



2019

## WE (SHE, ME, HER) ARE NOT IN COMMUNICATION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A BLACK COLLEGE ADMINISTRATOR

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WE (SHE, ME, HER) ARE NOT IN COMMUNICATION:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A BLACK COLLEGE ADMINISTRATOR

By

Tanya Anderson

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University of the Pacific  
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2019

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By

Tanya Anderson

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone I descended from. I carry you with me. I also dedicate this dissertation to all those following behind me. I had you in mind as I wrote this. I pray your learning curve is shorter than mine as a result of all the things I write in the following chapters.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jesus!! I'm sure you hear me screaming your name in my head. We did it, Dad! We did it! Father, where would I be without you? I could have all the tongues in the world, and it could never be enough to thank you for just being you in my life. I saw you, felt you, learned even more about you on this journey to becoming a doctor. Your plans for me are soooo much higher than anything I could ever think or imagine for my life. This degree was never one I set a goal for, you sent people my way to nudge me this direction and I happily followed. Thank you! Thank you for choosing me to be your daughter! Thank you for loving me the way that only you can!! I love you more than any words I could find that exist. Father, I praise you...I lift you up...I magnify your name! Hallelujah!

Father, I thank you for the plethora of people who supported me on this journey from before I started to this very day...I pray you bless them all individually for their well wishes, nudges, words of encouragement, pep-talks, prayers, ears, advice and thoughts, proofreads and constant emails (Dr. Hallett!). This dissertation is for all of us!

WE (SHE, ME, HER) ARE NOT IN COMMUNICATION:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A BLACK COLLEGE ADMINISTRATOR

Abstract

By Tanya Anderson

University of the Pacific  
2019

I'm a first generation, previously low income, Christian, African American administrator at a California community college who struggled and felt alone throughout my journey. This autoethnography helped me make peace within my broken pieces. Within this dissertation, I highlight the impacts and hindrances within my education, family and career experiences. The purpose of this study is to offer the reader an insider view of how I ultimately became an administrator and with this information provide scholarship on how to more successfully integrate African American female leaders into higher education. The bonus chapter provides young women lessons learned along the way to shorten their learning curve on the way up the ladder.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **The Beginning: Was Blind Now I See**

All my life I physically had 20/20 vision, but in August 2008 someone gave me glasses without me knowing how to use them and honestly scared me. It was at a training our college brought to the campus for administrators, staff and students called “Beyond Diversity: Courageous Conversations.” We were fortunate to have the founder of the organization, which means we received the most poignant, raw, straight no chaser, in your face, light switched to the on position, and never to be the same training. His name is Glenn Singleton and the mission of Beyond Diversity includes:

We believe systemic racism is the most devastating factor contributing to the diminished capacity of all people, and especially people of color and indigenous people, to achieve at the highest levels. It fractures our communities and erodes the support and nourishment we would otherwise receive from them. We cannot hope to eliminate the racially predictable outcomes of our lives unless we first discuss race and racism in a way that is earnest, honest, and sustainable. To that end, we have developed Courageous Conversation™, a process to understand and discuss race explicitly. (<https://courageousconversation.com/peg/>)

Additionally, this life changing professional development opportunity was designed to open the eyes of its audience to identify and examine their own cultural perspectives and assumptions and to understand how those factors impact and influence the ways that they interrelate with those whose cultural backgrounds are different than their own.

What I didn't know was that I would be made aware of my own privilege and the fact that my own (mis)perceptions of my own identity would make me feel isolated. Specifically on the second day of the training, Glenn had us return having done homework the day before which happened to be a White Privilege questionnaire by Peggy McIntosh (1988) full of questions that

asked about lived experiences surrounding race, language, identity, everyday living, power and of course privilege among other questions. We were to get in a circle with the final number we calculated from that questionnaire. As the line formulated everyone could clearly identify the color spectrum. On one side of the circle were those with a higher score of privilege points who physically resembled that of White skin; in the middle were those of Latinx decent, and then the circle progressed to those of darker Black skin. I fell in the middle. At the time, this made me feel something that was beyond description, but I can now surmise it to be isolated. I felt far away from those I call community.

I didn't know who to talk to about everything that had just happened. Not only did I experience "diversity training" from a drastically different lens, and I was made aware that I had more privilege than those I identify most with but I also had just been given these permanent new glasses that I couldn't ask someone how to use. I was confused. I was lost. I was alone. Normally when something professionally happened I would go to one of my African American colleagues' office close the door and vent. I couldn't do that this time because they were all in the room at the other end of the spectrum at what felt like an untouchable distance from myself. Added to that, is my status of being first generation college educated, born from a different country which means I didn't have the familial support to process this new social phenomenon with. It took me an unconscious amount of time to get through the use of my new permanent eyes and knowledge. I never felt comfortable enough to talk about it except to say it changed me.

I can now identify it to be the beginning of my desire to serve my community beyond the regular day-to-day interactions. This training, though extremely uncomfortable, was a pivotal point in me pursuing a study such as this one for the primary fact that it made me aware of my

positionality within my community with an acute awareness of struggles of which I hadn't experienced but felt close to nonetheless. The burden of needing to help increased with the receipt of my new prescriptions. I decided then that it was time to show up every chance afforded me for every student but especially our Black male students who I had a hand in supporting. It has been my intention to go above and beyond since I better understood how the world and educational system treated them. Lift them up and to move them forward is the goal.

### **Before the Beginning: My Personal Framework**

I was born in Belize City, Belize and illegally came to this country when I was only 2 years old. I often get asked "what are you" as if my Black skin doesn't clearly reveal it. Either I'm in denial of my physical appearance or when I look in the mirror I only see a regular Black girl, not one who looks Caribbean. I don't have long fine curly hair, or an accent or skin color that shows one my heritage being different than that of every other African American Black female. It makes me wonder if those who ask, "what are you" see privilege? And what does that mean while I serve those in my community?

I grew up an only child. My parents never married. My mother raised me and my father immigrated to South Central California (same city I resided) and moved in with his girlfriend when I was small. Though I was an only child, I was never spoiled as many presume. I worked somewhat hard in school and maintained a grade point average no less than 3.7 for the full duration of my secondary education. I was a natural leader that took advantage of every opportunity presented and have been working since the prime age of 13.

Though I grew up with my mother, I cannot say I know much about her past/upbringing because she never talked about it. She was raised by her paternal grandmother and went far educationally by Belizean standards, but ultimately did not finish high school. In the US, she

worked as a seamstress and was paid under the table. In my older years, she shared she didn't have legal paperwork for many years, which gives me insight to why she stayed in that job for so long. I learned hard work, tenacity, work ethic and collegiality from my mother in regards to working. She could never call in sick so she didn't. That influenced me also because it taught me to put work first before myself if I had to.

Being an only child meant I longed to connect with everyone. My mom did not form strong family bonds (not even with me) so connecting to aunts, uncles and cousins didn't happen on a frequent basis. Also, I saw my dad on weekends that slowed down over time. He birthed other children that got to know him in a much more intimate way than I did because they lived with him. We are estranged even to this date. This frame of reference makes up how I developed as a person, and as a result community is something I long for.

### **The Middle: Starting My Work**

This topic was chosen as a result of my current Administrator position at American River College—a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)—that is also a community college. I am very passionate about African American males at the community college but wonder exactly how to support, advocate, help, communicate while I am also struggling as an administrator. How do I help them when it's difficult to help myself? There is a bit of poetry when I think about meshing the two in the sense that we both need mentorship, struggle in the first year predominantly, need support before and during the process, don't know who to ask for help and it tears down our confidence, something generally and historically our culture drives strength from. I feel a strong responsibility toward helping my community, even more so since I am the only African American female administrator at my institution. Research shows that we (females) are the ones to mentor more than our counterparts (Griffin & Reddick, 2011).

It is well documented in several publications that African American males need help navigating the system, and so do I, but you won't find that in too many articles. There were so many programs I participated in that gave me leadership experience, strategies to transition to college, how to successfully network, conferences on how to do your classified job better but there were no programs or classes in my graduate programs that got me ready to become an effective administrator. I didn't learn how to navigate an institution whose system was rooted in white supremacy and no mentorship. The expectation to come with skills I didn't have was/is hard to admit and experience. How can I show up for those in my community when my confidence went down the drain and stress level was another part I did not know how to manage? In addition, the mantra of strong Black woman who can do it all ensued as I didn't give up trying everything I could to show up each day and face my challenges. I am proud to say I persisted for almost 4 years now which I will detail through this dissertation.

My contribution to the education field has been well over 17 years. I have assisted thousands of diverse students with matriculation, retention and persistence and the need for service remains daunting. Students who consistently have the lowest performance rates are African American males (my brothers). This is not representative of all African American males, but a majority is recognized. Research shows that statistics on my brothers with high dropout rates, low retention and persistence rates, as well as, the least to complete college have not changed, which strongly implies they need help (Henningson, 2005). I have experienced too many convocations with details that my community is still suffering, and no long-standing solutions are being directed to help them. It honestly makes me angry to see the low statistics and the lack of ethnic diversity in the hiring of faculty and staff. We've struggled for so many years and I could not imagine completing this dissertation on any other subject but on research



that is dedicated to a solution to advance us forward within academia. It is the hope of a positive shift within even just a small part of us to promote success for populations I call family.

Just as bell hooks (2004) so eloquently states in her book *We Real Cool*,  
As a black woman who cares about the plight of black men, I feel I can no longer wait for brothers to take the lead and spread the word...the suffering of black men has intensified...Black women cannot speak for black men. We can speak with them (p. xvii).

This study examines my journey as an African American administrator. Originally, I wanted to include research on mentoring and supporting African American males also but decided to stay focused on the advancement of supporting fellow administrators of color that way we have the bandwidth to support everyone else after gaining the help we need. I wonder what parts of the system is causing feelings of isolation; what internal oppressive systemic educational practices have contributed to the onboarding process and continual progression of sabotage?

In *Being Bad: My Baby Brother and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, Crystal Laura (2014) asks her brother (Chris) why he had dropped out of school. He blamed himself. He stuck to the story that it was no one else's fault but his own and was blind to his social ecology, the educational system that classified him as special needs as it similarly did for a high number of African American males making them susceptible to being labeled, undereducated, stereotyped and treated in a manner in which failure was reinforced (Laura, 2014), nor was he aware of the criminal school-to-prison pipeline set in place well before he was born. His blame was clearly misplaced. Laura continues throughout the book exploring the system, his environment and family contributions to his fate. What if that is my story? What parts of the system are prevalent in my story? For these reasons, I examine my journey.

### **The Now: Why?**

This study is a conversation with my *self*, but one the reader will be better for reading. It is about my life lessons and to extend and enrich my community's sense of value. I write this because I care and want to do something that will add to the scholarship that will benefit our world because helping the lowest performing will make everyone better. This is an issue beyond just the communities that are researched here, it is to shed lights on systems in place that are well intentioned, mostly, but need drastic change. While the (achievement, financial, equity, housing, everything) gap continues to grow there will always be work to do.

### **The Remainder of the Study**

This autoethnography provides an in depth account of my journey through an examination of my experience as a community college administrator. It documents my onboarding process, current duties of the position, and how my experience confirms and introduces new knowledge in research. My intention is to use the research as an advocacy tool to better support my community. I remember too well the feeling of isolation and the need to teach myself how to navigate the position/system so this study is for those in similar situations and for any Executive Administrators in search of changing the current oppressive system to better support, retain, and train new Administrators.

Chapter 2 reviews research on higher education Administrators, higher education women of color Administrators, women of color Administrators specifically in community colleges, and leadership characteristics of an Administrator and the impact Administrators make on students of color, more specifically African American males who are unfortunately the least performing. Chapter 3 highlights why I chose Autoethnography as a research method. It also provides a breakdown into an "intimate" approach to critical self-reflection....

Chapter 4 is a reconstruction of my stories from adolescence to today. I make connections of leadership, the development of my speaking abilities, who my parents are and how they contributed to who I am today, as well as, the fact that I understand them more as a result of this autoethnographic experience which happens as I wrote this chapter. I also chronicle how my schooling experience was transformed from secondary to postsecondary. And lastly, I include details of my Administrator position and the struggles I encountered.

In Chapter 5, I introduce new considerations to research. While I agree with many parts of the articles I read, ‘they read me’, there are parts of my experience that add to knowledge of onboarding and keeping Administrators of color in the academy. I additionally make suggestions for practitioners who strive to keep women of color, namely Black women working within community college, which is a part of the new call to increase equity.

A bonus chapter emerged from this dissertation as a result of the talk with *my self*. It is wisdom and encouragement to my sistahs who read this after I have finished it and who are looking for some sort of solace to help them make it through. It is a gathering of wisdom I wish someone would have told me when I originally took on my Administrator position, one of THE hardest experiences I’ve had to date.

## CHAPTER 2: OTHERS WHO GAVE ME LIFE

My journey as an African American administrator is one not completely consistent with literature. More often than not, many articles acknowledge racial discrimination (Bernard, Hoggard & Neblett, 2017; Griffin, 2012; Harper, 2009; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007), macroaggression and microaggression (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007), tokenism (Kanter, 1977) and even the combined experiences of racist and sexist familiarities in the lives of African American students, faculty, and administrators (Bernard, Hoggard & Neblett, 2017; Griffin, 2012; Harper, 2009; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Tillman, 2001). With the exception of macroaggressions, as I search my own journey I cannot identify the other listed common characteristics within my lived experiences; although, even as I write I wonder if because it has been such a prevalent part of my community's existence, did I actually negate situations in the hope of believing the good in people and not admit any racist questions asked of me or the disapproving gazes I dismissed, or even the conversations I may have overheard. Was I protecting the dominant culture from being called out or was I protecting my mind from dealing with a reality I have no knowledge how to navigate? This study is intended for me to examine more closely my first year journey within the community college system.

Similar to my experience during the Beyond Diversity training, this autoethnography is me getting more adjusted and acquainted with my new glasses as a new, and only, African American female administrator at my predominantly White community college institution. These glasses hurt and validate at the same time. They hurt because of the sociology of educational institutions and systemic racism that perpetuate a slave mentality (assimilate or perish, don't question the system and transformational leadership will take time and an army).

The glasses validate, because as I reviewed the limited literature surrounding African American administrators, the awareness that I am not the only one to experience what I have is comforting. The isolation process alone can make anyone question their purpose and ability to succeed, however, knowing there are strategies to help me continue the journey and those coming behind me serves as the overarching purpose of this study. The knowledge that my scholarship will contribute to how to more successfully integrate African American females into higher education is another main purpose of this autoethnography.

### **Overview of the Chapter**

The following chapter details research on African Americans in leadership positions in higher education. It begins with research on the barriers surrounding integrating into the academy and then discusses how institutions have a tendency to praise inclusion while practicing exclusion. Pertinent to my study, I examine the onboarding process in order for African American administrators to be successful that leads me toward extrapolating my characteristics within the impostor syndrome. It is most important to me that while in my role I serve my community so within this study I including research on implications of having African American leaders on campus, mentorship and what African American women have consistently meant to the movement and their significance toward supporting their community.

The primary research questions for the study are as follows:

1. What parts of the system cause feeling of isolation and educational/social inequality?
2. What internal oppressive systemic educational practices have contributed to this onboarding and continual process of sabotage?
3. What are the enablers and barriers that contribute or diminish the success of African American administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)?
4. What are the implications of increasing African American leadership representation on campuses?

### **Significance**

The significance of this study resides in multiple places. First, my voice because there is a significant dearth in research on the onboarding process of new African American administrators in general, but add to that those who are first generation with minimal opportunities for mentorship which I would argue is significant. Second, findings from this study will provide important strategies institutions should mandate and encourage to increase diversity within leadership. The more intention put towards practicing inclusion in the senior leadership team among the academy the longer administrators may remain and practices can influence the departments they oversee. Lastly, transformational change in community college practices is the intended outcome of this study for not only the PWI I work for but others with similar situations.

### **Integrating the Academy**

There needs to be connections, practices and overall equity training to ensure navigation of the educational system is fluid. Kezar and Eckel (2002b) found that supportive, visible and collaborative administrators are mandatory for transformational change in higher education. However, change within the institution becomes troubling if the administrators have difficulty navigating the system on their own behalf. If these senior leaders have difficulty navigating the system it's logical to believe that those outside the system will have even more problems. Feagin, Vera and Imani (1996) were the first to examine both Black students and parents' experience entering predominantly White institutions. They revealed that the participants confronted a racially toxic climate, constant confrontation of stereotypes and racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue refers to social-psychological symptoms resulting from living in severe racist environments (Smith, 2004a). The stress of constant "racial battles on People of Color in

historically White spaces can become mentally, emotionally and physically draining and/or lethal on the accumulation of physiological symptoms that oftentimes go untreated, unnoticed, or misdiagnosed (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2006, p. 3).” They found numerous barriers to navigating the institution and recommended increasing African American staff to enhance their sense of belonging throughout the duration of students’ campus experiences. For this reason, it is imperative institutions administer strategies to recruit and retain African American leadership to assist in the transformation against systems that promote alienation and the feeling of being a “Guest in Someone Else’s House: Students of Color” (1994), the title of Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner’s article that summarized the feelings provided by many students of color at most PWIs.

Why are African American female administrators underrepresented? Despite the advances our nation has made with increased representation of minorities in varying fields, African American women remain in significantly low percentages in executive positions (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016). Women teach more often, advise and mentor greater number of students, and seek out more professional development opportunities relative to their male counterparts (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Harvey & Anderson, 2005). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) reveal, “Additional research must be conducted to explain the conundrum that women show advantages in leadership skills but are disadvantaged in actually securing and maintaining leadership roles (p. 177).” Unfortunately, women who make it to the top rung of the leadership ladder often decide to jump off because of frustration and disillusionment (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000) which makes it imperative that more scholarship is needed expounding the phenomenon on how African American women overcome challenges within leadership positions in order to help other women succeed (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016; Brown, 2004). The system was created by White men for White men with their cultural

norms, policies and procedures, which may be a contributing factor to the lack of retention surrounding women and women of color. Systemic racism affects everyone through an attempt to veil the realities of its segregated outcomes. This study attempts to challenge this system. The system has a singular focus that does not include support marginalized communities. It is the institutions responsibility to assume a direct and decisive role in reducing racial discriminations, intimidations and inequities experienced on campus. The success of higher education institutions depends on it. For the purpose of my study I seek to gain clarity and to find models that provide increased access, success and representation of African American female senior leaders (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016).

There is a gift that ‘outsiders’ often bring to an institution. Women and minorities, precisely because they are outsiders, ... bring a fresh point of view to the institution, seeing it with different eyes and coming up with new ideas. If we do not have a supportive environment for them, we waste talent and ultimately the academy is the loser” (Sandler & Hall, 1986, p. 17).

### **Praising Inclusion, While Practicing Exclusion**

We are now in 2020 and the word diversity and inclusion are everywhere. When I do a simple job search the postings associated with equity exists now more than ever in so many different companies and organizations. I must admit it’s exciting. It’s exciting to believe that leaders all around care about the wellbeing of how employees and future employees experience employment in various facets of employment. But I hope it’s not for show and to say they run a more equitable system because of the hiring of this person but not actually perform in a less bias, white supremacist, racist, sexist, homophobic and the like manner. That is the premise for this section. There are many institutions who praise inclusion, but often practice exclusion. Ways this occurs: coordinate pilot programs that remain pilot with no real funding, temporary band aid fixes for low performing students that never become institutionalized, have surface level diversity training, hold “equity” summits but nothing changes, wait until state mandates come



through to change inequitable practices that research shows adversely affects marginalized populations, a website with predominantly white faces while headlining the welcoming of diversity and these are only a few. The moment institutions begin to make continuous long-term equitable changes the sooner employees of color and the entire student population will benefit.

Collins and Kritsonis (2006) stress the necessity to match the diversity of the staff with the growth of the student body. They assert the importance of students learning scholarship and leadership from those of pluralistic backgrounds and experiences, which add long-term value as a productive citizen who will enter the workforce and offer cultural competencies while operating in society. Saenz, Nagi and Hurtado (2007) reveal White students are unlikely to remain isolated within their own communities after meaningfully engaging with peers of diverse backgrounds and perspectives both on and off campus. The authors believe it will have sustainable effects in their residential neighborhoods and after college. In addition, Lark (2013) contends the opportunity to have inclusive faculty and administrators of color opens the door for progressive development and evolved students. She questions though, why no strides have been made to combat underrepresentation. Why is white majority still the norm in our institutions as evidenced by Whites dominating the number of executive leaders, administrators, faculty and student graduates? “The university has diversity plastered everywhere, but I have yet to see any real evidence of it” (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 16). This begs the question of why institutions “praise inclusion publicly, while promoting exclusion and marginalization, in practice” (Johnson, 2013, p. 36).

After reading Shaun Harper’s (2009) *Nigger no more: a critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities*, it caused me to wonder if I was being Niggered. He espoused, “Continuing to claim an ethic of care for Black

males without tending to racism and structural barriers to achievement and justice constitutes niggering” (p. 699), which “is an actionable term employed to categorically subordinate Black persons” (p. 698). Jenkins (2006) asserts the education system says there is care for Blacks, but continuously practices policies of oppression, prejudice and neglect. Almost 20 years ago, Berger and Milem (1999) discovered the inability of Black males to integrate into the college campus was the common explanation for their dropout rates. Neglect, racist structural barriers, subordination, and navigationally challenged, are all characteristics I would also use to share regarding my experience within the system. While I still maintain my belief that the current system has good intentions they either aren’t aware of how to transform the oiled machine to accommodate the many needs of disadvantaged populations, or those who are privileged are not in any rush to move forward with a system redesign to support the lowest performing students. I am not totally confident those who operate the system are aware of its niggering tendencies.

Case in point, similar to how my experience as an administrator is congruent to the Black males referenced in the aforementioned articles, I compare the sentiments of how White students feel to White administrators. In a focus group with White students who were thought to most likely interact with ethnic minority peers and provide meaningful assessments on the campus racial climate, they shared that they thought highly of the campus environment and erroneously assumed that minority students experienced and felt no racial tensions and that minority student similarly had positive feelings about being on campus (Harper and Hurtado, 2007). This adds great significance of my voice to ensure what White administrators know about Black female administrator experiences are a reality and not what they assume. Unfortunately, this topic is not a conversation that ever comes up. This dissertation is a testimony I hope brings light to what happens to people like me when we enter this level of leadership. I would imagine the same is

true that White administrators are unaware just how African American males experience the institution as well, that they face racial battle fatigue and have struggles not widely asked or discussed. Our voices matter. Our experiences matter. The more liberated we become to articulate our struggles the quicker change may occur. The challenge is will it be heard.

Harper and Hurtado (2007) interviewed ethnic minority staff and a few White institution staff, who were fully aware of how minority students were disadvantaged, racially segregated, and even discontented, but no one talked about it for fear of making senior administrators angry, being seen as troublemakers and fear of losing their jobs. A Latino academic advisor stated, “I feel bad for what the young brothers and sisters go through here, but there is only so much I can do since I have only been here two years” (p. 19). The burden of caring about my reputation and employment is a heavy one to consider when I think about the possibility of speaking out and potential consequences of challenging the system. It truly resonated with me reading Smith, Allen and Danley (2007),

The social condition that produces racial battle fatigue for African Americans is enveloped in societal ideologies and beliefs about Blacks as a group. In this social milieu, where institutional and individual racist practices are present (whether overtly, covertly, subtly, or as color-blind acts), African Americans are constantly dedicating time and energy to determining if there was a stressor, whether that stressor was motivated by a racist purpose, and *how* or *if* they should respond (p. 557). (emphasis added by me)

If the Beyond Diversity training served as new prescription glasses, this article detailing racial battle fatigue was the bright beam of light that glows in the dawn. In the words of Griffin (2012), “it read me as I read” (p. 140). I would add an African American colloquialism, ‘*it gave me life.*’ Racial battle fatigue is a theoretical framework that examines social-psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration, psychological or emotional withdrawal, and coping strategies) related with being an African American at predominantly White institutions. It essentially

concludes that those of African descent who have experienced micro and macroaggressions have trouble worrying, backaches, extreme fatigue, loss of appetite, constant anxiety, sleep broken by haunting, loss of self-confidence and inability to articulate sound thoughts. Smith, Allen and Danley (2007) examine how the intersection of race and gender experience within the educational system can be detrimental to aspirations and achievement, cause the loss of energy, and even lead to traumatic psychological and physiological stress conditions. Our community is more socialized in dealing with macroaggressions over microaggressions through passed down coping strategies (Stevenson, 1997).

The cumulative symptoms of racial battle fatigue are stress responses I have experienced; until now, I blamed and beat up myself for my inability to get my thoughts and life together. Macroaggressions occur at a structural level with full intentions to exclude through action or omission. More often than not, I witness macroaggressions on my predominantly White institution in many forms. The educational system in place shows overt aggression through a system that does not support African American students in policy, appalling graduation rates, low employment of a diverse faculty and administrators, non-welcoming institutional integration, racial discrimination, racialized campus climate, African American dropout rates (particularly with African American males), niggering on campus that happens in varying forms through oppressive school/social norms, and an even more hurtful one, blaming the low socioeconomic, often first generation African American student.

Audre Lorde exclaimed, “Your silence will not protect you” and I am now at the point where I am afraid of being silent, of not respecting my inner voice (Smith et al., 2007), and not being resilient for those coming behind me. I, by no means, desire to be an “accomplice in the cyclical reproduction of racism and institutional negligence” (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 21).

This study offers more purpose to me as an autoethnography but it is my intention that this study implores transformational leaders interested in introducing and practicing inclusion within predominantly White institutions (PWIs). It is my way of strategically talking back (hooks, 1989).

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back,” that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (hooks, 1989, p. 9).

### **Examining the Onboarding Process**

Gardner, Barrett and Pearson (2014) provide an enlightening qualitative study examining factors that serve as enablers and barriers for African American administrators at PWIs. They use a conceptual framework strategically framed within adjustment issues, institutional factors and career dynamics. I highlight this article as a poignant part of my study because it offers a lens as to successful onboarding, retaining African American administrators and possibly increasing the number of racial/ethnic minority applicants if this culture is adhered to.

The findings of the study are derived after interviewing 14 successful student affairs African American administrators, 4 women and 10 men from PWIs. It is not known, however, if these senior leaders work for community colleges and/or universities, which I conclude to be a limitation. Also, a minimum criterion to participate was to have worked in the profession for at least five years, because it was named as a benchmark (Moore, 1983). While I believe this article to be very beneficial, my study is equally significant because I examine my experience under 5 years to illuminate what happens to those African American administrators who jump off the track, as aforementioned (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Understanding the first year experience is important to the increase of inclusive representation within institutions; if we are not making it past the first few years, then the pool will continue to remain dismal. Important to

know, between 2007 and 2011, the number of African American professional staff decreased from 9% to 8.5% (The Almanac of Higher Education, 2013).

The findings (as shown in Figure 2) reveal a list that contributes to either career success or career departure. Within the issues that arise surrounding adjusting to the organization/campus climate, the enablers include mentoring, healthy self-image and motivation, and social network and family support. It is not a surprise that mentoring would help to facilitate and promote professional growth (Patton, 2009) and that it is critical to the survival of people of color (Turner, Gonzalez & Wood, 2008), as well as role modeling and redirection from harm (Salazar, 2009) and learning unwritten rules (Warde, 2009). However, institutions should keep in mind that historically, males are a majority within senior leadership and White men mentor White men which makes it difficult to seamlessly navigate the system, learn the rules of the game, and receive guidance toward a clear career pathway (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Beckwith et al., 2016; Tillman, 2001). Additionally, the lack of role models of the same racial/ethnic group for African American women has been labeled a barrier in the workplace (Beckwith et al., 2016; Brown, 2004). Further, relational exclusion occurs with White women through informal networks (Brown, 2004). Tillman (2001) found same-race mentor relationships offered African Americans more psychosocial support than cross-raced ones. The same-race relationships included both organizational and developmental influences which were more desired. Until an increase in recruitment and retention occurs for senior leadership, a survival strategy for African American women likely requires finding mentors outside their race and gender within their institutions and building networks of support elsewhere that include same race/gender mentoring. The definition of a successful mentoring relationship is an interesting concept. Tillman (2001) offers, “implicit in the different perceptions of mentoring

and the different ways of acting out mentoring relationships are very different criteria for what constitutes mentoring and its relations to success” (p. 305). Interestingly, even though testimonies of mentees who were successful in navigating the academic culture and were able to adapt (whatever adaptation means), they still felt like an outsider who did not belong which means successful system integration is relative.

As for another enabler, healthy self-image and motivation, Gardner, Barrett and Pearson (2014) share it is important that professions working in PWIs enter with extreme self-confidence that remains focused on their competent abilities, sense of belonging, developed racial identity and a professional attitude. Social networks and family support were listed as obvious inclusions for the interviewees, but I claim as a limitation since it does not represent those whose family support was minimal to none (similar to me), which again offers purpose to this study.

Other enablers include commitment to diversity, which essentially includes a robust recruitment and hiring practice of staff of color, diversity training, and orientation to the campus and community; fairly compensating employees is another enabler. In addition, professional preparation in regards to educational degrees offers credibility. Thomas and Alderfer (1989) suggest career development for Black supervisors has to persist through these stages – entry, adjusting, planned growth and success. Undergraduate involvement goes back to preparation as it explicates past educational experiences to offer introductions into student affairs.

The barriers of success listed for African American administrators at PWIs are lack of advancement opportunities, discrimination, perceptions of prejudice and feelings of separateness. I would like to expound more on the latter particularly because I most identify with it. Feelings of isolation and separation are consistent with other research that defines isolation as the absence of other African Americans on campus with unique cultural similarities and experiences at PWIs.

The combination between these feelings and lack of mentoring make African American populations within higher education susceptible to an impostor syndrome/phenomenon (Parkman, 2016).

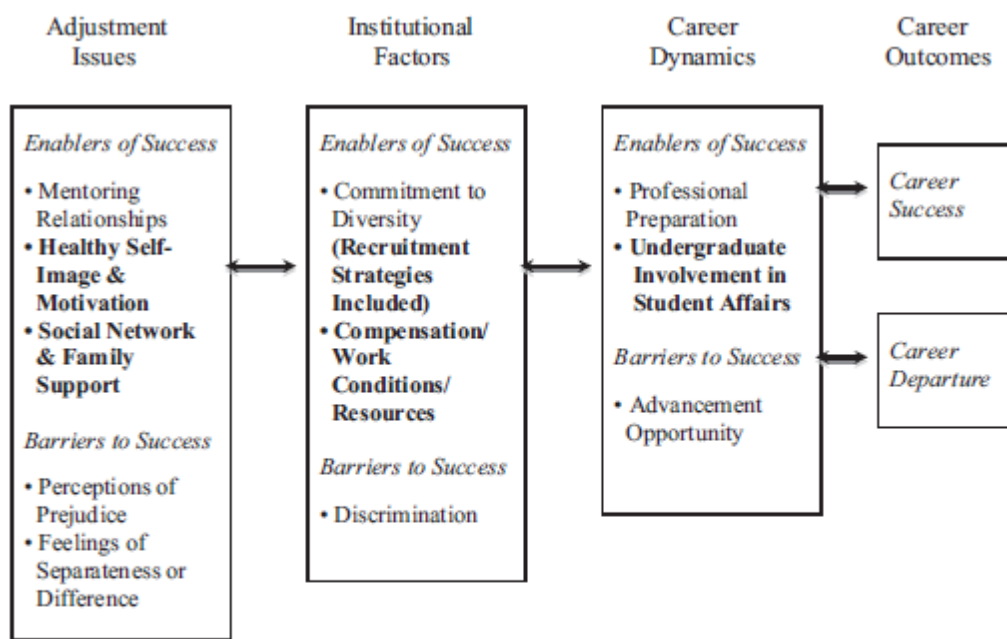


Figure 1.1 Revised conceptual framework: Factors that contribute to career success or career departure of African American

### Imposter Syndrome/Phenomenon

Impostor Syndrome/Phenomenon (IP) was first introduced by Clance and Imes (1978) to describe the personalities and behaviors of a group of high-achieving women who had a hard time internalizing their accomplishments and feared being exposed as frauds. These women did not see themselves as successful and diminished the idea that success was connected to their abilities despite accolades, which caused heightened levels of anxiety and stress. Essentially, impostor syndrome/phenomenon has been well acknowledged in the academy among students, faculty and staff. Understanding IP can be “very helpful in identifying those at risk for leaving. Equally as important, studying trends in addressing IP can curb the flow and create a more



inviting environment allowing colleges and universities to retain top performers across the academy” (Parkman, 2016, p. 51). IP also connects to the culture of belonging. The correlation between culture and climate enhance the experience, scholarship and work and need to be considered when developing programs and policies for the campus community.

What is the origin of IP in my life? Along my journey, IP appears inevitable through multiple avenues: 1) a new role, especially in first jobs (or in my case, new constituency level), 2) first-generation status brings about responsibilities and expectations to be successful (Harvey & Katz, 1985), 3) common with those with advanced degrees who have traits of assiduousness (Hutchins, 2015), and lastly, 4) administrators in student life suffer particularly because of their appointment (Dahlvig, 2013; Long, Jenkins & Bracken, 2000; Parkman, 2016). Long, Jenkins and Bracken (2000), three women in the academe used an autobiographical narrative to share how fitting into the prescribed molded system requires one to be white, male and upper class making it hard for them to feel like they belong. They also discuss the façade working class women (such as myself) must put on entering the academe and the obstacles it brings to the position such as the lack of social capital necessary for success, financial constraints not faced by middle and upper class, as well as, certain values toward the perception of work. Female college administrators with shaken self-assurance continually feel like an impostor by deferring credit to her team rather than accept accolades for her work. These women felt as though they were less capable and intelligent than they appeared to be (Dahlvig, 2013).

A few documented strategies to help alleviate IP, though it never goes away (Parkman, 2016), include 1) offer student programs that highlight a sense of belonging, IP tendencies, workshops that define success, strengths, how to deal with failures and how to set reasonable expectations for themselves (Cokely, McClain, Enciso & Martinez, 2013), 2) peer support

groups and mentoring prospects (Huffstutler & Varnell, 2006) and lastly, 3) the execution of a multifaceted designed feedback system (Cogner & Fulmer, 2004).

It is crucial to note that Impostor Syndrome stems not just from the mismatch between the representation of an academic and one's identity, but also from the daily experiences in which faculty, students and administrators convey that you don't belong, or that you don't have what it takes (Leonard, 2014, p. 1).

I often question my abilities so much so that when I get asked questions, I really do know the answer to I often second guess myself. It could be my constant need to overcompensate for my 5'1 stature, petite frame, youthful skin and young face ... and my blackness. Because there have been so few to accomplish what I have, I believe I represent our community and never want to let us down. So the pressure remains in me. When I make mistakes, I beat myself up so much it becomes detrimental to my health.

### **Implications of African American Leaders on Campuses**

My community needs help, particularly African American males. Hagedorn, Maxwell, and Hampton (2001) found African American male retention rates in higher education "are among the lowest of all ethnic groups nationally" (p. 243). Research has been well publicized on what diversifying the academy could do for these low performing students (Cuyjet and Associates, 2006; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Guiffrida, 2005; Harper and Quaye, 2007; Lutz, Hassouneh, Akeroyd, Beckett, 2013; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Reddick, 2006). Similar to the aforementioned experience of administrators needing mentorship to offer psychosocial support, navigational directions, and a network that provides career dynamics, African American male students are in need as well (St. John, Paulsen & Carter, 2005). In addition to faculty, administrators can arguably also assist these students toward successful futures as being influential people of color on campus seen as members of their communities. The implications of increasing the number of African American staff on campuses increases the likelihood of

student success across the board. For this reason, it is imperative that administrators of color get hired, remain and are able to integrate and successfully navigate an institutional culture equipped with the necessary structure that supports their existence. When this occurs, I believe more African American males will excel at higher rates.

It is important to first understand the experiences of African American males in order for postsecondary institutions to create support, activities, or organizations (Harper, 2007). Palmer and Young (2009) suggest that, in comparison to business supply and demand tactics, colleges must become knowledgeable about the interest and needs of their students in order to better serve them through growth and development. However, since African American males are not monolithic, it creates a more complex understanding of both successful and unsuccessful students (Ford, 1992). Their development is shaped through multiple avenues that include sports, music, acting, and school (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich & Bimper, 2011).

African American students must be deliberately exposed and connected with African Americans who have demonstrated success in higher learning. This has proven to increase their self-efficacy (Guiffrida, 2005). African American students purposefully wanted to connect with African American faculty for mentorship because they felt more comfortable speaking to someone they felt would understand them and their struggles; “The inspiration they received by having a Black role model at the university was important to them” (Guiffrida, 2005, p. 718). Several scholars have researched undergraduate African American males at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Harper, Carini, Bridges & Hayek, 2004); and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Harper, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007). They consistently revealed students recognized supportive African American faculty as willing to go beyond the call of duty when it

came to their success. With the continuous research on African American males at the university level, limited studies have contributed to the academic achievement of African American males at community colleges other than a select group of intellectuals (Hagedorn et. al., 2001; Flowers, 2006; Perrakis, 2008; Wood & Turner, 2011).

Since community colleges are the main entry point for most African American males (Perrakis, 2008), it is imperative that more research on how to successfully help this population be considered. There is growing research surrounding African American males in general, and thanks to the last decade for community colleges specifically. Past studies focused on African American males in higher education examined social integration, retention, and academic success (as it pertains to GPA and course completion). These studies also included the contribution of faculty support on students. A unified message of how there is a need for more research in the area of community college and mentorship was recommended. This is a great opportunity where African American administrators can fill this gap, while it should not be considered a silver bullet, it is a solution that can add positive impact to a population with the greatest need. With this leadership comes the chance for more African American male (and female) student voices to be more prominent when making necessary changes to the system making it more equitable.

In a quantitative study analyzing first-year African American males exploring how attending a 2-year institution in comparison to a 4-year college effected their academic and social integration, those in community colleges were found to have less social and academic integration than their counterparts (Flowers, 2006). Furthermore, they were also less engaged in campus activities, meetings and programs than African American males at 4-year colleges. The conclusion suggested more research on campuses exploring how to better serve and support the

experiences of African American males through institutional means. With this in mind, there is a need to expand research on the implications of supportive administrators, faculty and staff would offer in order to increase African American male connections with campus, particularly since social integration has been positively linked to academic achievement (Tinto, 1993).

“Historically, HBCUs are known for their remarkable ability to transform students with marginal academic performance into scholars. This success is attributed in large part to the institution’s nurturing and empowering environment which allows students to overcome” (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006, p. 103). Campus climate is important to the success of African American males and successful strategy PWIs could learn from HBCUs.

Highlighting academic successful African American males at community college, Wood and Turner (2011) focused on how the students felt about faculty for their data collection. This comprehensive study offered information consistent to the studies aforementioned but also included references that support the failure of community colleges regarding African American males and how it is important to fix this issue since a majority (63%) enrolls there. They also argue this problem falls on the institution rather than the students.

Twenty-eight African American males were surveyed and these are the key factors found that contribute to their success. They include: show that you care from the beginning, paying attention to the students’ progress and address any concerns, adhering to students’ concerns, and finally, proactively encourage students toward success. The overall message that came through was that relationships are what the students seek (Wood and Turner, 2011).

### **African Americans as Mentors**

Mentoring workload tends to weigh heavier for women for various reasons according to Griffin and Reddick (2011). Female instructors are firstly, more nurturing, and secondly, they

are more open to discuss life issues, struggles, finances, and relationship type issues (family, employment, etc.) whereas, male instructors have to concern themselves with institutional racism. Female professors also have to find a balance between offering support to students, seeking professional development opportunities and teaching. Harvey and Anderson (2005) found within higher education African American male professors outnumber African American female professors and have a greater likelihood to be tenured. In addition, Griffin and Reddick (2011) reported that African American male professors were found to be more formal and distant. This of course did not apply to all male professors, but it was recognized by a majority. The significance of a formal approach was to maintain appropriate boundaries between the role of teacher and student. Male professors employ a protective or hyper surveillance attitude when dealing with their students for fear of racist or sexist accusations. There is a belief that even a rumor could ruin reputations, so the distant approach is adhered. This is understood for female students but what about males? The article articulated in its summary that African American male professors may choose “homophilly” connections versus mentoring random students (p. 1052). A more lucid explanation is African American male professors are more often than not interested in mentoring students that are more like them. As a result, African American female instructors end up mentoring African American males who do not identify with certain African American male faculty. The same could be true for male and female administrators. In my experience, I mentored a higher number of students versus my male counterparts. My door remained open and I continually stopped my work to support students. My counterparts have administrative assistants who were able to be gatekeepers of their schedules creating a slight barrier to the general population, but I unfortunately do not have that privilege due to the way my

grant was written. As a result, students have approached me on a more consistent basis in comparison.

In general, there is a huge shortage in African American mentors, teachers and counselors (Cuyjet and Associates, 2006). The racial disproportion between students and teachers in the US educational systems are quite alarming and threatens to impact the quality of education for all students (Belcher, 2001). Nationwide, nine out of ten teachers are Caucasian, while students of color make up 37% of elementary and secondary school students (Belcher, 2001). These numbers will either stay the same or grow in disproportion because current teacher education programs have acknowledged 80% Caucasian and 16% minority within enrollment (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, 2000). This severe disparity in teachers of color deprive role models and mentors to students of color and it denies all students the opportunity of a diverse educational experience (Belcher, 2001). Investing in increasing the number of teachers of color is crucial because the alternative is the widening of gaps racially, culturally and economically (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, 2000). The benefit of this increase benefit both the students and entire communities of color both on and off campus. It is a tragedy when someone feels like the only one on campus, which is why deliberately hiring a diverse staff is of most importance.

Low representation of faculty of color still plagues our educational system at a rate of only 17% full-time (Turner, Gonzalez and Wood, 2008). Due to low numbers they often become the representative for diversity on campus and have additional duties on their regular workload such as mentoring students of color, serving on committees, expected to speak up when culturally sensitive topics arise, to be the voice of how to handle situations diversity and inclusion among other things. This weighs heavily and can negatively impact people of color

when considering the added workload and expectations of the academy to become tenure, and/or move up. This is an important point White administrators should understand about the experiences we face as being low represented, the burden and opportunity are one we cannot escape.

According to Freeman (1997), African American students face psychosomatic barriers that cause them to lack self-assurance in the reality and feasibility of pursuing college. These students have specifically articulated their need for school or institutional staff to help them in the college going process and the veracity of it. A study done by Flowers, Milner and Moore (2003) revealed that “students’ perceptions of their high school teacher’s expectations of their educational future had a significant impact on educational aspirations” (p. 6). As a result of many first generation college students identified as African American, the deliberate necessity of mentors and/or instructor-student interactions is at an alarming high. “Negative stereotypes of African Americans and low teacher expectations lead to African American students feeling less competent and less efficacious in shaping their school performance, and with negative coping reactions” (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, p. 8). The internalization of this can create a stereotype threat because it may paralyze an African American from achieving or cause them to develop a tremendous amount of performance anxiety. Stereotype threat is essentially the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm a negative stereotype (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000).

Additionally, social capital is a huge advantage that includes customs and information channels made available through connections with others, also known as social networks (Lin, 2001). Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) believed that ways of supporting social capital and identifying needed resources regarding college access can be done through institutional change



agents. They believed there is a gap in literature regarding the range of roles change agents play in order to help African American students prepare for college, the attention they receive, resources and time they offer (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez & Colyar, 2004). When schools collaborate with African Americans in the community who are willing to mentor and steer the younger generation it not only permits students to see the payoff to education but it also allows their strengths and talents to be recognized which helps to increase their self-efficacy and permits their coping to new environments to be experienced in a less difficult manner (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). These change agents can be compared to that of a mentor.

Palmer and Gasman (2008) conducted a study that discussed the promotion of social capital on the academic achievement of African American men at HBCUs. The authors examined the positive prevalence to which these colleges were able to graduate this population in such mass amounts. HBCUs provide opportunity for identity development, positive psychosocial adjustments, and amplified amounts of confidence. In addition, Palmer and Gasman (2008) reported African American students were found to be more satisfied and well-adjusted. Through the knowledge of the HBCU model of promoting social capital, community colleges have a unique opportunity to follow suite.

An Assistant Dean from a campus within the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) recommended hiring minority faculty and administrators to act as role models to underrepresented students (Hagedorn, 2004). Role models often give opportunity and vision of what is attainable. Due to the negative images seen on television, mentors are needed in mass numbers.

...black youth... were more apt to compare their academic performance with other blacks. Thus, social segregation in school partly explains why black youth have high educational aspirations even when their scholastic performance is average or below (Kao & Tienda, 1998, p. 379-380).

African American faculty and administrator mentors help students overcome barriers in school and build a crucial relationship in which African American students can bring their whole selves into the school experience (Gibson, 2005); this could also assist these students in understanding what it takes to be prepared for college rather than looking to friends. African American students who aspire to pursue a college education need role models and mentors, individuals who can give advice and offer wisdom, and experience. By having African American faculty and administrators as mentors it offers a unique opportunity to teach African American students through curriculum that revolves around history, life, and an opportunity for the understanding of a shared struggle. This opportunity opens the door to shape how African American students' current and future identity is shaped.

Kaplan and Maehr (1999) once shared the notion that concepts such as stereotypes, inequity, injustice, the history of injustice and its implications and realities on education should be taught to African American and White students. The effects on institutions and the decisions that guide the realities on these institutions should also be discussed. The authors posit that this approach could support the students' "feeling of belonging," create "positive intergroup collaboration, and motivation to learn" (p. 36). This extension of identity development can offer the ability to code-switch linguistically, knowledge on negotiating cultural obstacles, and increase resistance to racist myths and stereotypes (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000). African American students' awareness of historical content, resilience, a positive identity, and how to respond when confronted with any type of injustice is significant. The development of these pertinent skills could indicate a positive change for the entire community. By acknowledging facets of the African American culture it increases the development of identity and offers a greater sense of self within society.

Black students implore the necessity to see someone from their community in successful positions to demonstrate possible options for the future (Palmer and Gasman, 2008). Mentors mentioned in HBCUs serve as role models and display empathy and help to maximize their potential. They offer assistance beyond academic issues and invest their time beyond the classroom. In addition, they provide direction, nurturing, networks and encouragement. Research shows that African Americans tend to lack positive relationships with faculty at PWI's (Pascarella & Terrazini, 2005) which indicates a need for more studies to offer successful strategies in mentoring.

Several articles (Gandara & Mejorado, 2005; St. John, Paulsen & Carter, 2005; Maylor, 2009; Griffin & Reddick, 2011) reveal varying points of view when examining the idea of mentorship. Maylor (2009) reveals information on the need for an increased number of African American teachers, in general, but more specifically that they step up to be role models because they are who African American students believe they can most identify with and can model after. He also emphasizes that the role of African American teachers has shifted over time from being a role model to combatting racism to helping to remedy the ongoing underachievement of African American students. Salient factors that derived from this study are the idea that African American boys needed African American men as role models and African American females were incapable. Maylor (2009) suggests that it is irrelevant and untrue because most educators/supporters in the school system now are female and many have built positive relationships that have proved optimal. In addition, it was concluded that pedagogical and communication skills are what seem to influence and motivate these students to be diligent and to learn.

Although mentoring is severely needed, it is complicated when considering its components. Mentoring alone will not mend all issues surrounding the underachievement of African American males, but it is movement in the right direction. Due to the overwhelming enrollment trend of African Americans at the community college level it seems necessary that interventions begin within these institutions, fostering a positive identity for the African American male population. Understanding characteristics that provide optimal models for mentoring among this specific group require further study.

## CHAPTER 3: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to explain why I chose Autoethnography as a research method and it provides a breakdown into an intimate approach to critical reflection. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provided the rationale for this study which include explanations for the underrepresentation of African American female administrators, how institutions are practicing exclusion, effective onboarding practices, impostor syndrome, implications to educational systems and how mentoring impact African American students within community colleges, especially the lowest performing. In this chapter I will provide a description of the methodology, data collection procedures, research design, data analysis procedures, data presentation and site selection. It is my intention to contribute to the lack of scholarship surrounding African American female administrators in higher education. The significance of this study resides in my voice. Similarly, as aforementioned, this population is diminishing in numbers and struggling. The translation between their beginning employment and longevity reveals a disconnect. This study will attempt to show where that disconnect happens for me and what can rectify this misalignment. This qualitative study is designed to ensure the reader hears my voice and hopefully gains clarity on my journey and perspective.

### **Qualitative**

This qualitative study takes an intimate research approach “to improve the quality of practice” for African American female administrators (Merriam, 2009, p. 3). The hope is to change current practices for the onboarding, advancement and retention of this population in higher education. Merriam shares that qualitative research provides an understanding of how

people view their experience, how their perspective is shaped and what meanings they associate with their experience. The focus of this study is to gain an “insider’s perspective” in understanding the parts of the system that cause isolation and inequity, in addition to knowing what parts of the onboarding process act as enablers and barriers that contribute or diminish the success of African American administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (p. 14); and lastly, what are the implications African American leadership has on the lowest performing student, African American males. For the purpose of this study, I will gain this understanding by having a conversation with myself through a reflective interview process as I ponder my journey as an administrator.

#### Motivation for the study

I have to admit it is not easy sharing my dissertation topic with those who dare ask. People often either scrunch their forehead and/or get silent in wonder of the academic rigor of such a topic. I cringe when I have to explain. I wondered who would care about me and my journey and to have five chapters dedicated to it made me question if I should write such a study, and would others put me into the category of “angry Black woman” (Griffin, 2012). My confidence is diminished because even as I wrote chapters 1 and 2 I wasn’t totally sure what it was I wanted to say, what I was actually bringing to light and my imposter syndrome may contribute to my apprehension. As an impostor, the pressure to not want anyone to know about my inability to navigate the system is painful to face. Ellis and Bochner (2000) share “confronting things about yourself that is less than flattering” is extremely difficult and “generates a lot of fears and doubts – and emotional pain (p. 738).” Also, the vulnerability of what is written as well as how readers interpret, critique and/or judge my lived experience are also painful to digest. The authors believe one should not run from these uneasy emotions but to

learn from it because no one should hide from it and the world needs to know how marginalized communities experience the world in an effort to reduce the social constructs that keep them that way. I questioned the importance of my study and if indeed I was taking the easy way out rather than examining a subject others would be intrigued to hear more about. Why do I lack confidence in using my voice to shed light on an experience shared by many black women that lacks research? “Why should we be ashamed if our work has therapeutic or personal value? (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746)” It is even in the questioning of myself that I must examine my internal oppression. Blaming myself for the negative messaging or inability to integrate into the system has been a learned behavior over the last year and a half in this role. It literally wasn’t until reading the research for this study that I began to understand that my experience is a phenomenon and that I shouldn’t consider myself the sole contributor in me feeling like a failure. My inspiration is the fact that I am underrepresented. It makes a radical transformation necessary from description to communication (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I wholeheartedly concur with the thought that I don’t want to surrender to the victimization and marginal identities promoted by the gospel-like narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I would like my study to be an empowering tool for myself and to the dominant system.

The reality is we are not in communication. The experiences of African American female administrators are either not being told at the institution or no one is listening. There is a lack of mentorship, our administrator numbers have diminished and many of us jump off track once we hit top levels as aforementioned (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000). With the great strides to social justice and equality here is yet another area in need of traction. In 1962, Malcolm X gave a speech where he spoke to African Americans promoting against self-hate and despite messaging and standards of beauty we should not want to be and look anything but who we are.

Toward the end he also spoke about Black women suggesting, “The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman...the most unprotected person in America is the Black woman...the most neglected person in America is the Black woman.” We are often hidden figures. Davis (1999) adds, “Black women have been invisible to the dominant culture; and their unique ways of knowing and understanding the world have not been known (p. 152).” Black women have been integral parts of several movements (Civil Rights Movement, Social Movement, Black Lives Matter, etc.) and have for the most part remained in the background. The movement to help Black male students is no different. Research shows we mentor at a higher rate than our male counterparts which means we assist in a number of ways with helping with retention and persistence rates (Griffin and Reddick, 2011). We matter not only to the Black community, and not only to educational systems, but to the our world where there is overrepresentation in prisons of African American males, and low performance rates in education that lead to poverty and health deficits and reciprocation of families that impact neighborhoods/communities. This dissertation on supporting African American females in (*not only*) the community college system is necessary.

What was my Woke Moment?

My woke moment in my current role came on Friday, August 19<sup>th</sup> at my first convocation at this PWI. In the beginning, my picture as a new hire was shown and I was to stand in acknowledgement. After all fresh faces were displayed the president came to the stage with highlights of the college’s accomplishments, new initiatives and statistics. It was in the details of the statistics that my prescription glasses were fine tuned. The reality of the academic deficits surrounding my community were not anything new but for some reason hearing (from our White president) and seeing a graph that displayed my brothers and sisters at the bottom of the



academic achievement and graduation rates at this college while sitting with a predominantly White audience increased my anger. I remember looking around trying to catch the eyes of anyone I racially identified with to visually touch to offer some sense of comfort and congruent emotional stress but to no avail I could not find one. I was new to the school so there may have been other African Americans in the room whom I did not know but at that moment I could not find anyone to touch and agree with what I was feeling.

In addition, the cultural and diversity center on campus, committed to social justice, put up a display of all the African Americans who had fallen to police violence. The wall was covered with so many names it made me emotional. There were 267 names listed for those killed up until August 2016 and the names grew daily. It was overwhelming to know we are in a constant mode of struggle. Truthfully, everything about our lived experiences feel overwhelming.

### **Research Design: Autoethnography**

I chose this topic because I now realize similar to Crystal Laura's conclusions in her book *Being Bad*, I cannot solely blame myself for my feelings of isolation and struggle as an administrator. The system I entered has misalignments to their commitment to diversity and perceptions of inclusion. I grappled immensely with the best way to produce this study. While it in no way is meant to be generalizable to experiences of other Black female administrators in higher education, particularly predominantly White community colleges, I hope sharing my story brings solace to someone similar to myself and at the same time provides a flashlight on a structure that marginalized communities struggle for success and longevity.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) defines autoethnography as an “autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness (p. 739)” without a prescribed

formula (Ellis, 2004). They believe it gives the reader my knowledge; to feel the truth to my story and become coparticipants to my journey emotionally, intellectually and morally. This methodology adds to social justice by exposing organizations and systems of control. The author retroactively writes about impactful epiphanies of past experiences that are significant to the trajectory of a person's life (Denzin, 1989; Ellis & Bochner, 1992). Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) notes:

Autoethnographers must not only uses their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. (p. 1)

To achieve this an autoethnographer can examine artifacts, interview community/cultural members connected to the study, and/or compare personal lived experience to research. For the purpose of this study, I will do the latter.

Autoethnography offers a narrative means to highlight the struggles of my African American female community, which makes me proud. It speaks to what bell hooks references as “talking back” to a system that opposes our success (p.9). Miller (2008) contends that few scholars use an autoethnographic methodology to tell their own stories. “Zooming backward and forward, inward and outward (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739)” it connects personal experience to the cultural framework of a system, adding great value toward using this research method.

My undergraduate degree is in sociology, the study of people. I enjoy the study of people, so sharing my journey makes autoethnography the most appropriate to use. Ellis and Bochner (2000) note this methodology a “systematic sociological introspection (p. 737).” Stories are a way of knowing (Seidman, 2006). By doing an autoethnography, the current study will communicate the impact of onboarding into a system historically known to oppress and racially

discriminate underserved populations. It is the best approach because it gives communities underrepresented a voice. It brings a reflective awareness that offers an opportunity to transform or remake that awareness for the purpose of education (van Manen, 1990). Grasping the essence of my lived experience to uncover and describe the internal meanings it possesses is the goal. Seidman (2006) also contends that it is discovery oriented and intends to give introspection into a certain phenomenon.

### **Interview**

Reflections are both easy and challenging. van Manen (1990) says it's easy because it is something, we do every day; reflect on the meaning or essence of something that has occurred. However, it's also hard because it's more difficult to pre-reflect on the true meaning on what happened within the time it occurred. He further explains there is a difference between pre-reflection and reflection after some time has passed. "The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience (p.77)."

Seidman (2006) concludes that in-depth interviewing combines the history of one's life and the use of open-ended questions that build upon and explore a reconstructed experience of the participant. He specifies that this approach will help to understand and give meaning to the context being studied. The first focuses on dissecting the participants' experience by asking questions surrounding the topic from past to present. The second concentrates on the specific details of the participants' lived experiences within the topic at hand. And finally, the purpose of the third is for the participant to associate meaning to the reconstructed experience. Seidman advocates that a realization of making meaning out of the lived experiences can only be done

through the exploration of past and present events so that the participant can reflect on how these concrete details contributed to who they are today.

The first part of interviewing myself will explore my background. This will provide insight on formative experiences and a pathway to where I am today (Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Seidman, 1998). The next part will detail my experiences as an administrator, exploring both challenges and successes. The purpose of the third part of the interview will be to make meaning of the lived experiences. This will allow for more understanding, clarity and connection (if any).

Blumer (1969) emphasizes that interviews illuminate the significance of a story and how that story affects the way the individual narrating the story behaves as a result of the experience. It also permits the responses to be contextualized and provides an avenue to understanding the shared story. Seidman (2006) contends interviewing has been the key mode to recount an individual's experience in history. He says, it is a formative way to understand the depth and breadth of a person's lived experience and how they proceed to attach meaning to that experience. He further explains numerically coding or quantifying people defies realizing the worth of the person or their experience. Thus, interviews will provide the best tool to describe attitudes and opinions, along with, an in-depth understanding of the meanings from the interviewees' perspective. The interview will then be organized to answer the research questions and address the purpose of the current study.

### **Why Study Myself?**

I chose to study myself because I honestly felt like an anomaly though I don't really believe I'm an anomaly. I don't believe I'm the only one with my struggles because hindsight and forthcoming, although the journey has felt lonely, I have found my struggles have been shared by many in like situations as myself I just didn't know them. It hurts so much to struggle

alone, more than words I could ever write and its so unfortunate when you don't have the support you need during such a difficult time. For these reasons I write about myself with the hopes that someone else reads even a portion and feels some sort of connection, solace, freedom, air to breathe that they are far from alone.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to explain how I will collect data to better understand my journey as a new African American female administrator at a predominantly White community college institution. Through interviewing, I will be able to deeply examine my onboarding process, as well as, how I got through my first year. I decided to allow another researcher to challenge my perspective through interviewing to ensure my responses reflect clearly and go deeper than what my memory may be protecting or thinking. My voice will resonate the possibility of hope and change. The significance of this study resides in it. In the exciting time when new legislation (AB 19 and AB 705) offers an opportunity to increase equity for those who enter and exit the institution, namely African American and Latinx communities, it is a perfect time for this dissertation, as it offers knowledge on how to support Administrators of color. Their precise knowledge could be what is missing from college strategies on how to support these marginalized communities adding great value to this study. As a practitioner, the understanding gained will provide information on how to better serve both populations, African American female administrators and African American students. Through the use autoethnography, this study will gather rich expressions of a lived experience which could not be explored through a quantitative study. Moustakas (1990) assumes that within this methodological approach truth will emerge from the individual. These results will be found in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4: MOMENTS OF IMPACT

Examining my journey. Interviewing myself. Wearing my new glasses. A research method that is much more painful than interviewing others, I've learned. When considering the parts of my journey that are most impactful and have a significant hand in my life development, these areas are what surfaced: education, family and career. I decided to ask myself the following:

1. What parts of your education helped you become who you are? What parts hindered?
2. What parts of your family structure helped you become who you are? What parts hindered?
3. What parts of your professional career helped you become who you are? What parts hindered?

The purpose of this chapter is to offer the reader an insider view of how I ultimately became an administrator. The ride will include stories that have brought me great joy, grief and pain, as well as anger and stress. I am who I am because of everything I share in this specific chapter. Everything does not line up perfectly in sections. I cannot talk about education without talking about family and I can't talk about career without talking about the other areas, a crossover is inevitable in the story. This reflection made me so much more aware of how life unfolds and how each puzzle connects to who we become in the future and why. Life is a combination of memories that we are to experience and figure out how to live beyond just so we can find out the end of the stories as we grow. So amazing!

### **South Central Schools and Community**

My memory of growing up in Los Angeles was a good one. I lived there between the ages of 2 to 16. My desires included but was not limited to my mom, friends, dancing and television. Thankfully, I had no tragic moments that caused me any kind of harm during my tenure there. I lived in two parts of LA, an area near Inglewood with my grandparents until I was close to 5 years old, and the rest of the time in south central. My mom and I moved to an apartment building on Vernon street. It was walking distance from Normandie Elementary school, and across the street from an after-school program that I eventually ended up attending. Before the beginning of my kindergarten year (age 5), my mom showed me how to lock the apartment door, walk down the street, what to do at the cross-walk and how to stay safe, but somehow a conversation ensued with my kindergarten teacher that I was walking by myself and she followed me home. Soon after my mom put me in the after-school program I mentioned earlier. As I think back, I don't remember feeling unsafe or afraid. I didn't witness anyone in mischievous behavior, nor did I hear conversations to make me concerned. It wasn't until certain movies that came out that I became aware of where I lived. Boys N the Hood, Poetic Justice, South Central, and Menace to Society gave me the knowledge of crime in my area and what activities the gang members that lived one street up who I went to school with may have been into. I don't know if I walked around with rose colored glasses or I just chose to stay naïve, but I honestly didn't fear for my life or the people. We all come from the same neighborhood and I knew all the kids around, so I was fine. I also never had the thought of excitement to leave. I knew eventually I would but the, "I can't wait to leave the hood" didn't enter my psyche because my experience there wasn't a bad one.

The only time I feared for my location was when the LA riots happened in 1992 as a result of the not guilty verdict against 4 police men who were recorded violently beating Rodney King. Black people were angry for not getting the justice we believed we deserved. I was too young to understand the magnitude of the situation, but I was aware of what happened and was conscious of feeling the same energy of anger, disbelief and indescribable rage particularly because I saw the recording of Mr. King being beaten. The schools I attended never talked beyond the surface level of slavery, so it wasn't until many, many years later that I made the connection of what living in America meant to Black people with respect to treatment of existing. Segregation, wealth disparities, underemployment, standardized testing, discrimination, poor schooling, housing segregation, racial profiling, school to prison pipeline are only a few my people have had to endure while Black.

We lived in an upstairs downstairs duplex separate and behind the homeowner. It had a large yard with a back gate that connected to an alley way. This alley way was also connected to a liquor store that was visible from our apartment. During the riots, someone lit the store on fire. My family and I were concerned it might reach our home, so we stood outside watching, going back and forth into the house to see the news of the devastation happening in the city. Fortunately, the fire stayed contained and we were safe. Two years later we would move an hour outside of LA to become homeowners and escape the violence.

I'm proud to say I started my educational journey in South Central, Los Angeles. Given the crime rate and underserved communities one might wonder why I'd use the word *proud*, but I wouldn't change that experience for anything. Yes, I did have a few scary moments and I did live in a gang- infested neighborhood but it's also the place where my community resided, it was home. I learned the Stevie Wonder birthday song and the Black national anthem, and I had



Black teachers who cared about me. Because of these Black instructors I was part of a drill team that taught me discipline and love for being exactly who I am, Black. Back in the early 80s I don't remember using the word African American, we were just Black. I also fondly remember every year going to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. parade where the community came together to see performances and greet one another. Both my primary and secondary experiences taught me more than academics. Cultural pride was incorporated daily through activities, film, and school assemblies; the school was predominantly Black.

Another important memory about elementary was it marked my first speaking engagements through a yearly Proficiency in English Program (PEP) oratorical contest. A very caring and supportive Black teacher, Ms. Houston, taught me to enunciate certain words as I spoke, how and when to use gestures, the art of folk telling/storytelling, how to command attention in a room, pitch, projecting my voice and even how to dress in accordance with my speech. I learned how to emphasize certain words to illustrate the story versus just plainly speaking it. For example, in the short story called "The Peculiar Such Thing", Ms. Houston told me to wear clothing that was not flashy, splashes of color but not distracting, loose fitting and easy to move in. She wanted all attention on my words and the story. She guided me on how to move, working the space I had so I did not stay in one spot ensuring my eye contact worked the room. The use of my hands was of similar importance, she advised that gestures used at the right time emphasized certain words and drew the audience in and that it should not be diverting from what you want people to focus on. Gestures should come naturally, not contrived or manufactured. I learned this will add depth and art to the presentation simply through motion signals that can catch the audiences' attention. Ms. Houston taught me how to speak from the bottom of my stomach in order to project my voice. My range grew during this time as she

informed me how to control what I wanted my tone, pitch, volume and rhythm to be. Here is an example below.

One night, after the fellow had cooked and ate his supper,  
somethin crept through the cracks of the cabin logs.

That somethin' was the most peculiar (*emphasize peculiar by raising pitch*) such  
thing the fellow ever saw. And it had a great, big, long, tail. (*slowly articulate each word: great,*  
*big, long, tail*)

he reached (*pronounce reached with in a swift voice to demonstrate a quick movement*) for his  
axe.

And with a swoopin (*use a gesture as a quick, deliberate cut to something on the ground*) strike  
with it, he cut the somethin's tail clean off.

The peculiar such thing dashed away through the cracks between the logs and was gone. (*pause*  
*for a few seconds after the word gone for added affect as if something has left the room*)

This fellow, like he had no sense, he cooked (*pronounce cooked in jovial tone to demonstrate if*  
*the audience can believe it*)

the great, big, long tail! (*slowly articulate each word: great, big, long, tail*)

This is a small snippet of the chosen piece I recited in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and won a trophy for. It was an American Black Folktale by Virginia Hamilton called The People Who Could Fly, of which this short story is called The Peculiar Such Thing. I loved this story that Ms. Houston chose for me simply because I trusted her judgement. I'm not sure how she chose it but when she presented it to me, I don't remember being scared or apprehensive about reciting it well. My memory does recall being proud of my speech and my complete presentation. The audience were my fellow 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classmates, and school officials that included the principal. Funny

thing is, I performed several times for the PEP oratorical contest, but this story is the one that stood out most in my head and it served as the foundation for how I communicate and deliver oratorically to this very day. This experience boosted my confidence for speaking because I felt competent using the tools provided.

The book was a compilation of short stories, passed down history told by those enslaved. The author shares that her father was the son of a slave and every year he would sit all his kids down and tell them stories so they would not become slaves. Many of the stories told how his people escaped, fought back and survived tragic times. Mrs. Hamilton found it especially important to not only pass along heritage, culture and pride in our Black history but also because out of 5,000 authors of children's books only about 40 of them were African American books. She called her work liberation literature.

This book was so impactful that I still remember the stories and even how I performed it. I was too young to realize it then, but I now see how she changed my life some 35 years ago. I have been speaking ever since and throughout my life every job I've had there have been more speaking engagements than I can count, and I use what she taught me. Wow! I didn't realize it until now that she was also the first person to introduce me to pride of my culture. The history I was speaking never left me.

As I look back, I wouldn't consider Ms. Houston a mentor, more as an "othermother" classification because she went above and beyond the call of helping. She worked with me one on one, constructively critiquing while at the same time showing great care. In addition, I think on this term because my family never came to these competitions and didn't show any interest in my development, which is why I place her in this category rather than a mentor. To further define my definitions between a mentor and othermothering, it really boils down to how one

makes me feel versus what someone does. For me, a mentor is situational, they answer my periodic questions, is cordial, can be male or female, provides me with new knowledge anytime they think I need it or when asked, I gain cultural/human/intellectual/professional capital from this person, and they make time for me. Othermothering in my words is someone who fills the role I believe a mother might, this person goes above the call of duty to help me be my best self, they provide care and support that I don't even know I need, they check on me without me reaching out, they hug with love and intention, they speak with care (an example is asking how I'm doing but really, attentively and actively listening then responding with comfort not judgement), this person is typically female but it doesn't have to be.

Both my primary and secondary experiences contributed to an awareness of my ability to learn. All subjects came easily for me, I did not request any tutoring or help. I may have asked for clarification in certain areas, but I was able to conquer all my subjects without much help from parents or school instructors. This served me well, however later in my postsecondary journey this would become problematic. I believe what contributed to my academic success were a few things. First, attending preschool gave me a foundation for education that started me at a level that I could build upon. Secondly, my mother. It was always expected that school came first so when I arrived home I could not get on the phone, watch tv, play outside, or play with toys until I accomplished my academic responsibilities. This continued even when I was in high school. Lastly, I didn't miss school. I frequently received perfect attendance awards because even if I was sick, I went to school. This stems from not only my mother's work ethic but specifically because she never accrued sick leave from her job that paid under the table. I imagine it was also possibly because she could not afford a babysitter. I never compared myself to my friends academically or pushed myself because of them. The desire to do well in school

has always been present for me and it was not because of any rewards received from family because that never happened. I was often proud to display my report card to show my capabilities and work.

Another area that aided my journey was how affordable things were back 30+ years ago. It was a time when a dollar meant a lot because there was so much you could buy for that amount. We had one, five and ten cent candy and a drink didn't cost more than about fifty cents. After school if I wanted something, we had a corner store also known as the liquor store; we knew this store by the Black woman that worked there so we would say, "*I'm going to Ms. Betty's to buy (insert item)*". We never thought of the liquor store as a bad place. I often bought a small bag of sunflower seeds or now n later candy for about \$0.10 each. If I had \$1.07, I could purchase some fries from the burger joint next door to the liquor store and still across the street from the school. These small things contributed to my ability to eat, to hold me over until dinner and to be a kid who enjoyed eating candy with friends. I never went without food. Because I was classified as low-income and received free and reduced meals, I was fortunate to eat lunch every day.

### **Enter Clean and Green**

When I got to secondary/middle school I was fortunate to have my first job at 13 years old making \$4.25/hour with Clean and Green. Since 1988, this program provides low income youth the opportunity to gain work experience through several environmental tasks: removing trash from streets and alleys, remove graffiti, cut down bushes, remove grass growing between the concrete and plant trees to assist with the visibility of various communities in South Central. I took this job seriously and always wanted to be as diligent as possible. I worked hard for a few reasons. I learned through my parents that going to work and doing well meant I could keep my

job, so I went above and beyond cleaning the streets. Also, I am a hard worker, so it came naturally, when I was directed to conquer a particular task I jumped on it and made sure I did a great job. As I connect back then to who I am now and my continuous work ethic, I realize what drives me is fear. **I'm afraid of failure.** I've done well in many areas that failure scares every part of me. This job taught me the benefit of working, all about taxes and I enjoyed spending every penny of my earnings. From this moment forward, I never stopped working. The allowance I received from parents was \$3-5 a week so this job exposed me to income, and it made my world better. My adolescent world included purchasing apparel, shoes, and music. The fact that I could stay current with trends and jam in my home to recording artists I loved meant everything to me.

### **Enter TRIO**

During middle school, I was chosen to participate in a program called TRIO Education Talent Search. I fit the criteria of first generation, and low income so they invited me to be a part of the program. Learning it was for college prep, I happily said yes and never missed a meeting because it seemed like a good opportunity. I can't say if I remember hearing about college before this program, but I do know I felt honored/proud for the invitation. During the few times they pulled me out of class I remember there only being about 10 of us. I am not sure why the numbers were so low, but I was grateful I was included.

The Talent Search program identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. The program provides academic, career, and financial counseling to its participants and encourages them to graduate from high school and continue on to and complete their postsecondary education. The program publicizes the availability of financial aid and assist participant with the postsecondary application process. The goal of Talent Search is to increase the number of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds who complete high school and enroll in and complete their postsecondary education. Projects provide tutorial services, career exploration, aptitude assessments, counseling, mentoring programs, workshops, information on postsecondary institutions; and programs and activities previously

mentioned that are specially designed for students from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education.  
([www2.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/index.html))

Of all my educational experiences the TRIO programs (I transitioned to TRIO Upward Bound when attending high school) provided the most memorable, impactful and successful components. It singlehandedly contributed to my desire to attend college, how to plan, financial aid support, college visits, best practices toward successful admission processes, tutoring and advanced academic lessons for both middle and high school. Without this program that supports those who are clueless on how to get to the next level in life/education I wouldn't be who I am today.

The staff of the TRIO program planned activities, trips, academic and life lessons that caused my journey toward the educational route. We visited several different colleges of which we received sample questions to ask during workshops, we went to several Budweiser Superfest concerts to see R&B/rap artists, we stayed in the dorm for 6 weeks for a summer program, we learned how to fill out FAFSA in a way that would benefit our college financial packages, we spent every first Saturday together for an advanced lesson in Math, I learned about fee waivers and SAT/PSAT prep, and when it came to applying for colleges they are the reason I applied to 13 schools, I made copies of everything, and was confident in the process. One major hiccup that happened was in 1997 you had to write by hand inside the application and mail everything off. TRIO told me to get a certificate of mailing for everything I sent. When I got notice that I was not getting a CAL grant because they never received it, I was able to send a copy of what I sent in addition to my proof of transmittal. As a result, I received my full funding. The success of what they taught me over the years in particular what classes to take every year from grade 7 to 12, extracurricular activities, leadership positions within student government and lesson

planning that put me ahead of the class; these all contributed to my acceptance into 11 of the 13 schools.

Whatever I learned I also shared, those in my circle also benefited and many went onto college as well. In addition, my little brother is now in college because of my ability to help him move forward. Unfortunately, he was not able to take part in the TRIO program because the program did not serve students in Lancaster, CA where my parents bought their home. Antelope Valley high school did not have a system or practice of navigating students toward college, so students had to do everything on their own. Since my parents were hands off for my collegiate processes, they were clueless on how to help my brother. It was my pleasure to assist him. I shared how to fill out applications, I organized college trips during his break, talked to him about majors and the higher education track, types of financial aid and a heads up on what financial aid would look like since my mother was now getting a paycheck and my stepdad had increased his salary 20 years after I was admitted which made their family income look higher, and add to that the cap on individual student loan and anything additional would have to come from their pockets or a parent loan, this was very new to my parents. During my undergraduate tenure, my family provided zero financial support and they would soon learn this would not be the case for Jr. The latest thing I assisted my brother with was Cal Fresh, so he was able to get free groceries while a college student.

The impact of being a part of TRIO and my lived experiences was so strong that it influenced my career choices toward student services and assisting first year students. My life would not be what it is without this federally funded program. I have come to learn there are many others who don't have any type of assistance, so it became my passion to provide this type of privilege to others particularly from marginalized communities.



## High School

What I remember most about high school is originally I didn't want to be there. I was only 15 when my family and I moved one hour outside of Los Angeles to Lancaster, CA because it was more affordable to purchase a house there and we were escaping the violence. I was upset to say the least. I ignored my mother around the house when she told me we were moving. I don't remember everything I said but it was absolutely responses about not wanting to go. Moving away from my friends and everything I knew was not a plan I cosigned. Upon further reflection, I now recognize it was because I was afraid of moving away from my Black community. I didn't live anywhere they were not, which added concern for isolation and lack of belonging. Because I verbally shared my feelings with my mom, she began setting up a situation where I would go to live with my grandparents. One day after work before we moved, she brought home huge black trash bags and told me to pack my stuff and if I didn't want to go then I didn't have to. She didn't say it with care or a tone that she would miss me, just a matter of fact "get yo stuff". However, that was not an option for me because they resided in the center of an unsafe environment, and while I love my grandparents, I did not want to live with them, so I stopped complaining, murmuring and ignoring her and went on the journey to Lancaster.

My first day at Antelope Valley high school proved my fears different. I thought Lancaster in general was a town full of people that did not look like me, more specifically white people. I thought this with no gathered data or conversation just an uninformed thought. My entire educational career was in the marginalized areas of Los Angeles and every other place in southern California made me afraid that I would not fit in. I was completely shocked by the amount of Black people I saw. We were everywhere, but there were also other ethnic and racial communities so in a sense it looked very similar to Los Angeles. I didn't realize how significant

my desire to be near my people was until now. In my senior year, I was elected into student government as Speaker of the House, I became captain on the step team, I received one of two scholarships from the only African American counselor, I took all advanced placement and honors classes, I gained a best friend of now 20+ years, and lastly, a schoolmate invited me to church and I attended without my parents because they chose not to go with me. After this introduction into Christianity I never stopped pursuing this walk.

### **Hinderances in My Education Before College**

Federally funded programs, like TRIO, are typically given in a grant form with an approved curriculum and/or program plan to serve a certain demographic in a specific area. My program went through University of Southern California (USC) and served Los Angeles based schools. I was fortunate that even though I had moved to a non-feeder school in Lancaster I was still able to participate as part of the program. It's possible they kept me on the roster because I had taken advantage of everything they provided from Saturday sessions, merit-based field trips, and possibly for success numbers. These grants are based on number of participants, and if the students met the intended outcome of the program objectives. I was absolutely on the track to attend college. I'm not sure where I would be if I was denied access. I would not have been privy to college timelines, deadlines, and processes. My high school did not provide encouragements, college visits, college fairs, information sessions to plan for next level options. I was enrolled in all advanced placement/honors classes offered during high school and we never had a counselor present anything regarding college. Students should be presented options for their level of eligibility and possibilities beyond that, but we were never presented with any transitional assistance.

I never knew where I came from. African history was never taught beyond the enslaving of my people, and if we did hear about Black people it was over the course of one month and it was the same few people: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Ida B Wells, and Marian Anderson. While these are notable historical figures in the Black community, we didn't learn harm reduction. What I mean by harm reduction is we mainly learned how Black people were enslaved and not particularly how they fought back and/or survived individually or collectively. It's harmful to learn details that keep Black people mentally, educationally, and socially in bondage. Instruction that promotes people being trapped making it difficult to escape is the very definition of slavery. I recently went through a training that concluded culturally relevant curriculum isn't enough. It's important that for academic success African American students be affirmed in the brilliance of their minds, as well as be connected to courses that include racially salient images/curriculum that highlight their contribution to society. This is harm reduction.

I didn't learn until my first semester in undergrad that the abbreviated history I learned wasn't totally factual and it made me question everything. For example, the story of Rosa Parks. We originally learned that she singlehandedly was tired and decided to remain in her seat which became the catalyst for the 1964 Montgomery Bus Boycott but in actuality it was a planned effort of the NAACP and the impact of the community uniting to fight together was a powerful piece of history widely left out. There is also the story of Harriet Tubman. We learned that she was called the Moses of her generation because of how many enslaved people she freed through the Underground Railroad but we were not taught that she was a land owner and/or that she was the first woman to lead an assault in the Civil War through a covert operation in a plantation raid, burning storehouses and crippling the groundwork for multiple areas of land. Sojourner Truth

was another name in which important parts of history was left out. She was the first Black woman to take a white man to court and win. She hired a lawyer and fought against the illegal purchase of her son.

Not knowing one's history in the affirmative only keeps us at a disadvantage. The importance of knowing history adds value to not only the culture but to the world because it provides a complete story, not just one of slaves and degradation, but one of how we evolved and how strong we were/are. It also assists in the telling of decisions made, successful and ineffective strategies to shorten the learning curve in everything. By only learning half of our history, particularly the parts that show us without power and at a deficit only keeps us behind. The knowledge that we were once kings and queens, warriors, business owners, and fighters would give us power and an identity that would propel us much further. This is what made my college process so much more important to my journey because it is there that I learned African American studies and I unlearned information that was inaccurate and gave me new knowledge that empowered my being.

### **College Impacts**

First, let me proudly state I am a first-generation college graduate. The journey was by no means easy, but I entered, persisted and successfully exited my first leg of college in 4 years. This beginning experience I've learned was such a huge impact that it fueled my passion to help transition future new students into college. There are many making this leap alone that I have a drive to be a cushion for them or be in a position to build a softer transition.

I was fortunate to apply to 13 colleges and received acceptance letters to 11. I decided to attend UC Davis because their financial award package was the only one of all 11 schools that provided me the most free money, making it the viable option even though my first choice was to

stay in town and attend Loyola Marymount University (LMU). The main reason I strongly considered LMU was because I went to an overnight African American recruitment focused program where they invited graduating seniors who met their admission criteria to experience the college with their students leading the program and I fell in love. I was too young to know what I was looking for in a college and the fact that so many of us were present for the program made me intrigued and certain that that was the college I wanted to attend. I was heartbroken when of the \$29,000 it cost to attend back then I was presented with \$24,000 in loans so they were removed from my list immediately.

I also chose to apply to UC Davis because my cousin, Lori, had been attending the year prior to my arrival. She was my biggest impact for applying and attending. Growing up we were very close, and she was the only one I knew who had gone to college. I was not aware of UCD because my TRIO program only visited southern California schools and UCD was 6 hours north. Before attending Davis, I never visited or really heard anything about the college. I never even considered attending, I only applied to increase my number of college application, for clout, and of course, Lori. I grew in my faith starting at the age of 16. A friend invited me, and I started attending solo from that moment to this very day. My parents warned me of the church taking my money but didn't share anything else. They never had a problem dropping me off nor picking me up. This church introduced me to the power of prayer and that God can provide exceedingly above all one could ask or think, so I prayed and ask God to open the college door for me and to guide me to where I should go. Two things happened. Davis sent an acceptance letter with an award letter that proved they wanted me showing \$10,000 worth of grants out of the \$13,000 total cost. And secondly, I found a check in my bag. I was a little stressed out I wouldn't have the money I needed to transition from my parent's house, and I knew better than

to ask them for anything because it was in my head that I was to do everything on my own, not sure if I was told that or shown that. My mom did say to me one day, “Make sure you have everything you need so you don’t have to come back here.” The reality is I didn’t know how much money I needed. I had never purchased books for school, and I wasn’t privy to a college students’ needs so I was concerned I wouldn’t have enough. That last summer at my parents’ house I worked at McDonalds as many hours as I could making \$4.75 an hour which totaled paychecks of about \$200-\$250 every 2 weeks. It was about a month and a half away from me leaving and I remember the feeling in the pit of my stomach of concern over money. Somehow, I was looking in my bag for something and I found a paycheck I never cashed from the month prior. I began to tear up thinking this has to be some miracle check because there was no way my 18-year-old self would miss depositing a check, it just didn’t seem logical or factual. But maybe I did. In the end I needed that check. It put me closer to taking about \$800 with me and I was still disappointed I didn’t save more because I just didn’t know how much I needed. Fortunately, all worked out and I had more than enough.

My cousin guided me through most of my new changes in being a student. From how to choose classes, purchasing books, connecting me to new friends, getting a campus work study job, becoming resourceful (she was the guru!), and even encouraging me in learning how to study. I owe so much to her. Back then you had to choose classes by calling in at a certain day and time and enter course numbers to enroll. Lori taught me to have back up classes in case the ones I chose were full, we also went to the bookstore where she showed me how to identify the books I needed for the classes I was in and during lunch there was one spot in the quad where Black people hung out. There she introduced me to the few she knew and those around that she didn’t know. I was delighted to meet everyone. Out of a campus total of 25,000 students, that

included grad students, my community made up about 500. I loved hanging in the quad because it connected us. I didn't see them in class unless I was in African American Studies (AAS) classes, so lunch time was something I looked forward to my first year in college. The next few years I worked two jobs, so my free time shortened. You wouldn't always see us eating, even though the quad was next to the cafeteria, our normal activity was socializing, laughing, catching up and/or just sitting there taking in the culture especially when we were the minority throughout our experience there. In my dorm, I was one of two Black people, both of us female. We connected but not on a regular basis for some reason. We greeted one another but I ended up always being with my cousin, and her friends. We (the dormmate) were cordial though, and still remain connected today.

The most poignant memory is my first semester. The trauma moment that hit me first was the Subject A standardized test that I failed twice. This exam was intended to direct me to the appropriate writing course. I also took a math assessment of which I placed into a remedial level, which was mind blowing since I had just finished AP Calculus with an A. I wouldn't learn until 20 years later that these tests were never made for my success which puts me in rage because the tragedy of what these results did for years to my self-esteem and insecurity about my writing is indescribable. Due to these outcomes, I had to attend the local community college to pass a remedial English course otherwise I wouldn't have been able to stay at UCD, and I took a remedial math class with the university. The pressure to pass was intense, particularly with my English class, the math I didn't have a problem with.

I was a full-time student and prior to college, schooling was somewhat easy, I never struggled, ending high school with a 3.7 grade point average. I learned very quickly how different college was. In high school, having perfect attendance helped me get good grades. My

teachers generally taught us what we needed to know, I received high marks on the homework and honestly, barely studied. I may have looked my homework over briefly to remind myself of a formula or definitions to certain vocabulary and would generally get A's on all tests. College, however, I quickly realized could not be executed with the same habits. I earned an F on all papers and tests making me believe I wasn't as smart as I thought I was and that I couldn't cram the night before as in the past and still receive a good grade. The amount of work required to put in to write a paper or to study for an exam was grossly understated. I thought I could do what I wanted, hang out, talk on the phone, watch television, work and at some point, in the evening begin studying for something due the next day but it turned out that I couldn't. Once I opened my binder full of notes or sat to write a paper (back then I wrote my paper before typing it because I didn't have computer experience to think, write and type, and I used my roommates computer because I didn't have my own until my junior year) it was at that moment that I realized the load in front of me and the lump formed in my throat full with fear of failure. Even with these emotions, it never entered my mind that I would actually fail because it wasn't ever my experience. I felt like an imposter, that I wasn't college material and was scared. How could I receive an A in high school honors English and get to college and not know I didn't know how to write. One night before finals I called my cousin crying sharing my experience of the first few weeks. Davis is a quarter system, so you only have 10 weeks to learn and prove success. I'm not sure if she went through what I did but her advice is one I pass on to students till this very day which was, "you have to keep trying." And that I did. I learned more about what office hours were and used it, considered how I learn which ultimately connected me to what studying was, and I found study partners I could tap into for help. Thankfully, I received all C's. It was the first time my report card had anything other than A's and B's, but it felt good to pass and



make it through and I was ecstatic to see those C's. I had done poorly during the semester but had miraculously aced my finals. I could breathe again until the next semester. Fortunately, I was fine from then on. I had some bumps for sure, but that experience taught me about resilience.

Working 2 jobs and going to school became my norm and it built my resumé. Minimum wage was only \$5.75 back then so stretching a dollar became necessary and I absolutely could not survive without the help of financial aid. There were plenty of times I chose what meals in a day to have just to ensure I wasn't completely broke, and a savings account was nonexistent. It was tough on many occasions but I'm proud to have survived. I could pay my bills and manage to not go hungry over several days, I could purchase books required (not recommended) and had school supplies and clothes to wear. Working a summer job provided me the opportunity to purchase my first computer, and in my last year I went to the dealer alone to purchase a used car that I had to make payments on.

### **Hindrances During Undergrad**

I had three main hindrances in college. Not being fully prepared, not knowing who I wanted to become after I graduated, and lastly, my resentment toward my family. Each of these were reasons that made me insecure and angry and subjects that took me years to work through. My circle did not mimic my journey, each friend had different family structures, as well as, financial and social supports, so I didn't have anyone to talk to about all I was feeling and when I did bring it up some said, "get over it" like it was a harmless infraction on my life. I'm grateful for some peace today but what contributed to me gaining peace are too many to recollect.

As aforementioned, not being prepared for college was an obvious hindrance academically. It made me run to catch up to those already at the starting line, metaphorically

speaking. I doubted myself, my ability and it had me question whether I belonged. In addition to academics, I also wasn't prepared with self-care, nor was I aware of the available campus resources. If it weren't for my cousin I would have suffered even more. I also didn't grow up with health care so when I became pregnant at age 19 after my very first time being sexually active, I was scared out of my mind and had to use Planned Parenthood to learn about sex education for the first time in my life. Shortly after, when I miscarried was another lesson in the need for health care and emotional support. While having a miscarriage is sad to think about now, I have to admit back then I was happy for it. I was so young and barely in my second year of college and having no clue how to be a parent. Hindsight, the boyfriend I had at the time ended up breaking up with me months later because I did not favorably respond to considering his religion, Jehovah's Witness, when his mom sent me books. I was so young making decisions (sex) I wasn't aware that could have impacted my future in the most exponential way. I'm grateful today, my goodness. I was/am grateful for how my journey turned out. Truth is, I prayed. The night before I miscarried, I audibly told God "*I'm not ready for this.*" I didn't say it for him to take it away, I really didn't, it was just a matter of fact conversation of me talking to my Father in a way I have always talked to Him when I pour out my heart. With all honesty, I didn't know it would turn out the way it did. At the time my boyfriend and I had not talked about what option we would consider if whether to keep it or not, I just know I was scared, I didn't have health insurance and I really did not want to be pregnant. From this experience it has caused me to make sure that all summer bridge programs I oversee include sex education, so students have a chance at making educated decisions. It's amazing to reflect that this unfortunate experience at 19 years old contributes to my profession today as well as what I like to call my passion work. All the things I wish someone taught me has become my drive to teach those

coming behind me who are first generation, low-income and at the end of the day just clueless about adulting.

I was fortunate to hold several jobs/internships during my tenure at UCD. They were all memorable, important to my journey, enjoyable and I built great relationships. By the time I was in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year I knew it was time to grab a job closer to the direction I wanted my life to go in. I will go more in depth about these jobs later in this chapter, for now I would like to share that although I was pursuing the road I thought I should with these jobs none of them fit a passion inside for a long-term profession. This made me painfully aware that a lack of mentorship was a hindrance. There's only a handful of African American students, faculty and staff at UCD and I unfortunately did not link up with any of them nor was I mentored by those I worked with. I believe having someone who went before me would have helped me in so many ways. I recognize, however, my part in not connecting. I was so used to doing so much on my own that asking for help from a "mentor" required some modeling for me. This also impacts the reciprocal of being open to help beyond a few answered questions. Till this very day I feel like I am bothering others.

### **Family and College**

We have a saying at my church, "I'm not who I want to be, but thank God I'm not who I used to be." I'll start this section by saying, my mother and I are so much better than we were 20 years ago. I didn't grow up with my father. I visited him from time to time, but he was not a major part of my development and I often did not have any expectations from him as a result. How his, my biological father, relationship or lack thereof manifested itself in my life is two-fold. On one hand, the romantic relationships I took part in I tended to not require anything from them. My expectations were extra low, and I was happy with minimal effort from them.

Fortunately, I didn't choose a mate that was disrespectful or horrible, or caused me great trauma, we naturally had situations that caused a breakup, and revealed we were not right for one another. It wasn't until my late 30s when I made a change to this part of my life. The chain of events that contributed to this change was when I turned 33 and I purchased my first home, it was another significant moment where my biological father did not show up for me. I decided I could not keep going through life allowing him to let me down, so I cut him out my life by not communicating with him anymore. He lived in Southern California, and my home was in Northern California about 6 hours apart, so communication was the only thing that kept us connected so this was a significant act. This lasted for 7 years. The result, I stopped allowing men to treat me less than I wanted and/or deserved. The beginning signs of selfish behavior caused me to cut them from my life fast and in a hurry. No longer was I allowing men to not show up and remain, I don't care who you are. I am proud of my decision and am happier for it. During my undergraduate years, not having family support was a hindrance. My mother said to me before I left for college, "you make sure you get all your stuff, so you don't have come back here." Her and my stepfather (fortunately) drove me to Davis, unloaded my stuff, gave me a pat on the back and drove back to southern California.

Never did I hear, I'm proud of you, I love you, nor good luck. My mother shared that she didn't tell me she was proud of me because she didn't want me to do the work for her, she wanted me to do it for me. My resentment for her came when I observed how much support and care my roommates received. They had their own computer, they didn't have to work, they received financial support, a car. I became increasingly annoyed and angry at my mom, for some reason not my dad, because I felt alone. I wanted her to do more because I saw what others were receiving and I thought my mom didn't care about me. Other events that are notable to

mention was for the first few months my mom put \$50 into my account every month and sent care packages when she could that included snacks and small things, she thought I may like. Additionally, she became pregnant. It was a surprise baby that she considered not keeping but the night before her abortion appointment she cried and said she could not go through with it. She never thought she could have any more children. As a result, the money and the packages stopped altogether, which added more to my disdain. She didn't deserve that. I now realize that while my mom was getting paid under the table, she could never compete with what other parents were doing, nor was she aware of the playing field for parental support since she didn't graduate with her high school diploma in a different country. I know this now but as a naive 18-year-old I didn't know any better and she probably didn't know where my resentment came from. Both of us pushed one another away with our actions which made it even easier for me to not travel home for holidays and breaks, I always chose to stay and work. It took about 17 years to get close again. All that time wasted, and since I grew up an only child I often felt massively alone. I wasn't prepared for this. I wasn't prepared to experience wealth disparities and its impact not only on myself but my family and my community. This was just my introduction and first encounter into social, economic and academic gaps/inequalities/differences and not knowing how to respond to it.

### **Navigating My System of Family**

A family is like a forest, when you are on the outside it is dense,  
when you are on the inside you see that each tree has its place.  
~ African Proverb

The beauty of this section lies in how it will connect to the last chapter, Letter to my Sistahs. It is the section I am most afraid of writing because it means I will have to go back to areas within myself I would rather not bring back to the surface but cannot go around, nonetheless. It has pain, struggle, and loneliness while at the same time pushing forward strength, determination, persistence and maturation. The memories I share here are the ones that have stayed with me and appear, reappear and are the most vivid. They shape my identity in how I see myself and possibly how I show up in the world. Additionally, they are the foundation on which I built my life. “The events described are always less significant than the impressions they leave on the mind and heart.” (bell, p. xv)

### **Belizean by Nature, American by Nurture**

I was born in Belize City, Belize and migrated to the US when I was 2 years old with my mother. My father stayed behind as he had several other women pregnant and had not yet made plans to travel until I was a few years older. I was told a story that my grandfather sent for us and made provisions for us to travel from Belize to Chetumal, a city on the east coast of Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, then through the border and someone came to pick us up in San Diego. I did not acquire legal paperwork until I was about 8 years old. Both my parents did not graduate high school but had developed trades that sustained them—my mother a seamstress and my father an electrician.

Belizeans are good people who are family-oriented and although they live in a third-world country, they seem to enjoy living there and everyone knows one another. Whenever someone talks about the U.S. “the states” it is with ideas of a land rich with “milk and honey”, which describes a location where a person wants for nothing.

I grew up an only child and my parents never married. My mother raised me, and my father immigrated to South Central California and moved in with his girlfriend. Though I was an only child, I was never spoiled. I do not know much about my mother's past because she never talked about it but I do know she was raised by her paternal grandmother and went far educationally by Belizean standards, but ultimately did not finish high school. In my older years, she shared she didn't have legal paperwork for many years, which gives me insight as to why she stayed in the job she had for so long. I learned hard work, tenacity, work ethic and collegiality from my mother. She could never call in sick, a trait I followed in my older years even though I was fortunate to have employment with benefits.

Being an only child meant I longed to connect with everyone. My mom did not form strong family bonds (not even with me) so connecting to aunts, uncles and cousins didn't happen on a frequent basis. Also, I saw my dad on certain weekends which became less frequent over time. He birthed and raised other children that got to know him in a much more intimate way than I did. We are estranged to this date.

### **Identity**

From those in my community, I often get asked "what are you" as if my Black skin doesn't clearly reveal it. Either I'm in denial of my physical appearance or when I look in the mirror, I only see a regular Black girl, not one who looks Caribbean. I don't have long fine curly hair, nor an accent, nor skin color that shows my heritage being different than that of every other African American Black female. Of those who ask the question and even those who don't, I wonder what they see that sets me apart from my US born Black sisters? And what does that mean while I serve those in my community?

## Impact

The additional impactful areas that are vivid in my memory are I always had what I needed to exist, my mother imparted in me a sense of independence of which I didn't have to depend on her and lastly, finally learning forgiveness and letting go. When I originally thought of these 4 areas, I considered them on both sides of impact and hindrances. Depending on the context when each showed up in my journey is when they revealed to be either beneficial or a burden.

I feel blessed that I had consistent shelter that included heat, electricity and food, I was never abused, my mom took me where I needed to be, I never missed significant childhood events like prom or homecoming, our cars never broke down, and I was never stressed or felt pressured to help pay household bills. These were my privileges. These consistencies contributed to my success as a student. I would still consider us low-income, but we were on the upper scale of that socio-economic status.

Ironically, while this had a huge impact on me, it also hindered me. Somehow, I always knew we were low-income which is why at the age of 13 I worked to have my own money, so I did not ask for anything additional. My allowance was \$3-5 a week so it didn't provide me the luxury of purchasing lunch at school and items I wanted so a job was essential. I paid for all expenses like yearbooks, prom dress, event tickets, lunch and my attire. Even when finances became tight in undergrad I felt as though I never had anyone to back me up, no support. I felt alone and I struggled alone.

Independence is a trait I developed early on. Before I left for college, my mother drove me to the store so I could purchase what I needed to transition and she said, "get everything you need so you don't have to depend on anyone." Those words permeated into my core, and it



became a part of my identity. I stock up on personal items, ration when necessary (food and material items), and feel immensely uncomfortable asking anyone for anything. I pride myself in having what I need and am often the go to person for items others don't think about or assume I will bring so they don't worry about. I am eternally grateful for this lesson because it caused me to hustle, persist and to be determined to finding ways to get what I wanted and needed in all parts of my life.

Unfortunately, at age 40 I'm still learning to receive. Accepting gifts, help, hugs or even partnership are all a challenge for me. There is a discomfort I feel that stems from this independence trait that I have not been able to shake. As a manager, I should be disseminating more work to my staff but often feel the need to do for them rather than share the workload. Essentially, I feel guilty asking for help even though they offer often. Independence hinders how I function because while I know we are all interdependent I have a hard time depending. Coincidentally, I **crave** family and community. I want to be a part of a system that depends on one another to exist but now I realize my lack thereof could very well be due to my own socialization.

The last and most important impact/hindrance to mention is that of forgiveness and release. It took way too long, about 17 years, for my mother and I to make it back to love and being called a family again. After years of struggle, the moment of impact took about 2 years to happen. My mother was turning 50 in November, while at the same time I was anxiety filled trying to finish my thesis for my master's degree to graduate in December. I had to choose whether I should pay to attend her once in a lifetime birthday celebration on a cruise or stay in town to finish writing to graduate, pay for an editor, cap and gown, binding fees, graduation celebration that included food, venue and such. I chose to stay. She decided to cut off all

communication. She, along with a few other family members came up for my graduation the next month and I had given her a bound copy of my thesis. After reading the acknowledgements page she became enraged and hurt. She assumed her name should have been there, but I only did honorable mentions to those who helped me through the grueling process of which she did not contribute. She returned home and called me one last time to, in many words scream, share her disappointment for not being mentioned, to state she is exiting my life and then hung up. It would be over a year before we spoke to each other or saw one another.

I am a spiritual person, so this was something I prayed about often. God spoke to me one day as I was returning home from work and said, “it will take you to restore the relationship with her.” I questioned God because I felt like it was her that did all the wrong so why would it take me? As time persisted and my heart softened, I began to understand that what He meant was that I needed to forgive and release who I wanted my mom to be and accept her for who she is, and most importantly trust Him with my life and that all things are working together for my good.

One blessing that came out of the time my mother cut me out her life is the relationship that grew with my stepfather. He was on my heart one day, so I called him, and we vowed to start calling each other more often. I noticed he called me when he was away from home. The calls made me feel cared for because he was the kind of person to offer feedback and advice, something I never got from my mother. He also gave me accolades and reminded me of what he saw in me growing up, he has been in my life since I was 6 years old. I now call him dad and he proudly calls me his daughter, which again did not occur when I lived in their house.

A few months after I heard from God, we find out that my uncle passed away, my stepfather’s brother. There was no question I would be there for my “dad”. When I called him and told him I want to be there but am not sure I should stay at the house for too long because of

my mother he responded and said to come and that he would talk to her. I uncomfortably arrive and after hugging my dad and load my bags I get in the car and the first person to speak is my mother. She asked how my flight was and I respond. When we walked in the house, she hugged me, and we have been on speaking terms ever since.

### **Navigating My Career**

There are so many vivid memories when it comes to my professional career. I mentioned my first job when I was 13 and from there, I was able to obtain several part-time jobs that gave me the opportunity to provide for myself. Each position added more skills and layers to who I am today. For the purpose of finding the most impactful parts of my career that are closer to who I am today I have two very distinct positions. Both are within the California community college; the first as an Outreach Specialist, and the second as a Director/Manager.

The outreach job is the most impactful for several reasons. First, it's my absolute favorite job I've ever had to-date. I had the wonderful opportunity of assisting literally thousands of students transition into college. This included a diverse group not limited to different ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientation, religions, legal status, parents, re-entry students, bilingual, ESL, prepared and underprepared students. As a first-generation, low-income student, immigrant, who's assessment results were low, I felt as though I was our students. It was such a pleasure to be the bridge everyone needed. During my tenure, the campus I worked for had a great reputation and students had an enjoyable experience. Along with helping students, I remained connected to everyone on campus from faculty, administrators, custodial staff, campus police, and enrolled students. I served on numerous committees where I was the only classified staff and my opinion and input mattered and was heard. I was the consistent go-to person for our district, the secondary districts in our feeder and non-feeder

schools, and the neighboring universities. This job gave me purpose and was more like a career than a job because I would work it for free if I didn't rely on income. It was 100% rewarding and hard to leave.

Additionally, I felt community there. Primarily because there were several African American faculty, staff and administrators I could connect with, but I also felt community to those who shared my work ethic, cordial personality and desire to serve students. I believed I belonged there, and it showed in how I interacted with everyone. It is not uncommon for community college workers in this district to work in their positions for years until retirement. Only a handful applied for advancement and was granted the chance to move up and/or around to one of our sister campuses of which there were three. With respect to the classified chain, the Outreach Specialist position was the highest with a decent and competitive salary. The reason I decided to pursue alternative positions was solely because I was ready to increase my salary. Around my 5<sup>th</sup> year I purchased my first home, so my disposable income lessened, and I became ready for upper management.

Looking back, I recognize the reason it took me a few years to move forward was, the right job had to come around is obvious, but the evolutionary reason was my own humbling. I was an independent woman who became an expert in the field, I expected things to go my way, and I didn't need anyone to lead me. I believe God humbled me because I could not successfully lead a team with that attitude or mentality, and it hurt. It hurt because I became aware of myself. I saw the haughtiness, the self-righteous, and most important, my faults. During that time, I often cried driving home and questioned why God was doing that to me. It was a process that caused me to seek other employment because I didn't want to be physically, emotionally nor psychologically where I was. I wanted something different. I shared with my colleague at the

time about my discomfort and her profound words have stayed with me. She said, “maybe this is what is supposed to happen...maybe the fire under you is to cause you to move and do something different otherwise you would continue to stay in the same place, comfortably...this is supposed to be happening.” It gave me a different perspective on life. I received some solace from her words, but I still felt the fire, so I kept trying to find the right job.

### **I Became An Administrator**

Then about 3 years ago, roughly 2 years after I began searching, the right job showed up. It was a job newly created. It was an opportunity to grow a few programs from the ground up something I was a little familiar with on a small scale. The announcement came through our email as an interim position at one of the sister campuses in the district. This person would be the Director of 3 different TRIO programs of which I was a long-time participant and worked for several years as a mentor/tutor during my undergraduate years. This was an opportunity to give back to a program that had imparted so much into me many years ago and the reason I am where I am. This job had my name all over it.

In 7 days, I will have worked in this position for 3 years. I was hired into the permanent role about 6 months after getting hired for the interim. To-date this is my absolutely least favorite job for so many reasons but like anything, sometimes your worst experience is the catapult into something great for the future. I had many hard lessons that caused me extreme stress, self-doubt and thoughts of resignation. Where do I begin...

I was crazy excited about this new job. Its customary to go to the district and fill out paperwork so everyone is on the same page about salary and benefits, etc. The announcement that was emailed did not have a salary amount written so it was here that I would learn that although I had 3 grants/programs to manage I would be getting the same pay as another person

with one grant. We don't usually negotiate salary in our district. They provide competitive compensation and we all know the amount you see is what you get. The night before my district meeting, I was pumped up by my best friend who works in the corporate world to speak up for myself and when I tried, I began to sweat profusely and when I was told there was nothing they could do I backed down because of pure insecurity. That was my first challenge, but I wanted/needed the opportunity, so I persisted.

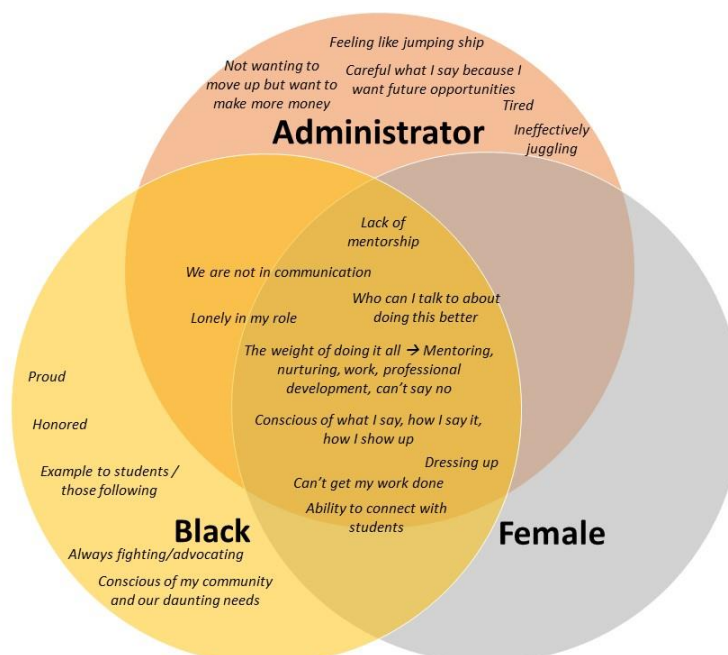
I learned quickly in the first few weeks on the job that one reason they chose to hire an interim person was because the grant year would end in a few months and two of the three programs had no staff or students to report. I started in April, almost the end of the semester and had to recruit 240 students with no staff all while learning the campus, learning budgets, not having ANYONE to tap into because I was the only one with this job, and when I searched online to find other TRIO Directors I found that absolutely NO ONE had three grants, everyone had one. The TRIO community helped greatly but I moved forward with an unquantifiable amount of stress and questioning whether I could do this job. The one grant that did have staff looked to me for direction, but I just didn't have it because I had no idea what I was doing. This type of struggle was on another level that I wasn't prepared for. I worked 10-11 hour days for weeks and my body became more and more tense.

Department of Education tends to send emails requiring detailed responses a few days later. This added to my stress. By accepting this position, I was solely responsible for the management of these Federal grants with no training or understanding of the expectations. This challenge seemed and felt monumental. My onboarding process was a tour of the campus and brief introductions. My boss did make arrangements for me to meet with the previous Director who oversaw one of the three grants before I was hired, which did help some, but ultimately she

could not help me juggle, manage, or direct all three grants because she did not know anything about the other two or the entire load. It was a moment I felt alone again, and due to this being a predominantly white institution (PWI), my African American community were too few and not assessible to tap into, and I was the only Black female administrator at the college, which till this day causes me to feel like I don't belong.

A final vivid moment of impact came during my first semester as a new Administrator at convocation. Convocation is a campus meeting lead by the president, classified senate, academic senate, and chancellor. It provided a chance to hear about performance rates of our students, accolades of certain departments, college and district financial plans, how we intend to adhere to new legislation, and overall updates at the college. On this day I became enraged at the feeling of apathy in the room of White professionals as the president shared the dismal rates of students that look like me. He proceeded to detail that out of 100 Black students only 4 make it to graduation and that our college must redesign how things are done to help the lowest performing. I wasn't sure if he was saying this out of pure talk or if he felt it as a burden as I did. As I looked around the room, it appeared to fall on deaf ears and blank stares, and because there were only a few people of color in the room I couldn't find anyone to lock eyes with to share a disgust for the moment which added to my feelings of isolation. After convocation, I walked down the hall where the diversity center decided to put the names of all the African Americans who had fallen to police violence against the wall. They stated that the names grew daily. It added to my frustration, anger, sadness, and disbelief of how the campus and world thought of Black lives. It's hard for me to find the words to describe how I felt and the motivation to fight against the system.

Today if someone asked me what I think about the journey of being a Black female administrator I would sigh and respond from each of those intersections. Black. Female. Administrator. When I originally wrote my list to respond to each of these distinctions, I immediately thought from a deficit mindset and I am not sure if that's because of my experience or how I have been conditioned. At the end of the day, each hold a wonderful privilege that should also be included when examined, but the power of privilege is to hold it and not really acknowledge it or to use when you need to. The privilege of being a Black Female Administrator gets buried in the very weight of the title. The side of responsibility, need and energy required outweigh the joy of having the privilege. Here are what make up my perspective and journey:



*Figure 1.2.* This chart sums up how I see myself at work.

I imagine the reader may question a few characteristics under some of the intersections that I would like to explain. Namely, can't get my work done, dressing up and why there are no



fillers in the female category. Fulfilling the duties of this role is one of the hardest things I've had to accomplish and it consistently remained this way for the last 3 years. A combination of overseeing facilities, attending to ongoing problems that arise, numerous meetings, keeping up with about 100 emails that come in daily, and being present for my staff that need my attention and help constantly, having an open door policy for underrepresented students that frequent my area and teaching myself the duties of the job, have all kept me busy. From day one this reality has kept me from getting my work done and often has me feeling bad about myself and not good enough for this role. I consider myself a leader and one who can work miracles on a job, but this job has me wanting to jump out of management and this may not be the path I should continue. The more time passes the more I feel like I can't breathe. I often don't want to come to work, I put on a happy face and silently struggle at the thought of being in this position and letting my team down. Not saying I let them down all the time because I honestly don't, but I could be and want to be so much better than I am at leading, being a visionary and moving us forward in a more impactful way. I don't have the emotional space nor the mental space to foreshadow the future because when I do get a break within the role I often just want to breathe and either catch up on work or not think about work all together. Even on the days where I can see I have no meetings and I come with every expectation of catching up I often cannot because of my revolving door. Those infamous words, "Are you busy?" or "You got a minute?" or "Can I talk to you for a minute?" I hear just about every day and it's hard for me to say no. I do think the way my role has morphed over the last 3 years of constant busyness is partly my fault. I've never been this type of leader before and I have a problem not setting boundaries. I tried to start a new method of serving my team by asking them to give me Fridays off to work but it did not stick and now we are right back where we started.

So, what now? I can't imagine back tracking and going back into the classified ranks so at the present time rather than moving up into the Dean role, I am looking for another Director role that pays more but has less stressful responsibilities. I cannot escape the leadership ranks because that would be denying a part of me I have built through a plethora of experiences but ideally I am considering a job that oversees less staff and causes me considerably less stress.

As for the characteristic dressing up on the chart above, while it's not uncommon as a professional to feel the pressure to look a certain way and wear specific attire even more particularly for women, my perspective adds another layer. I look young for a 40-year-old woman. I often get mistaken for a 20+ year old so I feel burdened to put on an appearance that not only ages me but sometimes there isn't much I can do to add 10-20 years on me to look my age.

Lastly, I had to really do some soul searching on why there are no descriptors in the female section of the chart. I truly value being a female and do not feel objectified nor less than. I also connect with male and female colleagues, students, parents, transgender, or other. I am acutely aware and love that I am a woman and just because I did not detail anything specifically under that intersection does not mean it is less significant to me and my identity. However, after having a conversation with a few other Black females who I asked if they were able to separate the two, Black female and female, everyone said no, but that it depended on the context, and I agreed. The context is important when considering my campus is a predominantly white institution, about half the administrators are women of which I am the only Black one, the area I have supervised and spent all of my work days have an abundance of female staff and again I am the only Black staff member. These make my Black female identity much more prevalent than

the female one because it is the most absent at the college and the part of me that naturally shows up.

It took me a while to gain the perspective of the value this position offers me, but I recognize it more now more than ever. Even though, of all other Directors, I am still the only one with the plate I carry it has opened the door for me to be at the executive table, I serve on more committees, I connect to college personnel more often, I am thought of more for opportunities, my organizational chart includes supervising a much larger team that includes classified, temp, faculty, and students, and I also now have managing facilities under my belt. This job sets me up to transition to a diverse array of positions. I anticipate a career move soon and look forward to the next moments of impact and hopefully they're positive ones.

## CHAPTER 5: EVERYTHING IS EVERYTHING

It's amazing how everything is connected. This conversation with my self has been important in understanding what frameworks have promoted success and which ones have not. This study is significant in considering how our social ecology contributes to who we become particularly for those following in comparable footsteps with similar cultural backgrounds and how we experience the sectors we enter, namely first generation, self-identifies as Black and women. Finding out how one navigates certain systems matters if we want to identify the broken parts and successfully change those systems to serve everyone. I had to come to grips that I am a phenomenon and my story matters. There are MANY Black women suffering in silence with the assumption that our journey is singular and sharing it means more than we could imagine in the support of the community, educational systems, professional organizations, and most importantly other Black females. It still hurts that I felt so alone in my life development, for this reason I write this dissertation.

While it was truly a journey to go through this process of recalling impacts and hindrances. I am forever better for it as I stated in chapter one. There is an African word and Asante Adinkra symbol, Sankofa. It means, you must go back to move forward. Essentially, it symbolizes the idea to take all good things from the past and bring it into your future to make positive progress with the knowledge you apprehended. So, I call this nostalgia moment, my Sankofa journey. I am no longer the same person I was when I first started and am grateful for it. The glasses I was given when I participated in the Beyond Diversity training have been refined through these pages. I can see clearer now and can breathe better too. I've forgiven my

parents because of these pages, healed from these pages and understand myself more than ever with the benefit of helping more individuals who cross my path in need.

There were many confirmations between the research and my experiences, however, there were areas I would challenge and offer alternate perspectives on certain ideas. Lastly, I'm excited to input my own theories that will add to literature. This chapter will include my challenges to how one integrates the college system as a person of color. I will add to literature how being a minority on campus can impact health in ways other than racial battle fatigue, and I will share how colleges should go beyond legislation mandates to fix our broken systems. I will make known how connecting with one's cultural community can be a challenge, and lastly, extrapolate the thought and experience of mentoring for people of color.

### **Integrating the Academy**

Feagin, Vera and Imani (1996) mentioned the weight of racial battle fatigue is significant when African Americans are in White spaces within the institution. It drains individuals in multiple ways from emotional, physical, physiological, and more. The detriment it does to one's health is damaging particularly because it goes undiagnosed for a long time. When I first read this article, I could not stop shaking my head at the thought of the magnitude of truth in how I strongly identified specifically with these health diagnoses. Only those close to me were aware of my stiff neck, sleepless nights, long work hours, and infinite stressful situations. This article seemed to read me. But I realized that I would not consciously associate my experience in White spaces with the causation of making me physically unhealthy. While I do feel angry and frustrated working in a system that continually underserves my community, I don't give them the power to affect me physically for too long. It does stress me out and I do feel a responsible burden to fight for my people, but I have not historically held this pressure physically. However,

I leave room for the possibility that I have become numb and unaware. We are not always aware of how things affect us in the moment or even over a short time, but long-term effects will reveal its true results. Currently, I would say the action that I identify as the biggest reason for my physical ailments would be the onboarding process and my thoughts of not feeling prepared for what was placed on my plate.

It was an amazing journey to make the connection of how sense of belonging became so important to me. It made me smile when I realized that growing up in Los Angeles, having so many Black instructors and school agents made me feel like I belonged there. I never ever felt like an outsider. Fast forward to my current role as an administrator, where there are only a minority of African Americans and often feel like I don't belong. One recommendation that Feagin, Vera and Imani (1996) suggested to help with the onboarding process of a person of color feeling welcomed and supported is for the college to ensure a connection is made with the new hire and to make known identity groups that are active. I agree with literature that emphasizes sense of belonging as a huge reason for the success of my people academically, socially, for building capital, developing identity, professionally, and existing at the institution, however, I would offer additional points to consider. You can only feel connected to a group you identify with. The PWI I work at has a minority group of African Americans faculty, staff and administrators I don't totally identify with. Sometime in my first year in this administer role we had a campus meeting where we came together to meet, break bread, and share thoughts of being on campus, but unfortunately, we have never met again. We are not unified in any way. There are some who seem to connect often but for those new, like myself, coming into the system, the awareness of when and how to build community with them is a mystery. Additionally, the opportunities to connect becomes less in my role as an administrator than when

I was classified. As a chair/lead for meetings and planned events, in my classified role, I organized and worked with several constituency groups and it made it easier to get to know someone or link up because we were required to. Currently, the connections between myself and the other African American male administrators have been minimal due to workload, missed senior leadership meetings, no intentionality or work purpose. I believe this contributes to why some African American female leaders jump off the track of going up the ladder, as a result of there are so few of us and more males, which can cause one to become lonely and have no sense of belonging because of the lack of connections.

My experience versus what the literature review emphasized around praising inclusion, while practicing exclusion were congruent. Over the past 3 years, there have been many verbal messages concerning supporting the lowest performing, African Americans and Latinx students, essentially highlighting the need for a more equitable approach to educate. Many meetings have commenced to transform the system, but the guide has been to fulfill mandates brought on by the state not a recognition of new methods to fix the other broken parts of the organization and support these students in other ways. Currently, new legislation for the California Community College system AB 705 has declared the elimination of standardized testing because of the historical implications of being a strong barrier to people of color entering and graduating. In addition, AB 19 allows all first-year students out of high school free tuition for a year and soon to come this may increase to two years; this is to eliminate tuition as a financial barrier, and it serves as a great incentive. The main intention was to help low income, first generation students to go to college.

While I understand the pressure and work it takes to execute these mandates, colleges should also address additional areas not serving all communities. The other parts of our system

that impact the education of marginalized communities are the cumbersome onboarding process, interrupting the pattern of poor graduation rates, incorporating a sense of belonging (particularly for PWIs), hiring more people of color administrators, faculty and staff, increasing cultural awareness, making changes to reflect equity within instruction and student services, and a concerted effort toward supporting African American and Latino males since they have a history of being the least served at within every institution. These are just a few additional categories that come to mind colleges can stop practicing exclusion in.

I find myself at times wondering the appropriate time to speak up and what to say so the section that detailed speaking up as a worry for new employees is something I identified with. While research stressed the intimidation of speaking up against the system when it came to discrimination, white supremacy, inequitable treatment and all other parts of the system that is broken I would add another area to the literature. Speaking up within your community also has a place in the conversation of praising inclusion but practicing exclusion. For reasons aforementioned about not belonging a person can have strong consequences if a person says anything that goes against the fight or how the fight is being conducted. There is an unspoken family rule that you should never go against your people in anyway but if you do have to say something say it behind closed doors. In my experience, even then it is not always accepted. Within my tenure at the college, I have witnessed my people fighting unfairly and harsh and it is expected for everyone to join the fight otherwise you are seen as an outsider. You're either all in or out and its typically not a situational thing. If you disagree even just once you're out. Consequently, a person can feel excluded on multiple levels.

Historically, mentoring is always on the list of needing more of for underrepresented communities in every area. Depending on the person, people mentor in different areas, personal,



professional or even situational. Research revealed the system is rigged for the success of white males, so I agree with Salazar (2009) that mentoring serves as an opportunity to learn the unwritten rules and role modeling as a survival strategy to redirect from harm. While I also agree that having a same sex/race mentor would increase my integration and psychosocial abilities, the truth is I just want to learn, and I don't care from who. I originally had a challenge to the research that suggested the need to have multiple mentors, one of the same/different race, same/different gender because in order to operate we must learn from one another but then I wondered the following thoughts/questions:

- Since research shows that white employees generally see from their vantage point having a person of color mentor and/or mentee could potentially help with addressing disparities among students, staff and administrators. This could offer a more realistic sight of campus climate and consciousness.
- If I had a white male as a mentor, would he teach me the rules of the game? Would he teach me how he navigates systems, even the informal networks, or would he keep certain parts to himself?
- Would a white male administrator become more aware of his privilege when mentoring me, and what would that do to me if I am aware this is occurring?
- Not everyone in my community wants to be mentor and since there are a minority of us does that mean our load of mentors would be higher than others?
- Would it be more beneficial for a new employee to choose their mentor rather than to be arbitrarily assigned? The downfall of this would be that certain people would end up with a bigger load since research shows more women become mentors because of the nurturing connotation frequently associated to them. For African American women this could also become a weight because we additionally mentor more African American students among others at a higher rate, we become the "equitable" parts of hiring and other committees as the minority representative all while trying to balance workload and professional development opportunities.
- Mentoring is supposed to assist with adaptation into the institution, but what does adaptation really mean? Should that be the goal? As an African American woman, does that mean assimilate/conform to a white male dominated standard of operation and reproduce the ways of this dominant culture where people of color remain the least served and continually left behind? What if it goes against my survival to adapt? Since the system is broken, should mentor guidelines be to teach the history of why things have

continued in that area so that someone has perspective enough to launch transformation within the current infrastructure, in addition to learning how to navigate the organization? What consequences would that employ? It's an opportunity for the institution to grow rather than to expect someone to adapt or assimilate into a system that has not changed for multiple decades of only serving white populations.

### **Conclusion**

This conversation with myself has been one of my best ever and one as I stated earlier, I hope everyone is better for. It was beneficial to examine the impacts and barriers I experienced as I continue my journey in designing my footprint into the world of equity. The more we consciously and intentionally learn about the parts of our system that do not work for students, staff and administrators the sooner we can stop being an accomplice to the machine that is our system. For this reason, I have come to realize how important my story is. I honestly didn't think so in the beginning, but I learned even more that I matter, my success matters. Those in my community who have been discriminated on, thought the least of, those placed in the school-to-prison pipeline, or special ed because of the systems inability to teach equitably, those who end up in the low percentile of college goers and graduates, those who don't know our history because it is intentionally kept out of the history books, those who do not experience protective factors (as I did with the TRIO program) to assist with resilience within the education world, those African American administrators who do not make it past 5 years and have a hard time navigating the system and/or finding a mentor...we matter.

I'm better for writing this dissertation because it gave me new eyes and a new perspective to work within the community college and in education in general. I am able to look for patterns consistent with my own since decades of literature confirms my experience and I am able to challenge the system based on my new knowledge. This required me to have a bird's eye view to examine the development of my identity, honing in on successes and hindrances. The African

proverb for Sankofa shares I am not able to move forward if I have not looked back so now I humbly move forward dedicated to serving my people and those in the same trenches that include but not limited to Latinx, Native Americans, Southeast Asians, and LGBTQ+ communities. The marathon continues.

## BONUS CHAPTER

### **Letter to my Sistahs**

I want you to know how much I love you. I think about you often especially when I struggle because it is in those moments that I want to build a bridge for you not to fall in the holes I did, to shorten the learning curve so you can proceed quicker, healthier, and stronger. So, my struggle was for you. I needed to write this dissertation to tell you that you are strong, important, and instrumental to the cause of advancing our people far beyond where we are now. I'm excited for you because if you were able to read chapters 4 and 5 then you are better, wiser and more equipped than I was no matter your age. I hope you hear how much you matter and how not to be ashamed of your story. Someone needs to hear it to learn from you, not only family members or neighbors you identify with, but the system you just came from, entered or a part of. It matters that they learn from you.

For every woman of color working in or entering academia, keep pushing. I understand it can be an isolating experience, but you'll make it through. Participating in the perpetuation of a cycle that restricts our success at every stage is stifling, absurd, all around ridiculous and we should never stand for it. I struggled so much with the balance of trying to learn a new role, be a competent supervisor, I was concerned about my reputation, I suffer(ed) with imposter syndrome, and it gave me health problems. I feel the daunting weight of serving our community especially in the day I receive my doctorate. Somehow this doctorate makes me aware of the responsibility I will have to serve our people, advance my career so I can continue bringing those behind me forward, and to figure out the best practices to navigate the system with no one before me reaching back to bring me forward (my journey has not connected me to this mentor just yet).

There were plenty of times I wanted to quit but I had bills to pay, failure scares me, and honestly moving into my parent's house is not an option I would choose, so I persist. I'm glad I kept persevering because after years of struggling I can share so much more about how to continue with you. I can tell you what strategies to use when communicating, best ways to build relationships, forgiveness of yourself and others, and most importantly self-care is a recent awareness. My hope is that through the advice I list below it helps even just a little. If you do not currently have a mentor let these words of wisdom guide you for the journey ahead:

- *Build relationships with EVERYONE:* I found out my biggest strength is relationship building. I like to know every person from custodial staff to administrative assistants to cafeteria worker to vice presidents. It's important to know their role, find some way to spark up a conversation particularly to find a commonality but if no similarity shines through it's ok. You'll know their capabilities and ability to get things done just in their conversation. Everyone is important and you must keep this mindset in identifying your supporters, allies, helpers and people that can accomplish tasks whether well planned or in a bind. Learning the people you work with will save you from disappointments and is a successful strategy in navigating the college. Everyone does not want to work, some people are complainers, and some people are only good to you for menial tasks which works best if you know this ahead of time.

For over a year I struggled with budgets in my administrator role. I was expected to develop my own accounting system, manage it, balance it all while juggling the demands of the role. I was too embarrassed to ask for help in fear it would reveal that I'm an imposter and I really didn't know what I was doing. After praying, the idea came to me to ask one of the administrative assistants for help. She emailed me a whole financial system and came over to provide instructions. Your help can come from anywhere that's why it's important to build a bond with everyone.

- *Figure out your self-care early and don't budge from it:* This has taken me the most time to figure out and once I learned these strategies, I have now become intentional about caring for myself. This really should be your first priority when going into management because everyone will pull on you to meet their needs, which could leave little room in your personal bandwidth to meet your needs.

My self-care includes but are not limited to:

1. Leaving work on time as often as I can
2. Breathing

3. Forgiving myself when something falls through the cracks
  4. Making plans to travel and traveling as often as I can
  5. Happy hour with friends
  6. Taking myself out to eat and/or to see a movie
  7. Intentionally drinking water, eating lunch AND dinner
  8. Mentally trying to leave work at work
  9. Praying
  10. Get a massage every time I need it
  11. Have a confidant who can talk me off the ledge, and tell me the truth about myself (I have a few of these)
  12. Watch mindless TV
  13. Sleep (This was the most difficult for me in the first year because my mind would not stop, but it got better over time)
- *For the culture:* Its hard navigating our college system and sometimes it's just as hard identifying your place within the (cultural) community. Wisdom has taught me to listen more than I speak. There have been a few times I've spoken up and later regretted it, if that happens to you forgive yourself. You're doing the best you can, and you have to keep moving, keep fighting for the culture. Your mishap was a learning lesson and the journey isn't easy, but it is necessary for you to become who you are and will become. We have too much work to do to worry about your mistakes. Several leaders have fallen and gotten back up only to become stronger, bigger and better and you are no different. If you become tired, hopeless or frustrated in the pursuit of serving go out and intentionally do something for someone else. Call an old friend, support a family member in accomplishing a task, watch any Black movie, do something for the culture that will remind you why we do what we do and why they need us to continue. I know times get hard and the systems we are a part of require our blood, sweat and tears, but you can't stop. Our ancestors fought and we have their blood flowing through our veins, they are cheering us on. You can do it...keep going.
  - *Perspective/Renew your mind:* This is something I came into this role thinking I had a handle on because of my faith, but 3 years in I am still learning how to perfect. Now that I am more confident in my role this has become a lot easier. One strategy to give yourself perspective so you can sleep at night or just function through the day is to trust yourself and the decisions you make, forgive yourself and others, and lastly, remember that trouble won't last always which means this too shall pass. I've come to know that I will not be in this position forever and so my purpose is to overcome my struggles, learn

new strategies for the future, meet people and then shake the dust off my feet and keep moving. Once you gain the right perspective for where you are and that you won't be in the position forever, then it will help you to let things go faster.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter is from my heart. It features the details I wish someone had sat me down and given when I started this management role. I intend to continue to pass this baton to whomever wants it. I confirm what research shows that we are not in communication so writing this bonus chapter was necessary to me in mentoring through words to those I may never meet or get a chance to speak with. We all need each other to move forward so I pray this chapter helps someone do just that, move forward.

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