like it's that intersectional aspect of it that kind of creates the need to have that self-awareness, and to police yourself. Other people don't have that, so I feel like, in certain settings, it creates a slight burden. It's not a humongous burden, but it creates more of a burden on you, than other people, in that setting who might be male, or might be a white male, and don't have to worry about it at all. Because, even if they do speak in a way that isn't necessarily proper, no one's really going to think anything of it, I feel like.

Melissa's hyper-awareness spoke to a level of discomfort she felt in settings with men and white people. She noted that even if Black women share academic space with Black men, a Black woman still has to compose herself in a way that reflects she should be judged fairly for her contributions.

Olivia recounted how her father strongly encouraged her to change her personal statement for law school because he feared that she held too impassioned a position about immigration. Given the current political climate, he was afraid that she may not get accepted nor

receive funding, and if that were the case, he could not afford to pay out of pocket for her education. When I asked Olivia if she ultimately changed her personal statement to something more acceptable to her father, she replied:

I did. I did change [my personal statement]. And it was a little frustrating, and the personal statement that I have now, that I ended up sending, I'm still happy with it, and I know it'll get me into the school that I want to, but I feel like I had to **put on** a whole different face in order to do so. If that makes sense.

It's frustrating. But I'm not disappointed because the face that I **put on** is not completely... I feel like it's still one of my faces. It's a face that I developed while I was here at Allegiance, and it's still me. It's not just my whole face. It's a part of my face, or part of a face that I have to show, when I really wanted to show the whole face.

Me: So in order to... I just want to make sure I'm getting it right. In order to... The only word that comes to mind is “survive”-

OLIVIA: Yeah.

Me: - in certain spaces here, you've had to make sure that you could be one way there, one way another place?

OLIVIA: Exactly.

Me: Okay. It's not necessarily a compromise, it's just a choice to behave differently?

OLIVIA: Right. And I guess one of the things, I guess you could say helped being at a PWI, was I got to develop these different faces. I feel like if I went to a HBCU or something else, another institution, I would just have my one face and that's the face I would show. But being here, I was able to develop the face that I would show to administrators, the face that I show to my professors, the face that I show to my friends. All those different faces still being me, but I can still pick and choose. Take them off, **put them on**, when I need.

Olivia was aware that she had *put on* different faces, parts of a face, or masks, according to the different spaces she had been in. While she felt that she remained authentic, she had to choose which behaviors she would exhibit, given where she was at the time. This was in contrast to how early in her schooling at Allegiance, she tried to assert her identity and project confidence by approaching everything with an attitude of not caring.

Jocelyn indicated that other's low expectations of her provided motivation for her to present herself well, and Melissa considered the ways Black women's comportment is dictated by the spaces they are in at the time, and how they are impacted by it.

JOCELYN: ... eyes are always watching. That you have to be conscious of what you say, what you do, how you do it, and how well you do it. Like you always have to be on point, because everyone's looking for you to fail. You're not supposed to be at college, you're not supposed to get this experience. The odds are always against you so it's important to be on your game at all times if that makes sense...

MELISSA: I feel like that is definitely something that, in my discussions with other Black students, I think that that's definitely something that people of color, specifically, experience more than, and I feel like even more so Black women than Black men, because I feel like in certain situations... I feel like everyone in general, or, people in general, when they're speaking to an employer, they feel the need to speak more professionally because that's their employer, and you don't want to set off a bad impression, and I feel like Black people specifically, have to do that in general, more so, even when they aren't speaking with an employer. When they're in their interactions in general with people who may not, I feel like in certain communities where you feel more comfortable, with your friends, that might be a community you feel more comfortable, or with your family, you might feel more comfortable speaking a certain kind of way; or even around other people of color, you might feel more inclined, you might be more comfortable speaking how you would normally speak.

And I feel like when you're put into certain situations, like I said, my first, when I first kind of came into college, I was always was the person that wanted to participate and raise my hand the most, but then when I came, but I was always in mostly Black classes, but then when I came into college, being in the majority white class, I kind of felt like I was more afraid to speak because I felt like I wasn't going to be able to speak as properly as some of the people in the class, and use nice words. I felt less inclined to speak, so I feel like, in certain settings, when you're around students who may not look like you, or people you're not necessarily comfortable with, you might be more inclined to speak more professionally, and to try to speak your best.

I feel like, in some ways, certain settings where you speak like you're writing an essay, and the other settings where you can just talk how you would normally talk, and then I feel like, just certain communities make me feel more inclined... Since I'm in a Phi Alpha Delta, which is a pre-law fraternity, it's an international pre-law fraternity, and in that organization there's literally only one other Black student, outside of myself, and I kind of joined it because it's a very prestigious thing. A few presidents were in it, and so many different senators, and people were involved in this organization, so that's why I joined it, but then, going into it, I literally did it for a semester, and I didn't really continue much on after that because I felt like, I didn't feel as comfortable, and I feel like, just in my interactions with them, I always felt the need to check how I spoke, or check

how I acted, and to be very cognizant of that because you feel more like people are going to judge you, and not only judge you, but they're going to be judging your people in general.

.... I feel like in some ways the stereotype of Black women being loud and ghetto still kind of rings true, in certain settings, that people, I don't know, I feel like if you defend yourself in certain settings, or are willing to speak up, then I feel like even though you might say something else that a white male says, or even a Black male, in certain situations says, and they're just saying something very respectfully, but that may seem problematic to some people, or may be out of alignment with certain people's political views, that they might disagree with what you say, or if someone says something ignorant, you speak up about it. Even if you do so in a respectful manner, I feel like, in some ways, people kind of look at you as being aggressive, just by virtue of you being a Black woman. It's kind of like "Okay, because she's this, she has this attitude or mindset toward this issue." When, in reality, what they're saying just might be outright wrong, period.

... Someone else who is also a white male, or just another white person, might even agree with you, and how you handle the situation. I've had, I've experienced white allies at the school, as well, who might agree "I'm glad you said this, I agree with what you said." Whereas other people might still feel like, being that you're the person who said it in the first place, and your identity, it kind of makes you this aggressive person. I feel like, in some ways, one of the messages I've gotten, it hasn't been a huge message, but I feel like it's definitely underlying, is the stereotypes about the Black woman still exist beneath the surface, in terms of being loud, aggressive, ghetto, and I feel like that definitely lies beneath the surface.

While college requires all students to affect behavior and speech expected of them as educated individuals, Melissa posits that this charge is compounded for Black students, and even more so for Black female undergraduates, who may be ill-perceived when they assert themselves or even respectfully disagree with someone.

ANIYA: I just know that like when I was younger, everyone used to tell me because I'm Black because I would need to have, you know, to try harder than everybody else, try like extra hard just to prove that I'm their equal. But I mean to me, I don't feel like all my peers just because they're like privileged means that they're more smart, smarter than me. But sometimes you just feel like that, like you have to reassert that to them to make them understand you are their equal.

As much as Aniya wanted to reject the notion that she had to work harder to be perceived as an equal, she admitted that she felt that burden.

Several times Robyn mentioned her comportment as a way to reflect that she is to be taken seriously and more so, that she is deserving of assistance:

As I go through more and more things, it's like when I go to financial aid and I'm like, "Oh my god, I don't have this amount of money." I have to prove to them, I don't know how but I feel like there's something that they have to see in me, different than any other Black person, that they'll be like, "Okay, we'll give you this grant because we see that you're doing this and this." I can't just be struggling in my physics class and also asking for an extension with my financial aid payment or something of that sort because I feel like the dual struggle would just also **paint** me as somebody who's enabled and I feel like that's a perpetuating thing that's always going on with "our kind" is like if you see that somebody is struggling, they're always going to be that way and that's why I feel like I have to **paint** a picture of myself as almost perfection, which I feel like that doesn't exist, but I feel like I have to make myself look like that towards my family and also to my peers and my teachers.

... I find people will be more willing to help you and look at you differently than just your skin color, but how you exhibit yourself, and also maybe how I speak to you. I find sometimes I speak just as formally as I write sometimes and that sometimes people will kind of look back and be like, "Oh, she looks put together." Or like, "She sounds like somebody who I'd like to see in the workplace."

Robyn's mannerisms throughout the interview reflected her belief that she felt a need to compose herself. Her posture was impeccable, she was neatly dressed, and spoke in a slow, measured tone. She gave the air of being quite reserved, which I now understand as perhaps part of her strategy to control how others perceived her:

You just gotta shock people a little bit with your intellect so that's what I do, I try to use that to my best.

.... I feel like sometimes it's like... Sometimes I feel like I can't be that person. I mean, I can look at my counterpart or some other peer next to me and they're struggling maybe like me but I can't do the same thing, like I can't just be kinda in a place of a gray area for a time. I always have to keep moving. I have to be one level above that person and that's not always the case, that I can do that, but I have to even maybe feign like I can.

.... I'll go through my own means to get better in that class, so that might be studying with my peers or attending office hours, but how I present myself is very much put together, even in how I dress.

Robyn's mechanism for navigating Allegiance University was to separate herself from the pack of other students and "paint" herself as "almost perfect" in the eyes of family, peers, professors,

staff, and anyone who could offer her support. In our individual interview, Robyn referenced “our kind.” When I asked her to define the term for me, she replied:

I might be saying it because in the presence that I am, that we both share the same common color. And I do that often, especially when I'm hanging out with one of my other girlfriends, 'cause it's like we'll say something like "Sis." It's something to me where it's like I might not know you but we share similar struggles so you might be able to relate to what I'm saying without me having to say all of it. I feel like in company of other people, if I'm talking directly to an African American, sometimes they might feel like it's an inclusive thing and they're excluded, but that's just what it is, it is a very inclusive conversation, and so that's why I'm saying “our” as opposed to just “myself,” but then again, my experiences are the only experiences that I know of, so I could change that.

Although she drew a distinction between herself and some of her peers, Robyn also used her language as a way to connect to others – to draw them into conversation and develop a sense of solidarity by relating her experiences to theirs. She wanted them to see her as someone in the same “struggle” that they were, which could be done by using some commonly understood terms within the Black community, such as referring to another Black woman as “Sis.” Similarly, some of the other women reflected on how they control the image others may have of them.

CLEO: Definitely the way I talk to my friends. I would never come off that way to maybe a stranger in my class who is maybe white, or Indian, or any other race because it might, quote, unquote, “scare” them or they might not be used to it. I've always learned, "Oh, **put on** your professional white girl voice when you're answering a phone, talking to a stranger, or something like that." But also, I guess it's just the way you present yourself as well. You don't want to seem comfortable and slang off the back.

ANIYA: I feel like we have, it's like double consciousness, and then having to compete with men, and then other women, and then white women, and then it's just like this added stress that we have to do. It's like we are extra marginalized than other people and other Black people too. But I don't know, we just... I know from my standpoint that like learning and from learning in those courses that Black women are usually the ones who have to show out more, like show their more potential, and more like... There's just like, you know how I said in the beginning like when you have to try harder just to make sure that you're equal? Well, then we're doing that like times three because of our sex, of our gender, and then of our race, and then that's the kind of stress that I'm talking about, that extra pressure to want to have to show everybody up.

...I feel like the more articulate you are, the better and more respect you'll get, but I mean people still see you the way that they want to see you no matter how well you articulate yourself. Then you get categorized as being like a white girl or something like that, so it's like I don't know. Some people try to mock you for like sounding the way you sound and then sometimes like you don't even get the respect that you think that you should be getting well-versed, and well, you know and stuff.

Aniya makes the point that Black women face added burdens due to their intersectional identities and are tasked with doing “more” just to be seen as equal to other groups. Despite this work, others still determine how they are going to receive her and there may still be backlash and disrespect, as she is referred to as a “white girl.”

MELISSA: I think, something I've noticed, is there's a lot of stigma on Black students, in general, at this school. I feel like that stigma kind of implies that each student that's here is of SOP, or this idea of affirmative action. I'm actually doing a research paper now on attitudes about affirmative action in the 70s and now, because I feel like there's a certain stigma on Black students, that the reason they're here is because of affirmative action programs. This idea, even outside of the school, sometimes you see it at other universities, at the university level, where people are kind of having this mindset of “Oh, well, I didn't get into this college, Harvard didn't accept me, this school didn't accept me, I think it's because a Black student somehow took my spot because of affirmative action.” It's like, even if they aren't receiving SOP funding, it's this idea that you got into the school in the first place because they needed that diversity requirement.

I feel like that's less of the problem here, at Allegiance, I feel like more of the problem here is the stigma of each Black student here is SOP and it's like, “Oh, I didn't get any financial aid, but they got all this money from SOP.” Even though really speaking... It's just like SOP is getting cut each year. It's interesting to see other students who, unfortunately, aren't able to get financial aid, but that's just because their parents are well-off enough to pay it. I feel like, realistically speaking, the financial aid situation, though it might make life a lot harder on certain people's families... I feel like they don't realize how hard it is for other students who do receive SOP in general, and then for people who don't receive SOP, I feel like it's even more of an insult, personally, to not have SOP, and to be stigmatized as having it because someone else couldn't get financial aid. I feel like it's really insulting. I feel like even if you aren't receiving SOP, it's a stigma on people who receive financial aid at all, because it's kind of like, “Oh, well, I couldn't get any aid, my parents have...” I heard someone in the café the other day complaining because she was like, “Oh, I don't understand how I don't get any financial aid. My parents have two cars they pay for, we have a house, we have a summer house to pay for.” I'm just like, “You realize that's a privilege for both of your parents to have a car?” I grew up without my mom having a car at all. Finally, thankfully, she's been able to have one the last two years, but to even have both of your parents to have a car, and to have more than one house, and to own a house in general, I feel like is a privilege. I think people don't realize that they're more well-off.

And, even though, obviously, I feel like having to pay the full thing out of pocket definitely can be straining on family, even if they are doing well, it's going to make things a lot harder because now they're putting you through college. But, I feel like, even with having to put them through college, it's still, you're in a better position than somebody who doesn't have anything. I feel like that stigma is kind of given without merit. I just feel like a lot of students who don't get financial aid, or any aid at all, have that kind of attitude that it's because the Black students are taking it. I think it's interesting, because a lot of students who are SOP at the school aren't necessarily Black, so I think that's the more interesting thing, is that the majority of SOP students here aren't Black students. It's a lot of white students who also make up SOP candidates, and people who are of diverse other ethnicities. I think that's something that I've experienced at the school.

Melissa highlighted how those who automatically assume Black students are in SOP do so to make their feelings of “oppression” valid. Their doing so has made her feel less inclined to correct them because they “rely” on those viewpoints as their way of protecting themselves from the truth of other people’s struggles, and potentially as a way to deny their own privilege.

MALIA: Then just in regards to settling in, I went to a predominantly African-American [high] school. I'm from [an urban city], so when I came here it was kinda like, I didn't feel like I fit in. I think I found myself trying to alter who I was, how I would talk, how I would dress to fit in with the community here, and yeah, it was hard. Eventually, over time, I started to realize that I needed to be myself and I kinda got over it, but just my first year especially was hard. I would go back home and my friends would be like, “Oh you sound white. Why are you talking like that?” I got that, and I was just like, “Really?”

Being called a “white girl” or having their speech referred to as “sounding white” was often lodged as an offense to the women, as others associated them being educated with a loss of their Black identity. More than any other identifier, the women referenced their Blackness as a reason for their double-consciousness. Theirs was a battle against the stereotypes associated with Blackness and Black femaleness. Malia referenced the code-switching she engaged in around different populations:

So when I'm around my friends, I talk a certain way, versus how I would talk around adults, or in a classroom, or around white people. When I'm with my friends, everything's more like a slang, it's cool, we're just talking, but obviously when I'm around... it's kinda like knowing when to switch it up. When to be like, okay we can be ghetto, and be

ratchet [uncouth] or whatever, and when we can be professional, and I think that's just a skill that anyone should have. You should know when and where something is appropriate, and when it's not, so that's really what it comes down to for me. When I'm with my friends I know I can talk a certain way, I can be free, I can be myself, but obviously when I'm around other people it's still myself, because I have that professional side to me, but it's... that's what it is.

So again, the whole friends and the professional, it's the professional and then the ghetto/ratchet [wretched; uncouth], and then the white people, it's like kinda in its own bubble because I feel like I have to come off even more sophisticated just because as a Black woman you always have to work ten times harder than that white person next to you. It kinda always feels like I'm in competition. I want them to know, "Yeah I'm Black, but I'm here too." I know what I'm saying, I'm educated as well, because white people, I feel like they tend to just look at Black people and say, "Oh look, those ratchet people," you know, so it's just kinda like, it's always how I've felt. I've always felt like I had to be more sophisticated, more elegant or whatever the case may be and talk a certain way.

I think that my tone also switches up. I was always unconscious of it, but my friends bring it to my attention. My boyfriend at one time, I was on the phone with, I forgot who, but it was a white person, and he's like, when I got off the phone, he mimics me. He's like, "Oh yeah, totally," [in a stereotypical "valley girl" tone] and I'm like, "Oh," so you know, unconsciously I do that, I talk a certain way to them, and my friends would just bring it up so that's how I know.

Malia recognized codeswitching as a skill she used to engage with different populations. Some interactions required her to speak more professionally and others required her to speak a slang acceptable with friends. Still, she found having to do so burdensome – around white people she is hyper-aware of how she is perceived so she works to control that perception. As well, with her Black friends, she is perceived as a "white girl" if she speaks properly.

Jocelyn very clearly notes a distinction between how she sees herself as a Black woman and what members of the college community may think of her. She states that while Allegiance University has a lot to offer, she also has something to offer – her knowledge, skills, abilities, and capital – and will use them to make the most of her Allegiance experience, despite any hardships that come her way. In my individual interview with Jocelyn, I asked her what kind of

messages she received on campus about her status as a first-generation, low-income Black female at Allegiance.

JOCELYN: That, like on the affirmative action message. You're fighting your way through college almost. You're almost in a civil war trying to get what you need here, because you're Black. I don't see the white kids really struggling to get what they want or what they need out of this university. It's more so the minorities are starting the trouble or we're trying to test our administrators versus the white kids. They don't have those issues. I've gotten a message that I have to work a thousand times harder to just get what the white kid wants. I have to push my organization [a student magazine centered on Black and Latino student issues] a thousand times harder to just get its name on the same page as the [university's student newspaper].

What other messages? That's the main, I haven't really gotten many messages that kind of put me in my place about my income or anything like that, which is I think a good thing. You know I don't feel like the university does much separating people by income, but you can definitely feel the separations through race. If that makes sense.

Me: Yes, that makes sense. And so do you think those messages you've received have impacted you, and if so how?

JOCELYN: A little bit. Like I said it all goes back to that Milo situation because I think that was the first moment that I really realized that I was at a PWI. So that kind of impacted me, realizing this is what people think of me, there's eyes on me to do good things. If I fail, they're expecting me to do so. So it's kind of impacted me to just keep working hard, keep doing what I can and be an example. And know while they can shower in all the resources they are given and all the opportunities they're given, we'll shower in what we have and we'll still make the most out of it. So I guess that's how it impacted me. I've learned how to work with what I was given, with the cards I was dealt.

In a conversation about language she uses to communicate in various settings, Jocelyn noted that she tried to maintain her professionalism as she wanted people to view her and say, "Wow, that's a student who knows what she's doing. She has her education on point." I followed up to ask her how she thought that impacted her college experience. She replied:

I feel like for the most part people don't really get to know you. Or they have to get your first impressions off of what you give them and not who you truly are. Which is always not fair I guess. I don't know, it's kind of like you're branding yourself in the classroom. Which is kind of not fair because you're **putting on** some face in a place where you should just be trying to learn. But you're more so worried about what your professors gonna think about you, what kind of grades they'll give you if you act X, Y, and Z. Or if you're too unprofessional I'll say. So I guess the language is affected by that.

ME: And so do you think your counterparts of other races don't have to do that same thing?

JOCELYN: Oh, of course not! Like even, I'm just thinking of my classes now because they're so fresh in my mind. But I had a girl in my journalism class the other day. And she's just all over the place. The way she just talks, it's just like... [She widens her eyes in an affected look of surprise.] Me? I'm sitting there like, "Oh my God, you're just giving too much information to your professor." I would never do that but she doesn't care because she's not Black. She's a white girl and she most likely comes from some money. You know she has some connections. She mentioned she knew someone and the professor was just like, "Ohhh," [in a tone to show she's impressed].

Jocelyn often referenced "putting on" a mask, a show, a face – as a way to navigate various spaces at Allegiance so that her voice and point of view, particularly as a Black woman could be heard and she would be viewed as a serious college student. The additional work of balancing others' perceptions of her with focusing on her academic work is an unfortunate task of the Black undergraduate woman (Banks, 2009).

JOCELYN: ...having people look at you that way, that kind of like... We had an event here one day and these kids were yelling at the Black students saying, "You're here on affirmative action." Stuff like that and it kind of gives you that back story thinking of what people might actually think of you being here as a Black student, Black woman, anything. I mean Black students get it bad as is, but being a Black woman, I feel like that's a hundred times harder.

.... I definitely feel like we have to **put on** masks in class or just in general just to kind of like that whole "Oh you talk white" especially being a journalism major, you kind of have to... I remember that was said in one of my classes. We were talking about why don't you hear more Black people on radio shows. It's because if you don't talk a certain way, if you have too much of a southern or a "ghetto" feel to who you are, you kind of stray away from that. They don't want people like that on the air and stuff like that. So, I think in terms of that like with classes you kind of have to **put on** that smiley face and that white voice and make your impressions.

No, you're professional, you're not coming from some hood background. But I feel like that's just life, you have to do that everywhere. Just kind of conform to society in order for you to come off as presentable I guess.

Well just life for Black women. Black women, Black men, I feel like we have to **put on** that show like I promise you I'm not gonna come in here and act a fool. I'm not gonna embarrass you. You kind of have to **put that face on**...

As Jocelyn perceived it, Black women in particular, had to adapt to a society that demanded more from them to the point that the job of the Black woman was to ensure everyone in the room that she knew how to behave properly in order to be considered acceptable. The Black woman had to subordinate her own feelings of comfort to those of the group for fear of the negative impact for her if she behaved in any way that could be seen as contrary. All of this is required just because she is a Black woman in a space with white people who are free to speak and behave as they wish.

When I asked Melissa what she thought impacted the language she used and how she thought it then impacted her college experiences, she stated:

But, I think in a way that it, I guess, impacts my college experience, I feel like it's very hard to answer this question, just by virtue of the fact that it almost becomes second nature, you don't really realize at a certain point that you're doing it anymore. I feel like it's impacted my college experience in some ways, because I feel like it makes you less comfortable in certain situations, or you feel like, because even if you're not necessarily uncomfortable, I feel like you're less comfortable. When you speak how you please, and you're not worried about people judging you, I feel like you're more comfortable, and you're just being who you are. I feel like when you're in certain settings, and in having to police yourself, and focus more on what you're about to say before you say it, I think, in some ways, it makes you slightly less comfortable. It's not that you're uncomfortable, but you feel like you have to be more in control, and more aware. Self-aware. I feel like having to have an extra level of self-awareness is slightly more draining than someone else who just is naturally there, doesn't have to worry about how they're acting, what they're saying, or who they are.

I feel like, as a woman, and then as a Black woman, I feel like it's that intersectional aspect of it that kind of creates the need to have that self-awareness, and to police yourself. Other people don't have that, so I feel like, in certain settings, it creates a slight burden. It's not a humongous burden, but it creates more of a burden on you, than other people, in that setting who might be male, or might be a white male, and don't have to worry about it at all. Because, even if they do speak in a way that isn't necessarily proper, no one's really going to think anything of it, I feel like.

Melissa noted the hypervigilance required of Black women and the toll it takes while others are allowed to just be “who they are.”

Summary. All of the participants discussed the ways in which they masked themselves, painted a more acceptable picture, or wore different faces depending on the situation at hand. Code-switching was natural and referred to as having self-awareness in order to command respect from their non-Black and/or male peers and professors, and to avoid being labeled with the stereotypes associated with Black femaleness and poverty. Melissa, Malia, Jocelyn, and Aniya explicitly stated that their behaviors and speech were mitigated through an intersectional lens of Black femaleness which impacted their ability to focus on the present moment and just relish the college experience like their non-Black and/or non-female counterparts could. Their experience of navigating Allegiance was compromised in this way.

Within the context of double-consciousness, aspirational, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social capital are evident. The following chapter explores the presence of these forms of capital.

Chapter Summary

Participants in the study discussed five themes at length: resources at allegiance; resources outside Allegiance; their views of Allegiance; visibility and invisibility; and, double-consciousness. Resources at and outside Allegiance included having and not having access to particular resources – family, religion, helpful professors, financial aid, academic advisors, access to opportunity programs, and student organizations – that had a direct impact on their college experience. The women also expressed their views of Allegiance relevant to it being hypocritical regarding diversity, having unsupportive administrators, and their overall experiences at the university. Participants felt both invisible and visible at Allegiance, at times in classes, in their interactions with professors or other students, and in various campus locations, such as dining halls, gathering spaces, and cultural centers. Both visibility and invisibility created

challenges and opportunities for these women, as such there exists an intersection of invisibility and visibility where they chose to enact either. Participants' discussions of double consciousness revealed their feelings about how they comported themselves around different groups so as to control other's perceptions of them.

Altogether, the five themes present a picture of how the participants experienced Allegiance University as low-income, first-generation Black female students not affiliated with opportunity programs, and each of the themes reflected the deployment of Community Cultural Wealth in different forms. By using their possessed capital through the forms of CCW, the women in this study were able to navigate Allegiance successfully. The following chapter responds to the research questions and how the participants deployed Community Cultural Wealth in their college navigation experiences.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Significance, Limitations, and Implications

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study in relation to the literature. Each research question is used to frame the discussion. Additionally, I offer recommendations for historically white institutions, specifically regarding low-income, first-generation Black female undergraduates who are not affiliated with opportunity programs. Before engaging in a discussion of this study's findings, I provide an overview of the research story of the study.

The Research Story

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black women deploy different forms of capital while navigating a historically white institution without the aid of an opportunity program. I argue that the lens of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), which offers that Persons of Color embody various forms of capital that are not valued in dominant society (Yosso, 2005; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Luna & Martinez, 2013), best illustrates the experience of navigating Allegiance University, a historically white institution, as a low-income, first-generation Black female unaffiliated with an opportunity program. The grounding theoretical perspective was standpoint theory which helped clarify the point of view of the low-income, first-generation Black women at Allegiance University who were not opportunity program participants, by allowing their words and voices to tell the story of their college navigation experiences.

Through my research questions, I sought to identify the types of capital used to navigate Allegiance University, the challenges faced and support received in doing so, and if and how the deployment of the forms of capital in CCW rendered these women “visible.” The site for this study was a mid-Atlantic state university which has a state-supported opportunity program and another opportunity program specifically for STEM majors. Eight participants provided their

insights regarding their Allegiance experiences. Data collection and analysis were intertwined and spanned from December 2017 to February 2018. I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the eight participants, and a subsequent focus group interview with six of them. Each participant interview was transcribed and coded, and thereafter, each transcription was read several times to identify significant (or key) statements from the participants (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2010). The key statements were organized into meaningful clusters (Patton, 2010), or themes (Creswell, 2007). The themes that appeared throughout the research are resources at Allegiance, resources outside Allegiance, view of the university, invisibility and visibility, and double-consciousness.

What Types of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Did these Women Rely on to Navigate Allegiance University, a Historically White Institution (HWI)?

Yosso (2005) explicates Community Cultural Wealth as different forms of capital – aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social – which are an important resource for Students of Color. Each form offers a different way to acknowledge the capital possessed by Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). This qualitative study revealed that participants exemplified each form of capital during their college experience to navigate Allegiance.

Aspirational capital. Aspirational capital refers to the ability of Persons of Color to remain hopeful and dream of the future regardless of the obstacles faced, and to be resilient and work toward high aspirations set by themselves and/or their families (Yosso, 2005). Participants highlighted their aspirational capital in discussions of their dreams and goals. Each participant cited that she held certain aspirations for herself, regardless of potential deterrents. The women in this study aspired to be lawyers, IT professionals, writers, journalists, social workers, community advocates, and scientists. As well, at least five of them noted that they desired to

attend graduate school even though their present finances could pose an obstacle to their ultimate success since they could not outrightly afford to attend graduate school or be without employment for too long after graduating from Allegiance. Despite their low-income, first-generation status, these women remained hopeful and continued striving toward graduation, often motivated by their family's desires for them to do well, and particularly their parents' desires for the student to do better than the parent had, educationally and economically. This was the case even when the parents were not well-versed on the college-going process or experience. For many participants, being the first in their families to attend college was additional motivation for success. They remained both at-risk, given their low-income, first-generation status, and resilient, given their desire to achieve and the support that surrounded them (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). The women in this study definitely had something to prove and worked to ensure they accessed the resources available to them to help achieve their goals (Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2018).

Given that just 50.2% of first-generation students have completed a degree within six years of enrolling at a university, the participants' remaining motivated to achieve this goal is notable (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011). First-generation students can easily fall through the cracks without appropriate institutional and/or familial support, yet these women were determined not to do so and their determination was fortified by their families' interest in their well-being and achievements. The take-away here is the necessity of acknowledging the forms of capital embedded in the family unit; in this case, the family's aspirational capital was beneficial to the students as their support transferred into continued motivation for the women.

Familial capital. Familial capital refers to community membership, notably families including fictive kin and extended family relationships (Yosso, 2005). As well, there is a mutual

commitment to and concern for these communities of membership and shared values and beliefs in the communities (Yosso, 2005; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). The research participants continually relied on their families and communities of membership for support and motivation. For example, Olivia asked her father for feedback on her personal statement for law school and Malia and Robyn's families always kept them in prayer.

Additionally, participants had established communities at school with shared values and beliefs, usually student organizations. These organizations represented their religious beliefs (i.e., Malia's participation in her religious organization; Olivia's participation in the gospel choir); nationalities (i.e., the Haitian American student organization; the African student organization; the West Indian student organization; the Black Student Cooperative); and college majors (i.e., Black pre-law society). The online platform and the collective of Black students known as Black Allegiance also represented a community of membership for all the participants as each used the resource as a way to connect with others and share information.

Museus (2008) offers that finding ethnic connections on campus by way of ethnic student organizations is an essential factor for students to remain engaged on campus. Black students' sense of belonging at PWIs is tenuous at best because they are more likely to feel isolated (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Through an on-campus community like Black Allegiance, these students found others with shared circumstances and experiences; thereby, increasing their sense of belonging on campus, which serves to promote their college completion (Museus, 2008).

Despite popular narratives stating that first-generation students have limited parental involvement (Dennis, Phinney, Chuateco, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger Pascarella, & Nora, 1996), the theme of family was prominent as the women referenced the emotional support their families provided, as well as the encouragement offered around their college achievement. While

the families could not offer much financial support, they engaged with these women to assure they were staying on track, such as when Malia's mother made it a point to check on her daughter's stress levels, Olivia's father warning her of the potential academic and financial consequences of writing an inflammatory law school admissions personal statement about the United States' immigration policies, and Shuri's family probing her to explain how she can love Allegiance but still write inflammatory papers about what it could do better. As first-generation students, the participants were also aware that their parents were not well-versed on college culture, so they were grateful for the interest their families showed in their college lives, even if they may not have fully understood the experience the women relayed about specific events.

The familial capital expressed by these women reflects the importance of family to them – biological and fictive. Universities must provide multiple spaces and ample funding for student organizations to bring first-generation Black students and their different families together since they are a very important part of their college experience. Particularly helpful would be programming to address the gaps in college knowledge that parts of first-generation students may have, to help lessen the disconnect between what the students experience and their parents' understanding of it. Further, Museus (2008) and Giuffrida (2003) suggest that participation in Black and/or Latinx student organizations contribute to the persistence of Students of Color. Student organizations focused on the Black students at Allegiance need increased funding as their meetings and activities are genuine opportunities for Black students to create connections they may not forge in the classrooms or dormitories.

Linguistic capital. Linguistic capital includes Students of Color engaging in the use of multiple languages or linguistic styles they have developed and by which they further develop intellectual and social skills (Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital includes bilingualism and artistic,

musical, and poetic expression (Yosso, 2005). Shuri and Olivia noted participating in the creative arts; Shuri through writing poetry and Olivia through singing with the school's gospel choir. Olivia, Cleo, Malia, and Shuri expressed their ability to communicate in a language or dialect other than standard American English – Haitian Creole, Caribbean patois, and Spanish – which connected them to other students and their families and could be used strategically to separate them from those who did not understand those languages or dialects.

Participants also referenced the ability to codeswitch from the language prized in professional settings, which was used in classes, at work, and in communication with authority figures at college and at home, to that valued in “the street,” which they reserved for close friends, often of the same racial background. Jocelyn and Shuri expressed linguistic capital through their participation in a campus magazine and through hosting spoken word (poetry) events. Robyn noted that she speaks the “language of kindness” by being strategically kind to those authorities on campus who could provide her with the most assistance. She did not want to appear needy and ungrateful, as she believed this posed a double jeopardy for her achieving her goals. Through participation in different organizations, and drawing connections through language with others of shared identities, the women were able to express linguistic capital.

Navigational capital. Navigational capital is represented by the skills of maneuvering through social institutions, especially those created without Communities of Color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Included also is the participants' ability to withstand stressful events, and to show agency by seeking assistance to maintain their success and to show resilience in the face of institutional barriers. Essentially, participants “survive, recover, or even thrive” and use the stressful event to inform their future functioning (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). The participants'

knowledge and use of Allegiance University resources, such as student organizations, reflects how well students have been able to navigate the institution.

Alternately, participants specifically discussed their disappointment with the college and their “complicated” relationship with the school. On the one hand, they were pleased with many of the on-campus opportunities, such as engaging in internships and research, leading and participating in student organizations, and developing friendships and fictive kinships with peers. On the other hand, they were disappointed with the lack of support they felt from the Allegiance administration, such as the lack of funding for their student organizations, and the bias and discrimination they faced in classes and in Allegiance common spaces. They experienced a great challenge when Milo Yiannopoulos was invited on campus, to the extent that a few of them questioned their attendance at the institution and wanted to leave Allegiance altogether. Yet, they remained and committed themselves to showing that they were as deserving of a bias-free Allegiance education as any other student. As such, they protested the speaker’s presence on campus and addressed college administrators to engage them in promoting a more inclusive and diverse campus. They navigated the university by alternating between remaining silent on some issues but being vocal on others.

The women learned to seek advisement from academic advisors who showed that they were invested in the students’ success. Students learned to ask for help from professors; although this sometimes came after failing course assignments or exams. Similarly, students learned to advocate for themselves, while understanding that even though sometimes authority figures may not have been interested in helping them, the onus was on the students to ensure they received what they deserved – many times evidenced in their interfacing with offices they perceived as challenging, such as financial aid and academic advising.

By continuing to navigate various spaces at Allegiance, these students made evident that they could overcome obstacles. This sense of overcoming is a trait celebrated in Communities of Color in that they have learned “to navigate and adjust to complex, discriminatory systems,” (Banks, 2009), and especially significant is the narrative of the strong Black woman who is able to overcome any odds to achieve her desires (Nelson et al., 2018; Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Several of the participants referenced having to “keep going” in some way at Allegiance, which is a hallmark of the trope of the strong Black woman. As a participant in Nelson et al. (2018) indicated, “You know Black women just be like—it’s whatever! Wake up and gotta keep it moving and be glad to wake up!” (p. 557). Similarly, the participants in Nelson et al. (2018) discussed the challenges faced as first-generation college students, and cited overcoming these challenges as a means of proving they – as Black women – were as deserving as anyone else in having their needs met as students. The participants’ perseverance and will to navigate Allegiance was indeed reflected in the ways they navigated the obstacles they experienced at Allegiance, reflective of Chavous and Cogburn’s (2007) assessment that Black women are often seen as both at-risk and resilient. The women in the present study sought to be seen and heard and did not give up on getting what they needed [at-risk], despite being redirected by campus administrators, professors, and peers [resilient].

The navigational capital expressed by these women showed that despite facing odds, Black female students in particular will “keep going.” While this may be a celebrated characteristic in their community, it should not be an expectation for them to “keep moving” across and around institutional barriers that should be addressed and changed. Not engaging them in conversations around their needs and following through to address their concerns and

effect change signals to them that they are truly unwelcome at HWIs – a feeling these women often expressed.

Resistant capital. Resistant capital refers to the knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality. Those with resistant capital will challenge the status quo and resist dominant messages that they are inferior, invaluable, or without agency (Yosso, 2005; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). Participants often expressed that they did not feel that others held them in high regard, but they still cultivated an attitude of persistence such that nothing would stop them from achieving their degrees, which aligns with Museus' (2008) assertion that the cultures of PWIs can be problematic for undergraduates of color because they can convey to the students messages of unimportance, devaluation, and exclusion. They challenged their own feelings of discouragement and challenged the lowered expectations of advisors and professors who told them they should chose a different course, major, or career, such as Cleo and Shuri remaining committed to being information technology majors when advised otherwise, and when there are few Black women in their field. While these acts of resistance were not often vocalized, some of the participants discussed their participation in protests to challenge racist notions of them, and their ability to speak out when they heard something disparaging about Black women, as often noted by Melissa.

Another form of resistant capital was the participants' understanding of double consciousness and how they changed their behavior or codeswitched given the circumstance. Sometimes participants chose silence or invisibility over visibility and speaking as a strategy to challenge the notion of being a "loud Black girl" (Fordham, 1993) because they were aware that they may be perceived through a lens of negative stereotypes. This form of resistance allowed them to control perceptions as much as they could and not feel as if they must "perform for

audiences” that did not recognize them outside of a stereotypical or myopic view. Thus, the women showed that silence and invisibility could be part of a resistance strategy. Included here would also be the cultivation of safe spaces through membership and participation in Black student organizations, including Black Allegiance, through which students connected to other ethnic minorities with shared experiences that allowed them to engage in cultural expression and advocacy and validated their cultural identities (Museus, 2008). These students also developed knowledge and skills and performed behaviors (i.e., protests) which challenged inequality (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016).

Forms of resistance are necessary in expressing this capital. As such, institutions must recognize these efforts at promoting change for the good of all students, rather than characterizing their behaviors as a group of students simply defying the rules. As the students became engaged in their academic work, and had more experiences on campus, they came to recognize inequities that had not been addressed. Via resistant capital – speaking out and protesting – they worked to create a counternarrative (Collins, 2000) that sought to privilege their voices. If the university values social justice, it must create space for these women to do this work and acknowledge the work they are doing, as their work provides answers to many of the questions surrounding what Allegiance is doing well and where it can improve. All told, the work of these women then serves to benefit all students.

Social capital. The participants’ sharing helpful information about the university with others at the college which could help them is an expression of social capital. Social capital includes social contacts or networks of people or community resources by which students get support to navigate society’s institutions (Yosso, 2005). Those with social capital “lift as they climb,” by sharing what they know with others within their communities (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

Participants expressed social capital via the college knowledge they had gained as Allegiance students and by sharing this information with others in their communities who could benefit from it, such as family members who were planning to attend college in the future, or even making reading recommendations to their parents who were newly interested in today's political landscape and wanted to learn more. For example, Olivia noted that she had asked her uncle for connections to internships, which not only benefited her, but also a roommate who was having difficulty finding an internship in her field. Melissa also indicated that she shared a course recommendation with two Black female underclassmen who were seeking an interesting course that would not pose too great a challenge. Robyn was well-versed at engaging in situations from which she could benefit from the social capital of others. A major entity for sharing social capital which all participants used was Black Allegiance, an online GroupMe page which housed events, trips, job opportunities, etc. with the intention of benefitting Students of Color. Robyn even noted that she had learned about the present study through a re-post on the Black Allegiance platform.

Important to these women's experiences was having opportunities to share information with others, which is reflected in the popularity of Black Allegiance. In Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) discussion of social capital, its importance lies in what it offers the individual, rather than the ways the community may benefit from it. Allegiance Students of Color deployed social capital to participate in a community in which they mutually shared and received information. Social connections are important for students because they lend themselves to an increased sense of belonging, or sense of connection to their community (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017), thus improving the college experience and outcomes for these students. These students also affected a sense of ownership where Black Allegiance as a community of membership was

concerned, as it was a helpful tool which they could extend to others in need. These events of sharing also reflect the ways the women used their voices to connect to others, even if it was “voice” by way of forwarding an email or posting online. The online platform offered a safe space in which they could communicate and connect.

Participants receiving appropriate advisement for their majors and careers was challenging. Participants found advisors not to be helpful and encouraging; instead, advisors often discouraged them from pursuing particular careers or taking certain courses. The women saw this as the advisors and professors not being invested in their success. Aliya, Melissa, Cleo, and Robyn were familiar with SOP and lamented not having the benefit of participating in the program since the advisement they sought would have been built into their program participation. Though the women lamented not participating in SOP or SOP-STEM, they deployed social capital when they connected to other students who were in these programs. The women were able to gain and use information about Allegiance that they may not have had otherwise since they were unaffiliated with the opportunity programs. Their lack of affiliation with either opportunity program did not prevent them from using social capital to navigate Allegiance University. In fact, they learned to be adept at making connections and using all resources at their disposal. Navigating the complexities of a large university like Allegiance poses particular challenges, as evident by the women’s experiences with the academic advising and financial aid offices, as well as experiences of racism and discrimination via imbalanced classroom practices and protest policies that seemingly impacted Black student groups more harshly.

Summary. By expressing different aspects of their Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) these women were able to navigate Allegiance and operate in multiple campus spaces. Although

they each expressed the challenges associated with being first-generation, low-income students, no one lamented that she had not been able to navigate the institution and make strides toward success. Expressions of CCW helped give these women voice, when they chose to express it. In the present research, the participants' experiences and perspectives are validated (Yosso, 2005; Holland, 2016) by recognizing the CCW they already possessed (Banks, 2009), and refined as they navigated the college, including their ability to find and participate in spaces that privileged their capital and thus supported them in achieving success in college. At the same time, they reflected on how they engaged, specifically through student organizations and connecting with friends and professors who "looked like them," either Black people or Black women. Having faculty of color diminishes the students' concern of having to represent their race, as the "professor is an embodied counterexample to negative stereotypes about their racial group," (Benitez et al., 2017), which leads to improved academic outcomes for Students of Color.

Benitez et al. (2017) and Umbach (2006) noted that professors of color are more likely to engage in classroom practices that promote inclusion and collaboration; as well, Milem (2001) noted that faculty of color are more likely to engage in scholarship about race, ethnicity, and gender, and use classroom materials reflective of their diverse student groups. Given the limited representation of Black faculty and staff at Allegiance University, relying on a connection to Black faculty and staff leaves the women with limited options for creating genuine connections with them. Thus, the university must develop a comprehensive plan to recruit **and** retain Black professors and staff to increase the odds of Black students receiving cultural validation, and ultimately graduating.

How Did these Students Describe their College Experiences? What Challenges Did They Describe, and How Did the Deployment of CCW Enable them to Overcome these Challenges? Where Did they Gain Support?

The participants' view of Allegiance reflects how students described their college experiences, including challenges they encountered. Parts of their conversations also showed places where they gained support, and their deployment of capital to overcome challenges and successfully navigate various college spaces. Overall the respondents described their college experiences positively, and noted that the negative events served to strengthen their resolve or aid them in awakening to and preparing for the world beyond Allegiance where they would face similar challenges, particularly related to racial or gender bias, or intersectional bias against Black women. Participants were quick to highlight the benefits of an Allegiance education. Allegiance has a strong academic reputation, and the women were proud to have made it into the university and to be doing well there.

At the same time, participants had a "complicated" relationship with Allegiance. Relationships with professors is an area that contributed to this complication. Professors were equally helpful and problematic in that they were encouraging and discouraging. Professors operated on both sides of the scale of complexity – while a professor's role is to challenge students, professors who showed discriminatory practices forced the women to deal with non-academic issues in the classroom, oftentimes without anyone else's support. On the other hand, helpful professors, who were most often of color, gave the women opportunities to participate in spaces they had not known possible prior to engaging with these educators.

Although they were not affiliated with SOP or SOP-STEM, each woman in the study was seemingly well-connected to a variety of student organizations through which they were able to make connections to their peers, access extra-curricular activities, share knowledge and receive

advice from peers, express their leadership capabilities, and network with professionals in their anticipated fields, among other things. Their lack of participation in these access programs had more of an impact on how the women viewed connecting with advisors and easing the transition into college rather than navigating through, except where financial aid was concerned. The SOP and SOP-STEM grants were seen as benefits to participating in the opportunity programs – a benefit which these students did not receive.

Their Allegiance experience has not been without challenges. Particular challenges the women faced at Allegiance were combating the stigmas associated with being Black women, such as being thought of as unnecessarily loud and others not understanding their need to speak up. Sometimes this was internalized as the participants chose silence over expression so as not to feed the stereotype. Although on one hand it could be read as strategic, it may have also prevented them from opportunities to make connections to others who held dissimilar views. Because the women generally rejected being forced into the role of being the voice of reason or the voice for “their” people, we cannot know what influence they could have had on others.

Financial challenges were also a hallmark of each participant’s Allegiance experience, except one. To be fair, given the participants’ socioeconomic status, the cost at almost any four-year public institution may have posed a challenge for these students as they were low-income. Specific to Allegiance was the trouble associated with interfacing with the university’s financial aid office. The seven participants who interfaced with this office characterized it as inefficient and unhelpful. Further, they were concerned that university administrators were not helpful. Participants expected Black administrators to do more to support students and that these administrators sold the illusion of diversity but did nothing when students with whom they shared a racial identity were challenged by other groups. Many participants reflected that these

challenges affected their sense of belonging at the university, believing that perhaps Allegiance was a place where their silence was welcomed and they lacked voice and recognition. Howard-Hamilton (2003) assessed that Black women will always feel like the “outsider within” (Collins, 1986) when participating in spaces with the dominant group because “they are still invisible and have no voice when dialogue commences. A sense of belonging can never exist because there is no personal or cultural fit between the experiences of African American women and the dominant group” (p. 21). The women in the study experienced a disconnect between themselves and the dominant group, but still persisted.

Evidence of each form of CCW was present throughout the interviews. The participants deployed the various forms of capital via CCW by leaning on their families and communities for support. It should be noted that the forms of capital expressed in CCW are dynamic and interact with each other (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Luna & Martinez, 2013). The participants discussed the ways their families, even though they may not have understood the college-going process or how to articulate the experiences their relative was having – were overwhelmingly supportive of them being in college. This reflects the familial capital Yosso (2005) discusses, as well as aspirational capital, because the desire for a college education extended beyond the person who was actually enrolled at Allegiance. Participants noted that their college attendance had an overwhelming impact on their families, as some had extended family members who contributed financially, and some others were the first of several generations of family in the United States and abroad to attend college.

Further, familial capital was shown in the on-campus fictive kinships that were developed as a result of participating in student clubs, living in residence halls, sharing a nationality or shared skin tone, and thus the assumption of common experiences. Taylor, Chatters, Woodward,

and Brown (2013) note that fictive kin are “individuals who are unrelated by either blood or marriage but regard one another in kinship terms. Fictive kin are accorded many of the same rights and statuses as family members and are expected to participate in the duties of the extended family,” (p. 612). Fictive kin can include peer group members, church members, godparents, god-siblings, etc. Fictive kin are important as they have common goals and thus, have the ability to positively influence the educational outcomes of their peers (Fordham, 1993; Tierney and Venegas, 2006). Fictive kinships often share a cultural identity, usually race, and are important in Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005; Tierney and Venegas, 2006), for students as they acclimate to college (Tierney and Venegas, 2006), and as they overcome challenges (Whitney, 2016). Fictive kinships also reflect the social capital evident in Community Cultural Wealth as students, in particular, joined groups that had similar interests and values, engaged in information sharing, and encouraged each other toward success.

Similar to the connections made in student organizations, students found connections through language when they found that they shared certain dialects with others. Linguistic capital enabled them to connect to others and build community which is reflective of their possession of familial and social capital. Additionally, expressions of resistant capital aided the students in advocating for themselves when they experienced injustice. For example, the students’ sense of justice was threatened when they encountered a white supremacist who was invited on campus to speak. Melissa explained how she and her housemates determined that a protest was necessary after having heard him. The women who discussed “the Milo incident” noted it as one that greatly influenced their view of the college unfavorably. Rather than understanding his invitation to speak on campus as an expression of free speech, they were adamant that it was offensive hate speech that confirmed Allegiance as unwelcome to them as Black women. This being the case, it

would have behooved Allegiance to host and promote events in which students could unpack the incident together and discuss their feelings about what had occurred. Administrators should have been present then and thereafter, to hear students' concerns and explain how the university could work to ensure everyone felt safe regardless of who was speaking on campus.

The women's advocacy efforts reflected resistant, navigational, and social capital. Jocelyn indicated that students were advocating for a curriculum change to ensure that everyone was required to learn about cultures other than their own. They challenged the current Allegiance curriculum in support of more inclusive requirements, and worked together to do so, which was indicative of resistant and social capital. Individual advocacy was also reflected in Robyn's and Melissa's continued interactions with the financial aid office to ensure they received the aid to which they were entitled. They were relentless in the face of an institutional barrier that often derails students' educational journeys (Singell, 2004; Hossler, Ziskin, Gross, Kim, & Cekic, 2009). Navigational capital was evident as participants learned how to negotiate different college spaces and thrive in the process of achieving their goals.

Did these Women Experience a Sense of Invisibility while Navigating their HWI, and Did the Deployment of CCW Then Render these Women Visible?

The study participants each discussed the ways they had felt invisible at Allegiance. Alternately, they also noted that there were spaces in which they felt seen and heard and were able to exist without feeling challenged simply for who they were. Student organizations accounted for a sense of visibility, as did understanding and caring professors.

The deployment of capital appeared to render these women visible in several ways. By participating in Black Allegiance, they were able to share and receive information, which is an expression of navigational and social capital, as they were visible within a community of Black students affiliated with student organizations. Students also connected to Black professors, which

is an expression of social capital, as they felt seen, heard, and valued by these professors. They were also visible as they expressed resistant and navigational capital by verbally challenging peers' notions of who they "should be." Fordham (1993) clarifies "loudness" as a metaphor for Black women claiming their existence, power, and space, which is what Shuri learned to do through her writing, for example. Thus, she and the other women in this study who engaged in protests and self-advocacy can be deemed "loud." Contrary to Fordham's (1993) notion that loudness impedes academic success, these women show that their loudness often facilitated their success as they ensured through voice that they received help to achieve their goals. They forced those with power to assist them and to recognize their needs when they were often unaccounted for. Unfortunately, their loudness often did not engender the changes they sought, but it did not stop them from speaking out and engaging others, especially fellow students in their student organizations. Alternately, they learned to have lower expectations of Allegiance administrators since they seemed reluctant to engage students and engender change.

Participants were visible to underclassmen who needed their advice, an expression of social capital. Visibility was evident in their personal advocacy efforts (navigational and resistant capital) and in their protests for social justice (resistant and linguistic capital). They were highly visible to and acknowledged by their families in different ways, particularly parents and younger siblings and cousins who aspired to attend college after them.

Although the participants faced challenges at Allegiance, they were able to navigate different university spaces by expressing the different forms of Community Cultural Wealth they possessed. Despite the challenges, there existed many resources at Allegiance which operated to counter spaces in which the participants felt invisible, such as student organizations, cultural centers, and courses with Black professors.

Significance of the Study

This study focused on the college navigation experiences of low-income, first-generation Black females who were not in opportunity programs at an HWI. This study contributes to the limited body of research on Black college women, which on its own is significant since much of the existing research on Black women compares them to other groups or lumps them together with other groups (i.e., Black men or white women). It addressed CCW, intersectionality, and the nexus of invisibility and visibility. As first-generation students these women were deemed less likely to achieve than their continuing generation peers who had college knowledge and the benefit of parents who had attained bachelor's degrees (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018). The experiences of the study participants bear out the need to understand how members of this population navigated spaces that they perceived as unwelcoming and hostile given the events they endured at the college.

Primarily the study and its findings are important because they show how these women possess various forms of capital that they deployed to aid them in navigating Allegiance. If the research focused on cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu (1973), which for example, does not recognize the importance of fictive kin in familial capital, or the ability to code-switch when in different contexts (i.e., using informal speech when with friends versus using formalized speech in the classroom or on a job interview) in linguistic capital, then the value of these women's contributions may never have been accounted. Altogether, these women came to Allegiance with a range of skills reflective of their CCW, of which their forms of capital strengthened as they endured challenges at the institution. Colleges must become spaces that recognize the expression of different forms of capital as wealth, particularly as they strive for diversity in their student body.

An intersectional perspective was important for this study because it allowed for consideration of the multiple identities of the women and how they mutually influenced each other. As well, the use of intersectionality allowed for the stories of their lives as low-income, first-generation Black females to be told without being situated against white women or being seen in a support role to Black men (Patton et al., 2016). Social justice in education requires that educators and policymakers listen to the lived experiences of Black women and learn what they need to succeed so they may better support them on their educational journeys. This study highlighted the voices of low-income, first-generation Black female students as they shared their experiences of navigating an HWI without the aid of an opportunity program.

The complexity of their college experiences could not be understood without consideration for their multiple identities, so an intersectional approach was validated in the ways in which they discussed their experiences, specifically as first-generation, low-income Black women. Their college navigation experiences at an HWI are different than they would be for a financially wealthy first-generation student – limited income means limited access to opportunities that require money. Given the same circumstance of preparing to take the LSAT for law school admission, for example, a low-income first-generation student would have to find out first that they have to take the exam and then identify a means to pay for it, whereas a wealthy first-generation student would most likely only have the challenge of first finding out about taking the test, but thereafter, they would most likely need only ask their parents for the money to cover the testing fee. Similarly, a continuing-generation, low-income Black student would presumably have parents help craft the questions she needs when going into the financial aid office, or that parent may simply call the financial aid office and know the language to use in order to sort out whatever issues the student had (FERPA considerations aside). The parents of a

first-generation student, on the other hand, are more likely to be intimidated by these offices and may not advocate on behalf of their child. No one situation is necessarily “better,” but there are complexities to the multiple identities students have and of which educators must be aware in order to provide assistance. Of note in this research is also that despite the family not having exposure to college and being low-income, they were very concerned about their child/relative’s well-being and future prospects. None of the families in this study applied a hands-off approach to the students’ educational experience, rather they helped wherever and however they could.

Not many participants discussed gender in their interviews, except to indicate that life as a Black woman was much harder than for anyone of any other race and/or gender. Race figured most prominently because, as Olivia and Robyn noted at the end of their interviews that while life as a Black woman has its challenges, they felt much of the burden related to their identity was a result of their Blackness rather than their gender, or the intersection of the two and how they influenced each other. Their Blackness was complicated by their low-income, first-generation status, and participants usually discussed their lives as intersectional when addressing either of these statuses.

Fordham’s (1993) notion of invisibility provided an important line of inquiry in the study. While Fordham (1993) problematizes “loudness,” this study elucidated how these women *chose* to utilize voice, loudness, silence, visibility, and invisibility as a strategy for maneuvering particular spaces. In the classroom, for example, she may be silent on an issue about low-income Black women though she is passionate about the subject because she does not want to be upheld by the students or professor as the representative for the population. On another occasion, she may speak up if she deems others in the room worthy of the energy and emotion necessary to change someone’s faulty perceptions. She may also not speak up in class if she needed help

because she did not want to represent her race negatively by asking for help. Instead she may save her voice for someone whom she thought may better understand her needs – someone who “looked like her,” which speaks to the need of better representation of Black female professors and staff on campus. The study shows that deciding between voice or silence, or visibility or invisibility could often be seen as an act of emotional, physical, and/or academic self-preservation.

The deployment of the forms of capital in CCW was a navigation strategy which required cultivation over time, as the women learned what to ask and whom to ask for what and when. The knowledge and forethought required of them was gained by connecting to others who could advise them of the rules of the college context. Additionally, use of standpoint theory allowed the Black women – whose viewpoints and experiences are not present in the current published research on postsecondary education – an opportunity to contribute their voice, as Black low-income, first-generation college students. As noted in the present research study, the use of voice is a strategy the women were familiar with. My hope is that their choice to enact their voices in this study bears fruit that helps alleviate some of the challenges Black women face in higher education.

Limitations

This study was borne from my experience as a low-income first-generation student. As I conducted this study, I was careful to remain as objective and persistently curious (LeVassuer, 2003) as possible in learning about the experiences of these women. Still, there are potential limitations to the study which may have impacted its outcomes. The university does not maintain a database of student members of student organizations, so finding students who met the participation criteria was challenging; yet, eight students shared their experiences with me. The

goal of this study was to focus on a very specific population, thus the study's findings will not be generalizable to the larger population of Black women. The findings then may not reflect the experiences of women at smaller institutions, nor at HBCUs. Often, the experiences of Black women are conflated with or subsumed by those of all women or Black men – as if the lives of Black women and other women and Black women and Black men are the same. Therefore, this study intentionally does not speak to the experiences of Black men, white women, or other women of color, and does not purport to be transferable to understand the experiences of those populations, as it is an effort to reflect the particular standpoint of a group of Black women on their own.

The present study relied on a single interview and a focus group with the participants who were able to attend. Additional data collection procedures, such as follow-up interviews, an additional focus group session, participant journaling, or observations of the women in different college spaces, may have revealed additional information that was not generated in the one individual interview or focus group. Additionally, because recruitment for the study was elicited through deans and student organization leaders, the women in this study were most likely to be those who were involved in Allegiance in significant ways. The voices of those who are not in student organizations would be interesting to hear to identify how they perceive their college navigation experiences.

Only students who were deemed academically successful were included in the study. Students who are successful navigating Allegiance would have come to the institution with or developed aspects of Community Cultural Wealth which supported their navigation experiences. Their academic success stands as an asset. I intentionally did not include unsuccessful students – those who had less than a 2.0 cumulative GPA, which meant they had not met the benchmark for

graduating from Allegiance. While those women would have navigation experiences to share, I wanted to focus on the assets the participants possessed to aid in their success. An argument can be made that those who are not academically successful are not successfully navigating the institution since we universally use GPA as a standard measure of student success. A future comparative study of those who are academically successful and those who are not may bear out differences between how successful students deploy Community Cultural Wealth and how less successful students do or do not.

Future research on the university's newest initiative to "capture" students like these who are low-income and first-generation, would be a valuable contribution. The students who participate in this new initiative are not affiliated with opportunity programs. They are offered mentorship, workshops, a seminar course, and additional supports such as a website which highlights professors who are first-generation college attendees so that students can see themselves in their professors. Identifying how they utilize this program may bear interesting findings. In a way, such an initiative endeavors to do some of the work that opportunity programs do, without relying so strictly on a student's low-income status or level of academic preparation as criteria for participation. Since the university does support opportunity programs, and has a new initiative to support first-generation students, a comparative study with a sample from each population may uncover findings that could not be discovered here due to the singular focus of this study on low-income, first-generation Black college females who were not in opportunity programs.

Recommendations for Educators

Opportunity programs imbue participants with capital through vehicles such as summer institutes, academic bootcamps, workshops, and mentoring, among other supports. They are an

effort toward a redistribution of power, resources, and social mobility (Collins, 1986). Those without these kinds of opportunities, particularly Black women, have limited opportunities to be recipients of this redistribution; thus, it is important that they find opportunities to connect with others, by overcoming or despite feeling like an outsider within (Collins, 1986). If educators are committed to social justice, they have to provide these opportunities, as well as recognition, acknowledgement, and validation of the CCW possessed by low-income, first-generation Black women who are not in opportunity programs. Viewing this population through a lens of possessed wealth can create a genuine opportunity for the restructuring of power, resources, and social mobility. This can be done at a higher education institution such as Allegiance through anti-racism and/or implicit bias training (Harper & Davis, 2016), for example, which helps dominant and non-dominant groups identify biases they hold and challenge them, and determine actions they can take to promote healthy ways to engage with each other. Ensuring that professors are prepared to “see” their students as individuals with lived experiences that are valuable to the classroom can influence changes that promote a greater sense of belonging for Black female students, which increases their likelihood of persisting and graduating (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Below I offer additional recommendations in the areas of student development, faculty and staff development, and institutional support:

Student Development. The women in the study were heavily involved in student organizations as members and/or as leaders. They understood the importance of working to promote change for themselves and for the student body at large; thus, their work to promote equity, for example, would benefit everyone, not just themselves. These women are already doing this work, so the institution would do well to acknowledge their contributions when they engaged in leadership activities, even when those activities resulted in protests. Further, the

institution could make a good-faith effort to ensure there is equity in providing financial support to student organizations to ensure those focused on the concerns of the Black community, and other minoritized groups, are able to fund student leadership and community-based events. The institution's acknowledgement of the work these Black women contributed to Allegiance would show appreciation for them taking on these tasks, acknowledge that they are contributing worthwhile work to missions that support everyone, and engendering positive change on campus.

Ways to show this support would be to:

- Encourage low-income, first-generation Black females to participate in already-acknowledged university-wide leadership opportunities.
- Encourage their participation in dominant spaces, such as roles as university ambassadors where they would interface with the public on behalf of the institution.
- Identify them as formal mentors to other students/underclassmen, not just low-income or first-generation students to acknowledge that they have much to share with everyone.
- Be intentional about acknowledging their contributions to the campus community when they engage in resistance work and community building efforts, even if they are seemingly counter to the policies of the university, and in such cases, engage them in conversation about how to improve practices at Allegiance.
- Provide avenues for student leaders to receive payment for their work. Since first-generation students are likely to work long hours (Mehta et al., 2011; Tinto & Pusser, 2006), this would allow for fewer burdens on their time so they could focus on engaging in leadership development activities and meeting the academic demands of college.

Faculty and Staff Development. The women acknowledged that they wished to see more Black faculty and staff on campus. While institutions are challenged with hiring and retaining Black faculty (Benitez et al., 2016; Matthew, 2016), the women in the study felt they could better relate to them, particularly Black women. Some ways for the institution to be more impactful in its engagement with faculty would be as follows:

- Recruit, hire, train, and retain more Black female professors and staff, as all students benefit from having more faculty of color (Umbach, 2006).
- Engage and reward Black female professors and staff to act as formal mentors for these students and give them credit for this work in the tenure and promotion process (Matthew, 2016).

Institutional Support. The women in the study made clear that the institution itself presented them with barriers that were hard to overcome. For example, while already being low-income, they felt they faced undue challenges from the financial aid department, which they saw as being an entity that should expressly assist them since they were among the neediest students. They also felt that their limited college knowledge prevented them from taking advantage of the resources that may be available. Recommendations for assisting these students would be:

- Provide structured forms of financial support for low-income, first-generation students, inclusive of discounts on tuition and fees, room and board, standardized test preparation, and college-sponsored events. Students in this study made very clear that a lack of financial resources was a major challenge to overcome. By providing this financial assistance, the institution makes known their commitment to help alleviate the financial burden for students who need assistance.

- Provide clear information – posted conspicuously in residence halls, classrooms, and common spaces – on what a first-generation student needs to know to do well in college. Where and how to access these resources should be clearly defined. One such resource could be first-generation student mentors whom students may contact by phone, text, or email.
- Offer evening and weekend workshops for incoming first-generation students and their families to provide this information about the college-going process so that students are not struggling once they reach the campus in the fall (Mehta et al., 2011). Swail (2000) noted that often the neediest students do not get the help they need to be college-ready because their home school systems lack programs that address issues of access and college capital, so such an offering would engage students' families, friends, and community members to teach them about the culture of college so they are better aware of how to support the student.

In-Class Support. The onus is on professors to ensure students feel comfortable in their classes. Many of the women in the study noted that they experienced racial and gender discrimination on campus, sometimes in the classroom perpetrated by the professor and their classmates. The overwhelming thrust of college is the academic experience, which was compromised for these students due to these challenges. Professors must hold themselves accountable for creating and maintaining an atmosphere of safety for all students in the classroom (Harper & Davis, 2016); specifically, “the ability of African American students to progress through college was highly dependent upon positive interactions with faculty members” (Reynolds et al., 2010). Yet, there are ways professors can provide support for students:

- Professors must make a stand about respect for diverse views being expressed in the classroom, but not tolerate racism and sexism. This statement should be placed in the course syllabus and stated aloud in class.
- Professors must acknowledge student's concerns when they bring them up in the classroom. Students in the study were disheartened when they experienced microaggressions in the classroom (Reynolds et al., 2010) and the professor did not take a stand. Classroom discourse must be managed to provide space to safely counter racist and sexist views and use them as educative moments (Harper & Davis, 2016).
- Ensure the voices of various different students are heard in the class session, and do not make minoritized students the "voice" for their particular group or groups (Harper & Davis, 2016).

Enacting the recommendations in each area could serve to provide opportunities for the possessed wealth of Black women, which is dynamic and not expendable, to be acknowledged and expanded so they may derive a sense of community in college and feel as if their voice is valued at the university. These suggestions also reflect an opportunity for a genuine redistribution of power and resources from the dominant group to Black women (Collins, 1986). Using the term "diversity" is not enough; we must have an open appreciation for diverse cultures and the ways we express our cultural understandings. Through their Allegiance experiences, the participants bonded, learned, created, and encouraged agency among one another, but they were anxious for the convergence of different groups rather than the most-discussed students so they could learn, bond, create, and encourage each other across social, gender, and generational lines, in a healthy, safe space – the university.

Ultimately, this research asks educators to be more thoughtful in how they view and engage Black female students on campus, in their classes and offices. These women are passionate about their communities, strive toward success, crave safe spaces where they can express themselves and be acknowledged for the wealth they possess and share with others. They want equal access to opportunities and equal application of policies across campus. They are not averse to doing the work of rising to the challenges they faced. In fact, they are strong women who have persisted, and there is much to learn from their strength; yet, they are disappointed that their college experiences seemed to offer more challenges than assistance.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER TO THE DEANS

August 2017

Dear Dean:

My name is Tieka Harris, and I am a Rutgers Graduate School of Education doctoral candidate conducting research related to the college experiences of Black female undergraduates. Additionally, I am a Rutgers alumna (LC, '98; GSE, '99), and former employee. By way of this letter, I am requesting your assistance with identifying students who may be candidates for participation in a study I intend to conduct at Rutgers.

My proposed study, titled *Community Cultural Wealth Brokers: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Low-income, First-generation Black Female Undergraduates at a Historically White Institution*, will allow participants to express their views of the experience of acclimating to and persisting in college. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand their experiences as first-generation Black women of low-income at a historically white institution.

Students who participate in the study would be required to participate in one interview, which will take approximately 60-90 minutes; and one focus group discussion, which will span approximately 60 minutes. At such time, participants will be asked questions related to their family and community (out of college) life and their experience with acclimating to and persisting in college specific to their identities as first-generation Black females of low income. Students who participate in this study should not be affiliated with opportunity programs.

The information shared in the interviews and focus groups will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, so that students' responses may be analyzed for common themes. As well, I will take notes as we converse. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the students' privacy and identities, as well as that of the institution. The collected data will be shared with my dissertation chair, Dr. Ebelia Hernandez, and my dissertation committee members, and analyzed for common themes.

As an educator, I know you are well-versed in the need to use data to inform decision making. I believe the data collected through this study will benefit the participants in gaining a deeper understanding of their collegiate experiences, becoming aware of the many factors that shape their ability to acclimate to and persist in college, and the ability to reflect critically on their experience at a historically white institution. Further, the proposed study can offer the institution a nuanced perspective on how to aid this population in acclimating to and persisting in college.

To help facilitate my research, I ask that you forward the attached participation advertisement via email to all Black female undergraduates who are currently juniors or seniors within the institution. Interested students will be asked to complete a Participant Information Form, and those who are eligible to participate will be asked to schedule an interview with me at a mutually convenient time.

Note that each student's participation in this study is completely voluntary, and they may rescind their offer of participation at any time without any penalties or consequences. Students who complete interviews will receive \$25 gift cards, with another \$50 offered at the conclusion of the focus group.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like more information before sending the attached advertisement, please contact me by email at tieka.harris@rutgers.edu or by phone at 732-503-9728.

Sincerely,

Tieka Harris, LC '98, GSE '99
Doctoral Candidate
Rutgers Graduate School of Education

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL INVITATION/LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

August 2017

Dear Student:

My name is Tieka Harris; I am a Rutgers Graduate School of Education doctoral candidate conducting research related to the college experiences of Black female undergraduates. By way of this letter, I would like to formally invite you to participate in my research study which will allow you to express your views of your experience of acclimating to and persisting in college. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand your experiences as a first-generation Black female of low-income at a historically white institution.

Your participation in the study would require you to participate in one interview, which will take approximately 60-90 minutes; and one focus group discussion, which will span approximately 60 minutes. The information shared in the interview and focus group will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, so that your responses (and those of other participants) may be analyzed for common themes. As well, I will take notes as we converse. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy and identity, as well as that of all other study participants.

Possible benefits of this research include gaining a deeper understanding of your collegiate experiences, becoming aware of the many factors that shape your ability to acclimate to and persist in college, and the ability to reflect critically on your experience at a historically white institution.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the Participant Information Form, which is linked here – <https://goo.gl/forms/k9uDrGHc9uAnkQu23>. I will review the completed forms and invite those who qualify to schedule an interview at a time that is mutually convenient for both of us.

Note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may rescind your offer of participation at any time without any penalties or consequences. Students who complete interviews will receive \$25 gift cards, with another \$50 offered at the conclusion of the focus group.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like more information before making a decision, please contact me by email at tieka.harris@rutgers.edu or by phone at 732-503-9728.

Sincerely,

Tieka Harris, LC '98, GSE, '99
Doctoral Candidate
Rutgers Graduate School of Education

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT INVITATION LETTER TO CULTURAL CENTER DIRECTORS

August 2017

Dear Director:

My name is Tieka Harris, and I am a Rutgers Graduate School of Education doctoral candidate conducting research related to the college experiences of Black female undergraduates. Additionally, I am a Rutgers alumna (LC, '98; GSE, '99), and former employee. By way of this letter, I am requesting your assistance with identifying students who may be candidates for participation in a study I intend to conduct at Rutgers.

My proposed study, titled *Community Cultural Wealth Brokers: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Low-income, First-generation Black Female Undergraduates at a Historically White Institution*, will allow participants to express their views of the experience of acclimating to and persisting in college. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand their experiences as first-generation Black women of low-income at a historically white institution.

Students who participate in the study would be required to participate in one interview, which will take approximately 60-90 minutes; and one focus group discussion, which will span approximately 60 minutes. At such time, participants will be asked questions related to their family and community (out of college) life and their experience with acclimating to and persisting in college specific to their identities as first-generation Black females of low income. Students who participate in this study should not be affiliated with opportunity programs.

The information shared in the interviews and focus group will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, so that students' responses may be analyzed for common themes. As well, I will take notes as we converse. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the students' privacy and identities, as well as that of the institution. The collected data will be shared with my dissertation chair, Dr. Ebelia Hernandez, and my dissertation committee members, and analyzed for common themes.

As an educator, I know you are well-versed in the need to use data to inform decision making. I believe the data collected through this study will benefit the participants in gaining a deeper understanding of their collegiate experiences, becoming aware of the many factors that shape their ability to acclimate to and persist in college, and the ability to reflect critically on their experience at a historically white institution. Further, the proposed study can offer the institution a nuanced perspective on how to aid this population in acclimating to and persisting in college.

To help facilitate my research, I would like to speak at one of your meetings, in which students are present. My hope is that your students will be students who may wish to participate in the study, or may know of others who would be interested. I also ask that you forward the attached participation advertisement via email to current junior or senior undergraduates within the institution, particularly if they meet the criteria of the students I wish to interview. Interested

students will be asked to complete a Participant Information Form, and those who are eligible to participate will be asked to schedule an interview with me at a mutually convenient time.

Note that each student's participation in this study is completely voluntary, and they may rescind their offer of participation at any time without any penalties or consequences. Students who complete interviews will receive \$25 gift cards, with another \$50 offered at the conclusion of the focus group.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like more information before sending the attached advertisement, please contact me by email at tieka.harris@rutgers.edu or by phone at 732-503-9728.

Sincerely,

Tieka Harris, LC '98, GSE '99
Doctoral Candidate
Rutgers Graduate School of Education

APPENDIX D: ADVERTISEMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS



Calling All Ladies

- ✓ Are you a Black woman currently enrolled at Rutgers?
- ✓ Are you a junior or senior with at least a 2.0 GPA?
- ✓ Are you a first-generation college student?
- ✓ Are you interested in discussing your college experiences?

If you answered *YES* to each question,
you may be eligible to receive \$75
for your participation in a research study.

Hello! My name is Tieka Harris, a Rutgers alumna, and a current doctoral candidate at the GSE. I am researching the undergraduate experiences of first-generation, low-income Black women in college. If you are interested in sharing your experiences, please FOLLOW THE LINK - <https://goo.gl/forms/k9uDrGHc9uAnkQu23> or ACCESS THE QR CODE below to provide your information, and I will reply to you within 24 hours!



You may also email or call me for more information!
tieka.harris@rutgers.edu
732-503-9728

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Please read the following information carefully, as it outlines the scope and limitations of your participation in the proposed research study.

STUDY: Community Cultural Wealth Brokers: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Low-income, First-generation Black Female Undergraduates at a Historically White Institution

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Tieka Harris

Research Purpose

- ☐ To understand what types of capital successful, low-income, first-generation Black female students draw on to help them be successful in college without participating in opportunity programs
- ☐ To understand if successful, low-income, first-generation Black female students experience feelings of invisibility while enrolled in a historically white institution

Procedures

- ☐ The study will require you to participate in one interview, for approximately 60 minutes. The interview will include questions related to your college experiences, including your acclimation to college and being a successful student. As well, questions will ask about any feelings of invisibility while enrolled in college.
- ☐ Interviews will begin in late August/early September 2017.
- ☐ There will be approximately 10 individuals interviewed for this study, including you if you choose to participate.
- ☐ I will record, transcribe, and analyze each interview, and I will take notes while we conduct the interview.
- ☐ After all interviews are analyzed, participants will be invited to participate in a focus group to review the research findings. If you decide to participate, you will engage in a 60-minute focus group to ensure that your voice has been captured appropriately throughout the research.
- ☐ You should ask any questions you have about the interviews, the research, or the methods at any time, including while the interview is being conducted.

Risks

- ☐ Participation in this study is voluntary. **You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you.** In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

- ☐ Although participating in this research study poses minimal risks, you may feel uncomfortable during the interview. Should you need assistance managing your feelings after the interview, you should contact Rutgers department for Counseling, ADAP, and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 848-932-7884. Their address is at 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901.

Benefits

- ☐ Possible benefits of this research include:
 - Gaining a deeper understanding of your collegiate experiences
 - Gaining awareness of the many factors that shape your ability to acclimate to and persist in college
 - Enhancing your ability to reflect critically on your experience at a historically white institution
 - Your contribution to the body of work on Black women in higher education

Compensation

- ☐ There is no cost to you to participate in this study.
- ☐ Your participation is voluntary. You will receive a \$25 gift card for choosing to participate in the interview, and a \$50 gift card for choosing to participate in the focus group.

Privacy and Confidentiality

- ☐ This research will be kept private. The research records will include some information about you, and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes your name, your economic status, your college year, etc. Please note that we will keep this information private by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location, specifically in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer. Handwritten notes taken during the interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet.
- ☐ Since the interviews will be conducted in the Graduate Student Lounge on the College Avenue Campus, I cannot guarantee that no one will overhear the questions asked or your responses. Thus, I cannot guarantee confidentiality.
- ☐ The research team, my dissertation committee, and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be retained indefinitely as it may inform future research.
- ☐ The data generated from this study may be used in conference presentations and publications.

Questions

- ☐ If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me:

Tieka Harris
Doctoral Student
Rutgers Graduate School of Education
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-503-9728
Email: tieka.harris@rutgers.edu

- ☐ You may also contact my faculty advisor:

Dr. Ebelia Hernandez, Professor
Rutgers Graduate School of Education
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 848-932-0818
Email: ebelia.hernandez@rutgers.edu

- ☐ If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-2866
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Participant (Print) _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Audio/Visual Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Community Cultural Wealth Brokers: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Low-income, First-generation Black Female Undergraduates at a Historically White Institution conducted by Tieka Harris. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (sound) as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis of study data by the research team.

The recording(s) will include your name and the content of the interview discussion. If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful and/or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the recording and record over such information OR you can ask that certain text be removed from the dataset/transcripts.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to subjects' identity. The recordings will be kept indefinitely as they may contribute to future research.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____

Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Participant Information Form**Community Cultural Wealth Brokers: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Low-Income, First-Generation Black Female Undergraduates at a Historically White Institution (Study ID #18-046M)**

Researcher: Tieka Harris, Doctoral Candidate
Rutgers University Graduate School of Education

Thank you for choosing to participate in this research. The purpose of this study is to understand how Black women acclimate to college, without the support of opportunity programs, and if they experience feelings of invisibility while doing so. The information you provide on this form will help facilitate our conversation during the interview. Please note that your anonymity throughout the research process is ensured. As well, if you have any questions while completing this form or at any time, please email me at tieka.harris@rutgers.edu.

*** Required**

First Name and Last Name * _____

Age _____

Gender *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other:

With which race do you primarily identify? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Black (non-Hispanic)
- ☐ White
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other

Home Address (Street, City, State, Zip Code)

Phone Number * _____

Email Address * _____

State and Country of Birth _____

Majors (Please list all majors, but not minors)

Class Status *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Other:

Class Year *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 2017
- ☐ 2018
- ☐ 2019
- ☐ 2020
- ☐ Other:

Number of Credits Already Completed * _____

What is your cumulative GPA? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 3.5-4.0
- ☐ 3.0-3.49
- ☐ 2.50-2.99
- ☐ 2.0-2.49
- ☐ 1.5-1.99
- ☐ 0.0-1.49

Please select any of the following programs that you have ever participated in, prior to college or during college: *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ EOF (Educational Opportunity Fund Program)
- ☐ SSS (Student Support Services)
- ☐ RFS (Rutgers Future Scholars)
- ☐ RU 1st Program
- ☐ James Dickson Carr Scholars
- ☐ Paul Robeson Leadership Institute
- ☐ ODASIS
- ☐ Ronald E. McNair Program
- ☐ Mountainview
- ☐ Gear Up
- ☐ Upward Bound
- ☐ college-level sports
- ☐ I have never participated in any of these programs
- ☐ Other:

Select one of the following for your mother: *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Never attended college
- ☐ Attended a 2-year/community college, but did not graduate
- ☐ Attended a 4-year college, but did not graduate
- ☐ Attended a 2-year/community college, and graduated
- ☐ Attended a 4-year college, and graduated
- ☐ I am not sure of my mother's educational background

Select one of the following for your father: *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Never attended college
- ☐ Attended a 2-year/community college, but did not graduate
- ☐ Attended a 4-year college, but did not graduate
- ☐ Attended a 2-year/community college, and graduated
- ☐ Attended a 4-year college, and graduated
- ☐ I am not sure of my father's educational background

How many people are in your household (at your primary residence, not on campus)? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ more than 8

As a best guess, write in your household's approximate annual income, not including yours (for example, \$21,000). * _____

Should you be chosen to participate in the next phase of this study, you will be contacted shortly to schedule an interview with me. Please indicate the best method of contact. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Email
- ☐ Phone

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Tieka Harris. I am a doctoral candidate at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, in the Education, Culture, and Society concentration. I am studying the college experiences of Black female undergraduate students. I am interested in how their backgrounds as low-income, first-generation college attendees shape their experiences as college students. This interview should take about 60-90 minutes, and I will keep all of your responses anonymous. After the interview, you will be invited to participate in a focus group where you will meet other Black female undergraduates of similar backgrounds. At that time, you will be able to review your interview transcript, and discuss findings with the group. That meeting will take approximately 60 minutes.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. To start, I am going to review the information included on your Participant Information Form, and review and have you sign the Informed Consent Form.

Do you have any questions of me before we begin?

I want to remind you that at any time, if you are uncomfortable, unable, or unwilling to answer a question, please say so. You are also welcome to stop the interview at any time by saying so.

Intersectionality

1. If someone dropped in from another planet and asked you to tell them about your life as a first-generation Black woman of low income, what would you say (Bowleg, 2008)?
2. Taking the same scenario of someone dropping in from another planet, what would you tell them about your experience as a first-generation Black woman of low income, specifically at a historically white institution (HWI)?
3. How has your experience of being a Black woman of low income shaped your experience of being the first in your family to go to college?

Invisibility

4. Anthropologist Signithia Fordham provides the following statement about “invisibility:”
 “...the most salient characteristic of the academically successful females at Capital High is a deliberate silence, a controlled response to their evolving, ambiguous status as academically successful students. Consequently, silence as a strategy for academic success at Capital is largely unconscious. Developing and using this strategy at the high school level enables high-achieving African-American females to deflect the latent and not too latent hostility and anger that might be directed at them were they to be both highly visible and academically successful. Invisibility is a highly valued prerequisite for academic success (p.17).”

What are your thoughts on this? (Disclose my personal experience of the respondent is having trouble: For example, have you ever experienced this? What makes you feel invisible? Have you experienced that feeling while on this campus? Where and when?)

5. Where and when do you feel most visible on campus?

Aspirational Capital

6. What are your dreams and goals for your future? Has anything detracted you from them? What has encouraged you to remain committed your dreams and goals?

Linguistic Capital

7. Tell me about the language or languages you use and how that may be the same or different from some of your peers.
8. What do you think impacts the language you use, and how do you think it impacts your college experience?

Familial Capital

9. Tell me about your family and how they impact your education.
10. What home communities are you a member of (i.e. church, community centers, Jack and Jill, etc.) and what impact do they have on your education? What school communities are you a member of (i.e., sororities, athletics), and what impact do they have on your education?
11. What beliefs or values do you share with your family and the communities you are part of?

Social Capital

12. What college or community resources have you used to adjust to or navigate college that you have also told others to access? What was the outcome for you? For others who then accessed the resources you recommended?
13. Describe any significant relationships you have built with (non-related) peers at school, and how those relationships impact your experience of college.
14. Describe any significant relationships you have built with faculty (professors, TAs) or staff (advisors, deans) at school, and how those relationships impact your college experience.

Navigational Capital

15. What institutional barriers have you faced while in college? How did you overcome them?

Resistant Capital

16. What messages have you received about your status as a Black woman of low-income while at college? How have those messages impacted you? How have you challenged, or are you challenging, those messages?

Rutgers

17. Reflecting on the questions we have already discussed, how would you describe your experience so far as a Rutgers student overall?
18. What could the university do to better support you as a low-income, first-generation Black woman?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the interview. I appreciate your willingness to share your insights. Please be mindful of your email, as I will send you an invitation to participate in the focus group.

Distribute the \$25 gift card to the participant.

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOL

FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOL

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining me today. I would like to use today's meeting to discuss your impressions of the interviews, to share any new insights you have, and to allow you to share them with me, and others who participated in this research. First, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, as well as the themes that were found across the interviews. Then, we will go around and respond to some questions and have an open discussion of those questions.

Are there any questions before we begin?

Begin by going around the room to have everyone introduce herself. Then, distribute the interview transcripts to each participant, and allow them time to read through them.

Now, I am going to ask questions related to the interview and the findings. Before you respond to my questions, please state your name as it will aid in transcribing the data from today's focus group.

Questions

1. Do you think the conversation we had during your interview accurately reflects your experience as a low-income, first-generation Black woman at Rutgers?
2. Is there anything that shocked you or was unexpected about your interview, now that you have read the transcript?
3. Is there anything you would like to add at this point?

Distribute the list of themes and provide participants time to read them.

4. Let's take a minute to review the themes. What do you find most interesting? Most troubling?
5. Is there any additional information you would like to contribute about your experience as a first-generation Black woman of low-income at Rutgers?

Thank you for participating in the focus group today. If you are interested in reading the final version of the dissertation research, I would be more than happy to share it with you. Once it is complete, I will contact you by email. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Distribute \$50 gift cards to each participant.